

The Japan Forum Newsletter

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国際文化フォーラム通信

Feature:

Why Japanese- Language Education in Our District?

Case Study of Menasha Joint School District
in Wisconsin, U.S.

The number of students studying Japanese language in U.S. elementary and secondary schools has rapidly risen in recent years. In order to include not only secondary teachers but also teachers at the elementary school level, the National Council of Secondary Teachers of Japanese changed its name to National Council of Japanese Language Teachers (NCJLT). There is now a strong consensus that continuity in Japanese-language teaching should be promoted from pre-school to university level. While Japanese-language teaching has a relatively longer history at the secondary and university level, at the elementary school level, it has just begun. New programs and resources need to be developed.

This issue of *The Japan Forum Newsletter* tells about the adoption and development of Japanese-language education in a school district in Wisconsin. The district has developed its own foreign-language programs based on national standards and the curriculum guide developed by the State of Wisconsin, and Japanese language has been a successful part of its K-12 program. There is also strong interest in interaction with schools and communities in Japan. What is the driving force behind this remarkable progress? In this feature, administrators, school principals, teachers, the children themselves and their parents, share their views.



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花見 Hanami **Sakura Goods Present!** See p. 13
(Enjoying the Cherry Blossoms)

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TJF Session at 1999 ACTFL Meeting

Why and How Was Japanese-language Education Introduced to Menasha?

Rocco D'Amelio

Principal, Jefferson Elementary School



Rocco D'Amelio

The concept of teaching a foreign language at the elementary level in Menasha's schools emerged during the 1991-92 school year. The administrators were asked by District Superintendent William Decker to envision new programs that our school district might offer to better prepare students for the future. One of the suggestions was introductory exposure to a foreign language. This idea corresponded with two other unrelated supporters of elementary-level foreign language teaching. School District Foreign Language Department Coordinator Sandy Briones, had expressed interest in the development of such a program, but had not been aware that any elementary school would welcome it. The other source of support came from a citizen's forum that was being conducted by the school system.

The connection of these three interested parties resulted in the development of a School District Goal Study Committee. A study was developed by Director of Curriculum and Instruction William Ott, and a committee of teachers, parents, principals, and foreign language teachers. The district goal was to provide a more comprehensive foreign language program for students and to further develop student skills in oral and written

communication. This was to be done by studying the feasibility of providing a foreign language experience in all elementary schools.

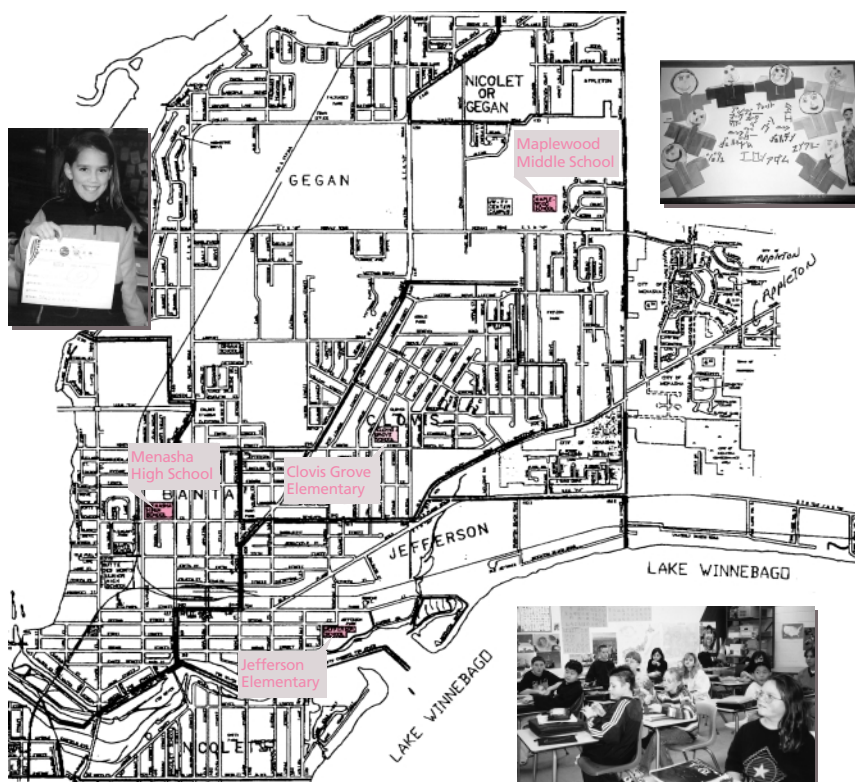
The study consisted of reports from national organizations, information from Department of Public Instruction Consultant Paul Sandrock, and a presentation from the elementary foreign language program being implemented in Ferndale, Michigan. The committee also made site visits to see six state school district programs.

