# Innovation in Language Teaching and Learning: The Case of Japan. Hayo Reinders, Stephen Ryan, and Sachiko Nakamura (Eds.). Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. xii + 289 pp.

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This edited volume aims to showcase ways in which innovation has been driving educational change in Japan. The book is the fourth in a series looking at innovation using a contextualized, culture-oriented approach (the other three volumes explore innovation in Thailand, China, and the Middle East/North Africa). Each chapter reviews a specific area of educational development, including curriculum planning, teacher training, and lesson design. While innovation has been a topic in educational research for some years (Waters, 2009), the current volume is the first that focuses on innovation in Japan. The current volume is likely to be of interest to trainee language teachers, graduate students, and more experienced teaching professionals. The book would also be of value to educators who wish to undertake research as it provides clear definitions of terms, with each chapter providing quality references and explanations.

The volume contains 14 chapters, including an opening and closing chapter by the editors. Eleven of the authors are male and nine female, with the authors being a range of ages and levels of professional experience (including PhD students, teachers from various levels of education, and program directors). While there are no distinct sections, the book progresses from several orientating chapters to elementary, secondary, and tertiary settings, with additional chapters exploring out-of-class learning and teacher training. Chapters are not numbered, which is not necessarily a criticism, but for the purposes of this review, each chapter is allocated a number.

The opening three chapters define, discuss, and explain the background and current state of innovative practices in education in Japan. The first is an introductory chapter by the editors, followed by a chapter by Philip Seargeant on the geopolitical situation of teaching and learning English in an era of global uncertainty. Seargeant's chapter provides a grounding to the topic as it allows for international contextualization while also illustrating specific points about the Japanese context. Chapter 3 by Makoto Ikeda provides a detailed explanation of the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approaches in Japan, and the drive to look beyond language-only approaches. While these general chapters are necessary scene-setting, they also delve into specific examples, such as Ikeda's description of elementary school CLIL lesson design and implementation.

Next are two chapters on elementary school innovations exploring history and peace studies (Noriko Ishihara, Terumi Orihashi, and Zachary Clark), and digital games (Yoko Goto Butler). A shared theme between these two approaches is the urge for interesting, engaging content. As other researchers have noted (Bao, 2018), creativity and innovation in lesson design can enliven lessons and encourage learners, while also engaging teachers in their professional development.

The book contains two chapters dedicated to working with older learners, Chapter 6 by Stephen Ryan and Kay Irie, and Chapter 9 by Danya Ramírez-Gómez. The first reports on a unique cross-generational language teaching and learning program in high school in Shimane prefecture. The preliminary study results encourage further research to report on collaborations between high school students and older retired learners. Ramírez-Gómez draws on her experiences as a literacy tutor to

explore the need for an age-appropriate approach to teaching older learners (60 years old and above) in Japan. The chapter describes curriculum innovations related to vocabulary learning, lesson pace, and the selection of topics. The results of the investigation would be of interest to trainee teachers, as well as those working in community-based teaching environments.

In Chapter 7, James York, Jonathan DeHaan, and Peter Hourdequin write about teaching English using tabletop (board) games using a task-based framework and multiliteracies pedagogy. The classroom context is a private sciences university in Japan. One of the games used was *Pandemic*, which uses real-world scenarios and develops critical awareness of global issues. The chapter reports on teaching learners how to play and then reflecting on the language used and bilingual questionnaire reports on learners' perspectives.

Ayako Suzuki from Tamagawa University writes in Chapter 8 on the topic of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). She reports on her university's innovation to promote the ELF approach in teaching and instructors' understanding of the term as a guiding principle. Teachers seemed to view the ELF approach's adoption as related to pedagogy, identity, or both. The report concludes that innovations such as using ELF as a university-wide approach are likely to meet resistance from teachers and to counteract potential problems, systematic training for ELF is required.

In Chapter 10, Jo Mynard describes examples of innovative practices in self-access centers in Japan. One example is learning advising, which can take the shape of guided learning cycles. Innovation can also mean supporting action research projects amongst staff while also rotating project coordinator positions to encourage new ideas. Mynard advocates investment in staff development and ongoing professional development to support innovative practices, which can be seen as general advice for best practice for innovative teaching and research.

Chapter 11 by Kay Irie begins by describing the built-in conservatism of some universities in Japan and why innovation may be particularly challenging. Irie is describing the establishment of the Faculty of International Social Sciences at Gakushuin University, Tokyo. The chapter aims to unpack contextual elements and institutional constraints which new faculties face, providing a real insider's view of the process. For those involved in creating new departments, the chapter offers a roadmap and a cautionary tale. The creation of the CLIL and English medium instruction elements of the Gakushuin department design is particularly relevant to the ongoing course design process at the Center for Foreign Language Education and Research at Rikkyo University.

Chapter 12 by Tim Murphey, looks at innovating with what he calls the *collaborative social*, which occurs when learners interact and help each other. Murphey introduces activities which he has developed to help learners become more accustomed to working together to achieve language learning goals, using group dynamics for success (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Relevant to the current online teaching situation, teachers, according to this approach, should encourage learners' questions (about the course, the progression of tasks and language learning) as asking for help is a mark of L2 proficiency.

Chapter 13 by Maiko Ikeda, Hiroyuki Imai, and Osamu Takeuchi look at in-service teacher training for English teaching in public elementary schools in Japan. The impetus for innovation has been the Japanese government's national curriculum standards to include English language teaching from April 2020. Anyone involved in elementary education in Japan will be familiar with the challenges of this change. Teachers feel that not enough training has been provided, for example. One approach to teacher training has been to take an individual approach in each school, conducting a needs assessment and then providing tailored training for teachers. The current chapter reports on innovations to include more collaboration between stakeholders. The final chapter looks at future

ways to use innovation in Japanese educational contexts.

While there are admittedly some benefits to edited collections from international perspectives (see Ushioda, 2013 on motivation, for example), there are advantages to the country-specific approach. This volume offers a deep dive exploring innovation in education for practitioners and researchers in Japan, and its primary audience will be the teaching community in Japan. While a more general approach may broaden the perspective, the focused approach adds depth. One further innovation, should it be possible to achieve, would be a multilingual volume bringing together writing in English and other languages, including, of course, Japanese. As departments seek to collaborate more closely with each other and programs continue to change and evolve, edited volumes such as this one are welcome additions to the professional development of faculty and education practitioners.

# References

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