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The Teaching of Japanese at Small Liberal Arts Colleges

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**The Teaching of
Japanese at Small
Liberal Arts
Colleges**

By Peter Dang

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INTRODUCTION:

During my one-year exchange in Japan at Waseda University, in addition to developing my communication skills in Japanese, I was able to learn much about Japanese Phonetics and English Phonetics, which were classes geared towards students who are considering teaching either as a second language. Through these classes, I was able better to understand the types of struggles learners of each language commonly encounter. Even though English is my second language, my long upbringing in the Bronx allowed me to have double fluency alongside my native tongue of Vietnamese. As such, I would never fully understand the struggles that a person learning English at a later age would face.

In order to balance out the financial burdens that living in Japan demanded, I worked many part-time jobs including managing the website for my exchange program and washing dishes at a Japanese restaurant. After given the chance to teach English as a second language at an English teaching company known as Leafcup, I was able to finally able to take my passion of teaching and put it to good use. Working about three sessions per week, I was able to students of many English levels, and of very diverse reasons as to why they wanted to learn English. Most of my students decided to study English in order to travel overseas, study abroad, or because they felt it could be useful in the workplace in the future. Interestingly, when my students were business workers, it was because some of their supervisors demanded it. This showed diversity in reasons for learning a foreign language.

During my conversation and tutoring sessions at Leafcup, I began to understand the problems that native Japanese speakers faced when learning English. At the same time, I started to reflect on my past (and current) problems in mastering Japanese as a student who learned it through the medium of English, becoming more and more aware of the strategies that my other international student friends used to overcome their weaknesses in Japanese. I thought more and more about the effect of learning Japanese at Waseda University, where the medium of instruction was through Japanese because of the high population of students from non-English speaking countries as well as the “direct method.” I thought about how the beginner and intermediate levels of Japanese taught at Vassar used English as a medium (and this is also to some extent in the advanced and seminar classes). As a person in which neither English nor Japanese is my first language, I am interested in how foreign languages are taught at small liberal arts colleges, and what types of challenges are idiosyncratic to language development at this age. Reflecting on my own personal experience at Vassar, including the self-study that I often did to make sure that I mastered the material, I now want to learn more about how students at a small liberal arts institution like Vassar College learn Japanese, and what strategies to they find the most efficient.

Through my observation of students who speak English as a second language, I understand that every Vassar student has their own approach towards learning foreign languages. I am interested in how variables such as knowing two languages from a young age, learning a language at a later age, and motivation towards language acquisition have an effect on how one studies and the results from such a background. I must admit my

privilege of having grown up in a bilingual environment. With my exposure to Japanese culture and language, I wanted to research more about the language teaching of Japanese at Vassar College.

PROJECT GOALS:

Even though the teaching of foreign languages is by no means new in the United States, teaching methods can differ from institution to institution, and even instructor to instructor. I want to specifically focus on how Japanese is taught at small liberal arts institutions like Vassar College. Bearing in mind that Vassar College is a liberal arts higher education institution, there are many possibilities that would separate learning languages at Vassar than at a different institution.

First, because Vassar has a language proficiency requirement, students that do not already show mastery in another language are required to take a full year of foreign language. That being said, there is also a demographic within this body that no longer takes foreign languages once they fulfill this one-year requirement. Secondly, there is also the student body that chooses to learn Japanese despite qualifying out of the language requirement. There are also students that study Japanese for a year to satisfy the one-year language requirement, but by choice decide to continue taking intermediate and advanced level even though they did not initially plan to.

Through my project, I will be able to understand what types of pedagogies do Japanese instructors apply in teaching small class sizes where students are fluent in English. I will also understand what types of challenges do both heritage speakers and

non-heritage speakers have when learning a language like Japanese. I will also understand the reasons and approaches to learning that students have for continuing language study at an institution that only has a one-year minimum requirement.

From a pedagogical perspective, doing this project will allow me to understand the types of teaching methods are used in the classroom by Japanese teachers. Bearing in mind that teaching a language as a second language is very different from teaching a national language (like English in a regular track classroom), I will be able to observe the techniques used to teach vocabulary and grammar. As Japanese is a very different language structurally and visually from English, I will understand how its teaching differs from techniques used for more similar languages such as Spanish or French. I will also understand what types of techniques instructors use in combining language and culture. Seeing that use of media in the classroom is getting more and more popular and accepted, I will be able to understand why and how teachers use media, what types of media are employed, and whether or not using this interaction is overall effective in cultivating language acquisition.

Although I have had the experience of taking Japanese at the elementary level and the intermediate level at Vassar, in addition to study abroad, through this project, I will be able to focus on the language acquisition of other students instead of myself. The third person view that this project angles me will allow me to understand how Japanese language acquisition can differ from student and student, and how methods employed by the teacher facilitate it.

DATA TO BE COLLECTED:

In order to answer the questions that are central to my project, I will employ various methods to collect data. I will distribute a short survey to all students of the class that I am observing (which is in English) to get a brief idea of motivations and struggles a student has towards learning Japanese. I will also interview the students in the class in order to get a more personal account of these reasons; because interviews are more open-answered, participants will be able to state the role that Japanese will have in their life after Vassar. In addition, the interviews will allow students to tell me about their personal methods for learning Japanese, and why they feel that these methods are effective.