The study group completed a mission statement and program philosophy. They established goals and identified pupils to be served, worked out a budget for staff and materials, developed patterns of organization and staffing, and created sample schedules that included minutes of instruction per grade level. They selected languages and a time table for implementation.

The resulting proposal was presented to the Board of Education, which agreed to implement the pilot after-school program at Clovis Grove Elementary School. The class was called Foreign Language Study Buddy Class because participants were encouraged to register with a sibling, parent or friend to make it easier for them to practice together between classes. The first class session taught German, as parents had been given a questionnaire with various languages from which to choose, and a number of families in the area have German heritage. The class was taught by one of the middle school teachers. The group consisted of seven sets of parents and children and was a definite success. The evening class changed from German to Japanese during the next year because the District Board of Education had decided to implement the foreign language program and Clovis Grove was assigned the Japanese language. The evening class was helpful in developing a group of supportive parents and teachers who saw how quickly the children learned. They enjoyed the experience and continued to participate in the remaining classes. This helped to implement the program. A Japanese cultural series was also provided for parents and staff from the Clovis Grove and Jefferson schools. Participants were able to experience art, origami, and examples of culture in daily life.

The selection of languages to be taught was based on several factors. The district al-

Menasha School District



ready taught German and Spanish in the middle and high school curriculum. These programs had a well-established reputation. The addition of a third language would allow the program to present a base language in the Slavic, Romance, and Oriental languages. The existing German and Spanish programs satisfied two of the three base languages. Japanese was selected because of the possible opportunities for future student career choices and because our district had some experiences with the Sister School and JALCAP programs that were in existence at Jefferson Elementary School and led by its principal, Tom Westermeyer. The committee determined that the elementary schools should attempt to equally divide the number of students in each language so that there would be sufficient participation in each language program by the time the children reached the middle and high schools. The elementary schools were paired for the selection of languages according to the number of children and resulted in the following assignments: Clovis Grove and Jefferson Schools—Japanese, Butte des Mort and Nicolet Schools—Spanish, and Gegan School—Ger-

man. The program started with kindergarten and first grade in the first year, and added a grade level in each subsequent year.

We are very proud of the commitment that our leadership has shown and continues to show through Superintendent Dr. Michael J. Thompson, and Dr. Keith Fuchs, in his capacity as Director of Curriculum and Instruction, in providing our elementary foreign language program. The goals of our program are to: (1) provide an exposure to other languages and cultures; (2) promote global awareness in a rapidly changing world; (3) develop the ability to listen, speak, read and write while interacting in real life situations; (4) heighten awareness and tolerance of non-English speaking people; and (5) serve the nations' needs in commerce, diplomacy, and education.

This comprehensive K-12 curriculum will seek to have all students participate in the program. No students will be deprived of the opportunity of learning another form of communication, benefiting from the cultural values of foreign language study, attaining greater academic achievement in other areas of studies or exploring a career choice.

Student Participation

The Menasha Joint School District offers instruction in Japanese language and culture from kindergarten through grade twelve. There are presently 580 students kindergarten through grade five engaged in the integrated Japanese program at Jefferson Elementary and Clovis Grove Elementary Schools. As students from Jefferson and Clovis Grove enter Maplewood Middle School (grades six through eight) they can continue in the Japanese program in grade six. Beginning with grade seven, students can elect to either take or not to take a foreign language. Foreign language is an elective in grades seven through twelve. Our present seventh grade students represent the first group of students who have participated in the Japanese program since the first grade and they are at a point where they must decide whether to continue to participate or not. We are pleased to report that more than 60 percent of the students who participated in Japanese in grade six have elected to continue in grade seven. We believe that, as the students who have participated in the K-6 Japanese program proceed through middle school and into high school, our Japanese program will continue to grow and flourish.

