Report: Project-Based Learning with 21st Century Skills for the Japanese Language Classroom

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Abstract.
This report is a summary of "Project-Based Learning with 21st Century Skills for the Japanese Language Classroom" presented during the International Workshop on Advanced Future Studies from March 14-16, 2016. I work for the University of California San Diego as a Japanese language instructor. American education standards have changed in the past decade, and "21st century skills" are now incorporated in teaching for a more global education. The Japanese for Professional Purposes course is designed not only to teach the Japanese language, but also to guide students in conducting research, developing a feasible project, and putting it into action by using Japanese as their communication tool. In order to learn and implement the skills necessary for a global education, I conducted a hands-on project-based course which provided students with the opportunity to contribute to the community in San Diego. In this paper, I describe the process for creating the course curriculum, national standards and skills for a 21st century education, how to implement these skills into a language classroom, and the Japanese Aging Society project I supervised in spring 2015.

1. Global Education

1.1. Impact of September 11, 2011
After September 11, 2011, the U.S. government realized that the United States lacked foreign language capabilities crucial to national security and a more global economy. In November of 2003, the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA) published "Securing America's Future: Global Education for a Global Age" which emphasized the importance of "international education," "studying abroad**,**" and "global competence." This article positively impacted foreign language teachers. Furthermore, the Committee for Economic Development (CED) stated that 1) international content must be taught across the curriculum and at all levels of learning, to expand American students' knowledge of other countries and cultures, and 2) foreign languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, etc., need to be taught at every level of education (Committee for Economic Development, 2006). Due to the surge in globally-focused education research during this period, the Japanese language became one of the most important foreign languages in the U.S. and was introduced widely in public education curriculum.

1.2. World-Readiness Standards for Language Education
In order to focus on a global education for the 21st century, World-Readiness Standards were established by an organization called the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)[1]. The standards highlight literacy, real world application, and 21st century skills to help students communicate effectively with competence in both local and global communities.

The World-Readiness Standards have five goals (5Cs): Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. According to the ACTFL, the goal of the 5Cs is not only to prepare students to apply skills, but also to bring competence through global awareness to their future careers and life experiences. Consequently**,** keeping this global focus in mind**,** it is time to alter current teaching styles by taking these goals**,** together with the World-Readiness Standards, into account.

1.3. 21st Century Skills
"Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21)[2]" is one of the leading organizations to advocate for 21st century learning. This contemporary learning comprises more than 10 skills including creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, information literacy, flexibility, adaptation, and more. One of my goals is to incorporate many of these skills into the classroom. "21st Century Skills Map[3]" compares education styles in the past and today. In order to promote students to acquire the skills listed above, language education has to change its teaching style. One key aspect to this change is a shift from the traditional teacher-focused classroom to a student-focused classroom, in which students have greater responsibilities and more opportunities to work in ways which incorporate the 5Cs. Students don't simply study textbooks, but rather communicate and interact with each other while using the target language. In our contemporary society, it is no longer enough for students to learn out of a book. Instructors must guide each student to reach individual goals. The same instruction will not fit the individual needs of all students in a diverse classroom or society. Although the use of textbooks is still one of the greatest tools to study languages, especially for beginners, it is not enough to enable students to acquire the language and become truly bilingual or

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[1] American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Available from URL: http://www.actfl.org/

[2] P21 Partnership for 21st Century Learning. Available from URL: http://www.p21.org/

[3] P21 Partnership for 21st Century Learning. *21st Century Skills Map. (Page 4)* Available from URL: https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/21stCenturySkillsMap/p21_worldlanguagesmap.pdf

multilingual. What is the most effective way to implement 21st century skills into a language classroom?

Table 1. The 21st Century's Skills MAP for Language Education

IN THE PAST	TODAY
Students learned about the language (grammar)	Students learn to use the language
Teacher-centered class	Learner-centered with teacher as facilitator /collaborator
Focused on isolated skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)	Emphasis on learner as "doer" and "creator"
Covering of a textbook	Using language as the vehicle to teach academic content
Only teaching language	
Same instruction for all students, etc.	Differentiating instruction to meet individual needs

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2. The Study of Project-Based Learning

2.1. Student-Centered Instruction

To create a student-centered class, teachers should not continue to use a one-way lecture style, in which instructors lecture with minimal interruption or contribution from their students. The classroom should be a place where students can express themselves and make connections with language, culture, and people. A successful student is self-driven, flexible, adaptable, easy to talk with, responsible with his/her tasks, always on time, and well-organized. In a student-centered classroom, L. Jones describes the following: (Jones, L. 2007)

- Students *DON'T* depend on their teacher all the time, waiting for instructions, words of approval, correction, advice, or praise.
- Students *DO* communicate with each other and value each other's contributions.
- Students *DO* cooperate, learn from each other, and help each other. When in difficulty or in doubt, they do ask the teacher for help or advice but only after they have tried to solve the problem among themselves.

