

Monash Japanese Language Education Centre: A Journey in Supporting and Developing Japanese-Language Education in Australia

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Background

The Monash Japanese Language Education Centre (MJLEC)¹ opened for operation in 1996 at the Clayton Campus of Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Thanks to a generous Nippon Foundation endowment and support from Monash University, the MJLEC was established to provide support, advice, and services to teachers of Japanese at all levels of education in predominantly three states—Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania—and throughout the whole of Australia more generally. As its Director, I am responsible for running the center with the help of administrative officer Hiroko Liu.

Japanese is the most popular foreign language at every level of education in Australia—primary, secondary, and tertiary—a position that has been reasonably stable for nearly three decades. There are currently over 300,000 students studying Japanese in schools in Australia. The Japanese teaching community in Australia is famous for its passion and dedication, and the MJLEC works diligently to further the teaching and learning of Japanese, increase the professionalism of teachers, and improve learning outcomes for students. The primary goal of the MJLEC is to encourage, support, and direct teachers to improve the delivery of Japanese in Australian schools.

The MJLEC creates resources, provides professional learning seminars, conducts research, provides study grants to PhD candidates, and engages widely with teachers, schools, and stakeholders. The Director sits on several curriculum advisory committees and has input into curriculum changes and development across Australia.

Over the 22 years of operation, the MJLEC has evolved into a relevant and important stakeholder in Japanese-language education in Australia, having increasing influence in the Japanese-language education space. Programs and activities of the center are developed to meet the changing needs of Japanese-language education in Australia and so, in addition to ongoing essential programs, additional programs are added annually to meet emerging needs.

The Director runs the center with the assistance of an administrative officer and the support of a management committee, which includes academic, finance, legal, and global engagement staff from Monash University. The Director consults widely with teacher groups and stakeholders, such as state departments of education, curriculum authorities, and the Japan Foundation, Sydney, to inform choices about the nature and delivery of programs and activities.

¹ The center was established in 1996 and previously called the Melbourne Centre for Japanese Language Education (MCJLE), being renamed Monash Japanese Language Education Centre (MJLEC) in 2018. The operation, programs, staff, and support offered remain the same.

Programs

The MJLEC provides a range of programs to the Japanese teaching community, predominantly focusing on teacher and preservice teacher education and professional learning. Resource development of materials suitable for teaching in the Australian context is also a priority for the MJLEC. The MJLEC has a Resource Collection, housed within the Monash University library, of over 4,000 teaching resource available to borrow in person or remotely. We provide a PhD scholarship each year and disseminate all information through an email group and Facebook page. The MJLEC also conducts research and is continually implementing programs and developing resources and activities that promote Japanese-language education. Details of our programs can be found on our website: <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/mjlec/>.

Of great importance and interest to the MJLEC is to collect and analyze data related to the teaching and learning of the Japanese language. This data informs us and helps us decide where our efforts will be most effective. In 2010, the Director, together with the Nippon Foundation Management Committee chair, Dr. Robyn Spence-Brown, published a national report, commissioned by the federal government, titled "The State of Japanese Language Education in Australian Schools." This report remains relevant today and is used and quoted by many researchers. We continue to collect relevant data for a variety of reasons but foremostly to inform our programming.

Japanese-Language Education in Australia

There has been growth and change in how Japanese is taught in schools over the past two decades. New types of school programs and approaches to teaching have been widely implemented, including CLIL (content and language integrated learning), bilingual, and immersion programs. Up until 2016, the curriculum used to teach Japanese was different in every state and territory, but in 2016 a national curriculum was developed for Japanese (the MJLEC was heavily involved in its development), and that has provided opportunities for national collaboration, strengthening Japanese-language education in Australia. The Australian Japanese-language curriculum is largely based on developing usable skills in communicating and understanding, helping students to develop language-learning strategies, intercultural understandings, and transferring skills, concentrating more on skills than content and also linking to other curriculum areas and integrated studies.

In Australia, as long as the curriculum is followed, individual schools are free to implement any language and program type they believe suits their students. Australia has a number of bilingual schools around the country where the curriculum for all subjects is taught half the time in English and half the time in Japanese. These schools are mainly in the primary school sector, but there is one high school teaching mathematics and science in Japanese. The staffing of these programs is very challenging, so increasingly schools who are looking for innovative teaching models are implementing CLIL programs.

This means that teachers collaborate with other subject teachers and teach subject content in Japanese. The benefits of this is that students find learning Japanese more meaningful and engaging,

as they are learning about something while learning Japanese, rather than just learning Japanese in isolation. In the primary school these subjects often include physical education, music, science, social studies, or geography. At the secondary level, history, food technology, and geography are popular.

Advocacy

In the Australian school system, depending on the state or territory, teaching a language is compulsory only until the end of the second year of junior high school, but language choice is a matter for the school administration. Unlike many countries, there is not one obvious choice for second-language education. The most popular languages of choice across Australia are Japanese, Italian, Indonesian, French, German, and Mandarin. As a predominantly monolingual English-speaking society, ensuring that Japanese remains popular among schools and students is an ongoing challenge.

Often schools choose to change languages depending on perceived benefits to students of a particular language based on economic reasons. This was the case in the boom of Japanese-language education in Australia in the 1980s and is the reason for an increase in schools wanting to teach Mandarin in recent times. To that end advocacy has become a major issue for teachers of Japanese and therefore a major purpose for the Monash Japanese Language Education Centre. It is an ongoing challenge to ensure that schools, school communities, and stakeholders are aware of, and regularly reminded of the benefits of teaching and learning Japanese.

Over the years we and other stakeholders have used a variety of methods to promote Japanese-language education. Our latest project has been to produce videos highlighting how people have used Japanese in their career and life, to be shown at schools and universities, to encourage students to continue their studies and help them see how Japanese can enhance life opportunities. These videos were made for the “I use Japanese” project, and our intention is to add to the number of videos annually to display a diverse range of people and experiences.

As previously outlined, although teachers are required to follow the Australian Curriculum, how they teach is a matter for individual schools and teachers. Following the introduction of the national curriculum for Japanese in Australia, the MJLEC, together with the Japan Foundation, Sydney, thought it timely to organize a national body of Japanese teachers. We worked collaboratively to create the Network of Australian Japanese Language Teachers’ Associations (NAJLTA). The group comprises the presidents of the state and territory Japanese-language associations. NAJLTA meets annually and its purpose is to share information, support, and advice and to collaborate to promote Japanese teaching and learning nationally.

To further national collaboration, the MJLEC organizes the biennial National Symposium on Japanese Language Education. The first symposium was held in 2012, and it has grown in reputation ever since. The symposium attracts educators from every state and territory in Australia from every level

of education, and increasingly attendees are coming from overseas. The symposium provides teachers with information and presentations on best practice, innovative and effective programs and methodologies, and latest trends in advocacy.

All information about the Monash Japanese Language Education Centre and its programs can be found on our [website](#). The MJLEC welcomes communication with other institutions about its programs. Please contact the Director, Anne De Kretser, at [anne.dekretser\[a\]monash.edu](mailto:anne.dekretser@monash.edu) (replace [a] with @).

Biography:

Anne de Kretser is the Director of the Monash Japanese Language Education Centre, which provides professional development services, resource development, facilitates research and offers advice and support to teachers and preservice teachers of Japanese in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, and Australia more broadly. Anne has worked in curriculum development and sits on several Japanese-language advisory committees. She is the co-author of the report, “The Current State of Japanese Language Education in Australian Schools,” published in 2010, and co-convenor of the biennial National Symposium for Japanese Language Education.