Number of Students Taking Japanese, 1999-2000 School Year

School	No. of Students	Students Enrolled in Japanese Program
Clovis Grove Elementary	377	377
Jefferson Elementary	203	203
Maplewood Middle School	806	138
Menasha High School	1126	27

Note: The first students to begin taking Japanese starting in elementary school are still in junior high school, so the figure for high school shown here is quite small. In the next two years, this figure can be expected to rise sharply.

A Principal's Support for the Japanese-language Program



Barbara Drinkwine
Principal,
Clovis Grove
Elementary School

There are significant ways a school principal can support Japanese-language programs at the elementary level. The first way is to provide as many opportunities as possible for guests from overseas to visit the school. Encouraging people from other schools to visit and see what the Japanese-language program is all about is another way. Support for the teaching staff and the Japanese-language program encourages its continuity and facilitates successful learning by the students.

Another way we principals can sustain our Japanese-language programs is to make them known to the public by emphasizing the educational advantages to students. Research shows that the earlier a student begins to acquire a second language the better the language is learned. It is also advantageous because it increases a student's capacity to learn other subject matter as well. As we are living in a global society, we must encourage learning about and acceptance of other cultures. The awareness and understanding of another cultures enhances our capacity to live in harmony with all the societies on our planet.

We have strong support for the Japanese-language program at Clovis Grove Elementary School. One significant support is through the arts. Musically, we offer instruction through the Suzuki string instrument method. Through our vocal music program, Japanese songs are taught and holiday programs include a variety of Japanese cultural experiences and topics. Classroom teachers use as much of the Japanese language as they can to reinforce new learning for their students.

As you can see, the overwhelming support of the Japanese-language program is well documented. As part of the group that traveled to Japan last October, my perspective has changed as well. Even though our trip was only a week long, I came home with a very positive image of the families, schools, cities, and culture we saw. The people of Japan are amazing! We were greeted with kindness, courtesy, and friendship. We have so much to learn from each other, and now that Menasha teaches Japanese, language need not be a barrier in the future!

Japanese-language Education: Coordination and Collaboration in School

Lynn Sessler Schmaling

Teacher of Japanese, Clovis Grove Elementary School



Lynn Sessler
Schmaling

Living and teaching in a small town in North-eastern Wisconsin, I am often asked: "Why do you teach Japanese to elementary school children?" It is true that we, as Japanese teachers in the United States, often answer such a question by citing the numerous studies that indicate the benefits of the extended, sequential study of a foreign language and the need for students in the twenty-first century to be able to communicate with others in our increasingly global society. But we do need to ask ourselves an even more important question: Do we truly understand the needs of our students so that we can offer them a meaningful experience as they begin their study of Japanese language and culture at the elementary school level?

In addressing the aforementioned question, we have developed and focused on three main goals for our elementary school Japanese language program: (1) to create a content-focused curriculum that uses Japanese language in the context of other school subject areas, (2) to have students engage in age-appropriate, meaningful communication, and (3) to ensure that all our students obtain a level of personal attainment in their study of a foreign language and, at each different level, feel comfortable in their use of Japanese.

To achieve this goal, it is imperative that we give our students numerous opportunities to use the same content in a different context. In the classroom, we recycle grammar patterns and vocabulary as the students move from kindergarten through grade five, constantly relating it to other topics in science, social studies, mathematics, and other curriculum areas. We will, for example, recycle the same grammar pattern used in a science

unit during a social studies unit. This approach diverges from the old ideal of practicing one grammar concept per topic, not taking into consideration that the normal speaker of a foreign language will use a single grammatical pattern in many different situations.