On the other hand, teachers are expected to…
- Design the course
- Set curriculum goals and objectives
- Coordinate the course schedule
- Make arrangements with volunteers
- Facilitate students' discussions
- Help students to develop their language skills

2.2. Project-Based Learning

Recently, Project-Based learning has become widely employed in various subjects including science, math, and business/management. According to *A Review of Research on Project-Based Learning,* "Project-based learning (PBL) is a model that organizes learning around projects. Projects are complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, that involve students in the design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities; give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time." (Thomas, 2000). PBL allows student to make a plan, put it into action, evaluate/check, and repeat this process as a cycle. From the beginning to the end of the event, students are able to see the whole process and gain "common knowledge" with other group members. In order for their project to succeed, students recognize the need to build good

relationships with each other and negotiate their ideas to make decisions. Through PBL, students gain 21st century skills such as real world application experience and global competency, literacy, and meet national education standards.

## 3. Course Summary (Japanese Language Course at UC San Diego)

3.1. Overview

Since 2013, the University of California San Diego has been offering a unique project-based learning course called "Japanese for Professional Purposes," which I am in charge of developing. Unlike traditional classes, the course is not restricted to a single language level,[4] and there is no textbook required. Regardless of previous knowledge of the course topics or their language skills, students create a project together and achieve goals altogether. Students are mainly evaluated on their ability to contribute to group projects, complete tasks on time, submit a self/peer review (21st century skills included), and on their individual language improvement.

Project-Based Course Description:
- The course is project-based and lasts for one year.
- Students discuss Japanese social issues with native Japanese speakers.
- The course will connect students' majors/interests with the Japanese language.
- Students who are at various levels of Japanese will work together and interact.
- Course assignments are differentiated by the students' Japanese skill levels.
- Group-work/pair-work is required to be successful in the course.
- Classwork will be planned and applied to the local community and students will gain experience outside of the classroom.

Table 2. Course Overview

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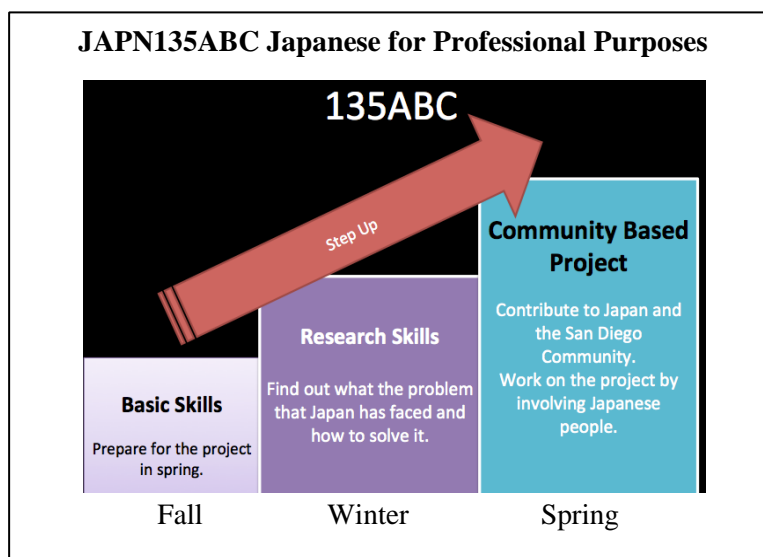
[4] Any student, who finishes the second year of Japanese at UC San Diego or has the equivalent ability, can take the course. It is a three-quarter-sequence course (A: fall, B: winter, C: spring).
http://www.ucsd.edu/catalog/courses/JAPN.html#japn135a

3.2. Course Theme

Throughout this course, students research social problems that are currently unique to Japan and that could realistically happen to other countries in the future. Students learn the problem's cause(s), how the Japanese were affected and how they reacted, including what measures were taken and how successfully the problem was dealt with. In pairs, students pick a topic during winter quarter and find articles about current issues as well as Japan's countermeasures to those issues. Using the results of this research on Japan's social problems and their countermeasures, students think of what they can do locally to prevent the same social problems from happening in San Diego. They plan an achievable project that they can employ in spring quarter.

The requirements for the project are below. Students discuss and make a plan which meets these requirements. I monitor student-led classroom discussions and help structure their ideas. When an agreement is reached and a project plan is formed, I summarize their plans and put them together in writing so that students have a reference to make sure they are always on the same page with each other.