For example, during the fourth grade, our

students do a unit of study on the planets of the universe. In Japanese class, we review the planet names, their position in the universe and make comparisons of their size, distance from the sun, surface temperature, all in Japanese. Our content standards for this unit of study are the use of comparisons (. . . *yoru* . . . *wa* . . . *desu*), superlatives, and descriptive adjectives. Recycled vocabulary and grammatical patterns include numbers, colors, kanji for the days of the week (as they are used for the planet names), and the basic noun/adjective sentence pattern (. . . *wa* . . . *desu*).

After giving the students ample situations to practice the above mentioned grammar and vocabulary, performance is assessed by having the students create a poster about a planet (using an actual picture of the planet copied from an image downloaded from the Internet) and report to the class, in Japanese, three pieces of information about that planet. As a middle school student, these same students will once again recycle this comparative grammar pattern, for example, during a unit on school/daily life while telling their Japanese penpals about their likes/dislikes and comparing class subjects.

It is not so important that students at the elementary and middle school level be able to compare or use the superlative in their communication in Japanese as that they be able to communicate, in Japanese, what was meaningful to them at that certain point in time, during that particular unit of study. We stress learning to communicate, in Japanese, content that is meaningful to the students. Only when communication is meaningful will they find a sense of fulfillment in studying Japanese, perhaps in future elect to continue their study.

Another important element to the success of our foreign language program is the cooperation and collaboration of homeroom teachers. As Japanese language teachers, we work to connect with other areas of study in the classroom, not only in terms of core subject areas but also such as life skills, critical thinking and fine arts. Elementary teachers of standard subjects may see Japanese language study (or any foreign language study at the elementary school) as taking time away from other subject areas. By using the



content-related approach, we can collaborate with the teaching of a given subject area by the homeroom teacher, allowing them to devote more time to completing tasks in other areas. By cultivating this cooperative relationship, we have gained the respect and support of teachers, who will reciprocate by using and encouraging their students to use Japanese to complete basic classroom tasks,

such as asking for items, counting lunch tickets, or describing the weather.

In this way, Japanese language education at the elementary level has demonstrated that it can be an asset, not an exotic frill, in the context of the regular school curriculum. We have been able, through content coordination and staff collaboration, to use it as the vehicle for greater fulfillment of our professional purpose.

Bringing Students More than Just Language



Oshima Teruhiko
Teacher of Japanese, Jefferson Elementary School

It has been nearly four years since I started teaching in the Menasha Joint School District. I still remember how nervous I was about teaching elementary school students. Although my four years have been filled with many embarrassing mistakes and tough challenges, I find my current assignment most rewarding. This opportunity to work with elementary grade students has brought me further understanding of my own language and culture.

Contrary to common belief, it is not easy for native speakers of Japanese to become instructors of Japanese language in the United States. You are required to teach Japanese effectively as well as undertake numerous duties. You need to have a good understanding of the American education system in order to be able to function in school. Being from Japan, learning a different educational system and, most importantly, how to handle American students isn't as easy as you might think. We have to get through a lot of things besides obtaining working visas and teaching certificates, which can be tough enough!

Despite some headaches, it has been worthwhile. I really enjoy what I am doing. Being a native speaker of Japanese, I hope that I can bring to my class something more than just the language. By utilizing my knowledge of the language and culture of Japan, I would like to help students in Menasha widen their knowledge of and interest in Japan and the Japanese language.



Teacher Testimony

Mrs. Joanne Gerritts, second grade teacher at Clovis Grove, says: "the integration of Japanese into our elementary curriculum has been an inspiration for my second graders as well as for me. Through daily lessons, we have enthusiastically absorbed the language and culture of Japan. All of us are seeing a much bigger world than Menasha, Wisconsin."

Our parents have been enthusiastic about Japanese language learning. They have hosted Japanese visitors, been active in an earlier Study Buddy program, and affirm the importance of the Japanese-language program."

Parent's Perspective

A parent whose daughter has gone on to middle school offered many insights about the Japanese-language program: "The Japanese-language program was a very positive experience for my daughter. She plans to continue to take Japanese through high school. I can remember being part of the Study Buddy group. It helped us get used to hearing the language. We cooked and took field trips that had a very positive effect. The Japanese-language program opened my daughter's mind to another culture. She has a totally different perspective on the world than I do. She will use this to her advantage as she gets older. She plans to travel to Japan when she is in high school."

Students Speak

Students are enthusiastic learners of Japanese. They are very proud of their accomplishments in learning a new language. The following quotes about the program tell the story.

"I think it's cool because you can go into Japanese industry—so much comes from Japan." (Paige Berg)

"I think it's fun because you learn a lot of things and this will be an advantage to me." (Amanda Messerschmidt)

"I like learning a whole new language and would be able to use it if I go to Japan." (Alex Koehnke)

"You get to learn a whole new language and get to see all new things Japanese people use in their culture." (Brandon Ketchum)

"I want to go to Japan and speak the language rather than have others interpret for me all the time." (Sheri Thompson)

"I like taking Japanese because you learn neat projects and I like the teacher." (Leah Schwartzbauer)

"I think Japanese is fun because you can learn more in class about the world than without Japanese." (Kayla Korth)

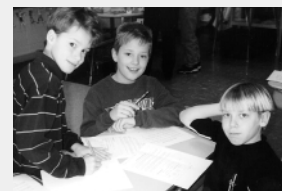
"We get to talk about animals in Japanese. You will be able to get a different job when you get older." (Zach Knaus)

"Someday I want to go to Japan and instead of saying, 'Hold on a minute until I look that up!' I'll be able to talk with them." (Lauren Schultz)

"I think the Japanese program is great because you can learn about different foods and how Japanese culture is different." (Alaina Unmuth)

"I like Japanese because it is fun to talk in another language and to know about their animals and do fun partner projects!" (Molly Moran)

"I haven't taken Japanese for long because we only moved here a year ago but it is new learning for me and it is lots of fun!" (Tiffany Myers)



How Does the School District Support Japanese-language Education?

Dr. Keith Fuchs

Deputy Superintendent, Menasha Joint School District



Dr. Keith Fuchs

The Mission Statement of the Menasha Joint School District clearly indicates that we will provide a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve educational program that offers students an opportunity to maximize individual potential. All of our students will have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to equip them to function as lifelong learners and responsible citizens in their community. Recognizing that the community to which today's students belong is a global community, the Menasha Board of Education, in 1992, issued a challenge to the Menasha World Language department to create an innovative plan for implementing a Kindergarten-through-Grade 12 World Language Program. The goal of this program was to effectively prepare our students to function in and actively shape the global society of the twenty-first century.

For the past eight years our world language department has made a concerted effort to fulfill this goal and to define and refine our K-12 program. It is our belief that language and communication are at the heart of the human experience and that we must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate in our pluralistic society and abroad. The result of our effort has been the development of a world language program that provides all of our students exposure to and knowledge of languages and cultures other than English. This program will promote a global aware-

ness and second-language competence.

It is the objective of our K-12 Japanese program to have students learn the Japanese language and understand and appreciate the Japanese culture. We want each of our Japanese students to be able to communicate in Japanese, to use the language in both personal and career opportunities, and to gain satisfaction and fulfillment as a lifelong learner of Japanese. We want them to be aware of different perspectives reflected in both the language and behaviors of other people and to possess the language skills and understanding of other cultures that will be necessary to be productive members of the diverse communities in which we all live.

During the past several years we have seen a significant increase in the interest that other school districts have shown in creating an elementary world language program. We have had numerous visitors to our district to see this very exciting program and in all cases they have been very impressed with the overall program and intrigued and fascinated with our Japanese program. Our program has been recognized throughout the State of Wisconsin and recently the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh created a program of teacher training in the Japanese language.

We believe that students of Menasha are just beginning to realize the multitude of positive experiences that they will encounter in their future as a result of their involvement in our world language program.

Grant from the U.S. Department of Education

The Menasha Joint School District was fortunate to receive a grant totaling \$100,000 from the United States Department of Education to support continuation of a strong, ongoing K-5 foreign language program in our schools. With matching funds supplied by the school district, we will be able over the next three years to adopt a unique K-5 Japanese-language program in our middle school and high school.