Project Requirements:
A)   It must be a <u>Student-Driven Project.</u>
B)   Students develop a project based on a Japanese social problem that students researched in winter quarter.
C)   All individuals must contribute to the project. Each student will choose a position and contribute equally to the project.
D)   Before running the project, students will obtain various opinions from native Japanese people to see if the project is acceptable and relevant in the context of Japanese culture. They will use their comments and ideas to improve the project.
E)   Native Japanese speakers will be involved in the project as much as possible.
F)   Students will contribute to society, especially the local community in San Diego.
G)   The project will be made visible at the end of course.

**3.3. Class Project in Spring 2015: Connect to the Local Community**

During spring quarter, students presented three project proposals: the issue of an aging society, the low birthrate problem, and the disaster in Fukushima**.** Students chose the issue of an aging society project for 2015, developed research, and planned a community service event. One negative effect of the aging society in Japan which students discovered through their research was that some of the elderly population felt isolated, less connected to their community, and had less communication with family and friends. Based on these findings, students made it their project goal to connect UC San Diego students with the elderly Japanese community in San Diego.

Near downtown San Diego, there is a Japanese-American senior home owned by a Japanese person. The home is for elderly Japanese who wish to speak their native language and feel like they are in Japan for a moment in a foreign country. They visit the home once a week and enjoy spending time in a Japanese environment. Many of them came to the U.S. decades ago and have no home left in Japan. Some of them have no family or relatives who can speak Japanese and yet, because it is their native language, they miss being able to speak it with others. This seems to be one of the reasons why they visit the senior home weekly.

The needs of these Japanese senior citizens who lived in San Diego and my students who wanted to communicate using Japanese matched perfectly. Students visited the senior home weekly and played music, made origami, and had fun with the elderly women there. At the end of course, students wrote articles about the seniors' life histories and experiences. The articles were compiled into a booklet which the students named "Jinsei Monogatari 人生物語."

Figure 1. The title and the first page of "Jinsei Monogatari" from spring 2015. Students at the University of California San Diego made the booklet. The design, photo, layout, edit, and its contents were all done by students.
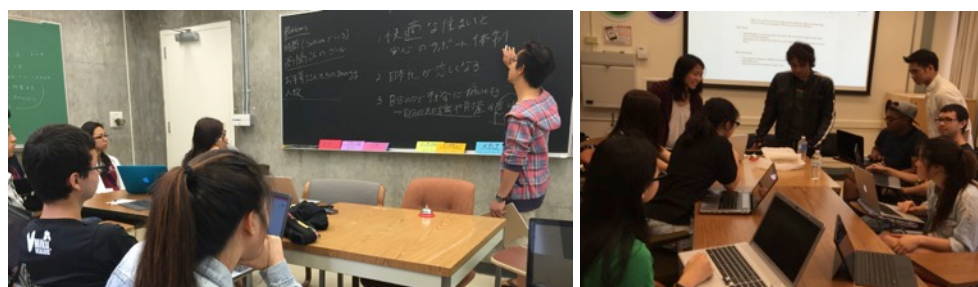
Figure 2. Students have a group meeting during class. Since it is a student-centered class, each student has his or her own tasks and needs leadership skills to accomplish them. That requires collaboration, negotiation, and self-driven skill besides language skills.

4. Reflection

While running the project, I was able to introduce the importance of Japanese business manners "ほうれんそう**":** the routine of *report 報, inform 連,* and *consult 相.* In order for foreigners to work effectively in Japan, this knowledge of business etiquette is essential, but in a traditional language class it is difficult to naturally employ it. Our project-based course was the perfect place to introduce the concept and encourage students to enact it. I was able to assess students' success by seeing their progress on coursework and in their collaborations. Feedback from students included: "It is really important to others that our individual tasks were done on time."; "It is necessary to have communication, flexibility, adaptation, and problem-solving skills in a diverse classroom**.**"; "It was a great opportunity learning how to use *keego* (Japanese polite language) when speaking with elderly Japanese people. I learned not only to show them respect, but also to be humble and lower my status in order to maintain a good relationship."; "I learned project management skills."

I believe that project-based learning can enable students to think creatively and critically in the real world. The whole process incorporates various goals from World-Readiness Standards and 21st century skills in a natural setting. Relevant topics from the real world and impromptu group projects are likely to create a situation that requires students to "collaborate," "be flexible" and "be adaptable to diversity" in order to bring about achievement. In addition, because it is not "teacher-centered instruction," students seem to have a greater sense of responsibility for their own tasks. This serves to

strongly motivate students. Furthermore, community-support experience promotes students to develop emotional intelligence based on their overall reflections and success. By letting students learn collectively outside the classroom, they are able to nourish their "connection" to the world.

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