There are several components to the grant, which include development of K-12 benchmark assessments for Japanese, smooth articulation of our students between elementary school Japanese and middle school as well as into high school Japanese courses. Our first component from this grant will enable us to take the time and develop the resources to develop K-12 curriculum that is standards-based and content-related, while meeting the needs of individual students. As we strive to meet our goal of Japanese-language education of "all students, all levels, all the time," it is necessary for us to look closely at offering Japanese classes, K-12, so that students can engage in meaningful communication as well as obtain personal success at their own pace. This is a difficult but inspir-

ing mission, one that is necessary if we truly want to prepare all of our students to live in the global community of the twenty-first century.

And that leads into the second component of our grant: connecting the community within our city, state, and world to our students learning Japanese. We anticipate making several connections with our business community to offer upper level students the chance to engage in communication in Japanese while exploring future career options. Our technology component, which will enable students K-12 to create electronic performance portfolios as well as begin communicating through photos and words on the Internet with our sister schools in Ōgo, Japan.

Finally, in order to complete the preceding objectives it is important that we rely on the outside resources of experts in the fields of standards education and foreign language to help us piece together. All our elementary foreign language teachers will attend workshops this summer to improve their language skills and learn more about creating standards-based materials and curriculum. Also, through the grant, all our foreign language teachers, grades K-12, will have the opportunity to attend workshops, visit immersion schools and receive special in-servicing from experts around our state.

Ōgo and Menasha Elementary Schools: Toward Closer Ties

A special friendship tie was formed between four American and Japanese elementary schools in 1998 through the assistance of the Japan Forum. Among them, Clovis Grove Elementary School in Menasha, Wisconsin and Ōgo Elementary School in Ōgo, Gunma Prefecture have moved rapidly to form a closer relationship and made impressive progress in a short period of time.

Acting as go-between for the two schools, TJF advised at the outset that they establish a relationship on a friendship-exchange basis, engaging in activities such as the following: (1) video penpal projects, (2) school event report exchange, (3) artwork and class project exchange, (4) language and culture exchange and (5) e-mail correspondence.

The proposed activities were adopted and carried out by both schools. Then, in October 1999, three administrators and one teacher from Menasha School District visited Japan and met their counterparts in Ōgo reconfirming their two schools' commitment to maintaining the relationship. That visit paved the way for a new phase in their relationship and even further progress.

The two sides expressed their (1) mutual desire to expand their relationship from the elementary school level to include the middle school level so that students could have a total of nine years of association with each other throughout their primary and intermediate

school years, (2) hope that ties between municipal offices in their respective locales similar to those between their schools might be possible, and (3) the Mayor of Ōgo expressed his desire to pay a visit to the Mayor of Menasha and the city, bringing with him twelve middle school students and several citizens of the town of Ōgo in August, 2000.

The Ōgo proposal to visit Menasha was welcomed by the Mayor and school and plans to welcome the Ōgo delegation have already begun. The Japanese middle school students will be invited for homestay experiences with families in Menasha during their stay and discussions are expected to take place regarding the formation of a sister city relationship between the two mayors at that time. As matchmakers we at the Japan Forum feel that the school-to-school and city-to-city relationship between Ōgo and Menasha is ideal to fostering stronger and closer ties between the two schools. Their experience can serve as a model for other schools.

Establishing Relationship with Japanese Schools



Dr. J. Michael Thompson
Superintendent,
Menasha Joint
School District

The Menasha Joint School District values its developing relationship with the schools in Ōgo, Japan. As one of the few American schools with a comprehensive Japanese-language curriculum, we are particularly interested in the valuable resources such a sister-school relationship has to offer. Learning first-hand about Japanese culture can only

assist us in enriching the learning program for our students who study Japanese. Moreover, the personal relationships we will be able to establish with Ōgo officials, school personnel, citizens, and students will create a bridge between Menasha and Ōgo that will lead to an improved worldview for members of both communities. We greatly anticipate the visit to Menasha of a delegation from Ōgo later this year.

A bulletin board display at Clovis Grove Elementary School of kanji with illustrations made by grade five students at Ōgo Elementary School for Clovis Grove students of Japanese. In return, Clovis Grove students started a similar project to help students in Ōgo study English.