To understand how students overcome (or get stumbled) by difficulties that may be specific to Japanese, along with the survey will be a short quiz that involves several questions related to grammar, vocabulary, or kanji. Kanji are the Chinese characters used in the Japanese language and will be further explained later. The purpose of the quiz is not necessarily to test the proficiency of participants, but to ask students what techniques they would employ to overcome the language problems presented, and why they feel that these techniques work best for them.

In addition, with permission of Yuko Matsubara-sensei, I will make class observations several times a month. I have had Matsubara-sensei as my language teacher for several semesters before my study abroad, but by participating in her class as an observer instead of a student, I will be able to focus on the types of techniques she employs in the classroom. I will observe the types of interactions present between the

students, and through this, also observe the differences between the interaction of a language classroom and a lecture classroom.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

- How is Japanese taught at small American liberal arts college Vassar College with primarily English speakers, and how is this learning affected by the needs of individual students?

I am deeply grateful to Peipei Qiu-sensei and Miku Fukasaku-sensei, for allowing as well as inviting me to participate and observe Japanese classes taught at Vassar. Qiu-sensei is my academic advisor for Asian Studies, and has guided me through my internship teaching Japanese culture and language through The Fountains at Milbrook, as well as a fountain of encouragement through my years at Vassar. Fukusaku-sensei, as the language fellow for 2013-2014, has taken time out of her schedule to give me special training in reading newspapers and interview preparation for Japanese companies, as well as a being a friend and cultural bridge to the country that has changed me so much as a person. I would also like to thank Bjork-sensei, who has served as my advisor for Education and helped me in this study, as well as supporting my endeavors and never giving up on me even when assignments seemed difficult. I am grateful to Kentaro Kaneki, a student who serves as my cultural connection to Japan even after

returning to Vassar. I am also thankful to some of my friends at Waseda University, who corrected Japanese grammar in my research, and continue to support me even though I am so far away from them. It has been a privilege to both be a student learning this beautiful language as well as returning as an observer for study, having had the chance to teach it myself with a fellow student, and to have learned so much from all of these people during the course of my time here. With love and heart, *Arigato gozaimasu.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction:

In order to understand how the Japanese language is taught at colleges where the majority of its students are non-heritage learners, I will refer to research that addresses different audiences of learners for this language, specifically for those beginning at the college age. First, even though there are overlaps between the teaching of all languages, bearing in mind that Japanese, with its very different grammatical system and writing system, is significantly different from other roman languages taught through English as a medium, it is important to understand the pedagogies unique to teaching Japanese. Secondly, languages taught as a foreign language at a college for non-heritage speakers usually teach it as a second language, so it is important to understand the differences between heritage learners (who may have some proficiency) and non-heritage learners. Thirdly, it is important overall to understand the difference between learning Japanese as a first language and as a second language.

I. Different Methods of Teaching Japanese as a Language

A. Traditional Methods

An example of a traditional method employed in American liberal arts college is known as "Application Performance. A study of this supplemental drill in the Japanese language program at Oregon State University reveals how it was used as a

way to develop students' communicative competence. The approach is a type of role play, with pairs of students preparing a dialogue according to a situation provided by the instructor and then performed in class. Situations are designed so that students can utilize newly learned grammar and expressions, and drafts of dialogues are checked by the instructor prior to the performance. The types of dialogues used through “Application Performance” offers students the opportunity to act out Japanese business scenarios and the Japanese way of communication in varying situations. During the process of preparing for an application performance drill, students learn aspects of Japanese culture such as cooperation, teamwork, and consensus building (Nakajima, 2012). Role play through reading dialogue and creating one's own dialogue is a language tool that is also used in languages besides Japanese. In the aforementioned method, by using it to specifically explore business scenarios in a Japanese settings, cultural learning through this method will differ from language to language.

Translations of documents from the original language to the language being used as a medium for teaching is also used for language teaching. In an analysis of an advanced-level Japanese language subject taught at a liberal arts university, the significance of incorporating translation and interpreting in advanced-level Japanese language teaching is used in order to expose students to genuine documents from the target language. Positive aspects of students' learning experiences through translation and interpreting identified in this study include relevance to real-life and constant interaction, which directly contributes to promoting students' learning (Takimoto and

Hashimoto, 2011). Using documents from Japanese newspapers, magazines, and other articles as opposed to class materials that are solely meant for the teaching of the language is a more direct exposure to the types of material students would encounter through travel, work, or study in Japan.

In addition, it is quite common for schools in English speaking countries to introduce Japanese as a foreign language by engaging native Japanese volunteers to assist in the classroom using a collaborative team-teaching approach. These volunteer Japanese assistant teachers, commonly referred to as Japanese Assistant Teachers (JATs) or Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), and are often seen as an indispensable asset to school language programs. This service is overwhelmingly attractive to school language teachers in general and worth the time sacrifice required for the associated administrative tasks (Hasegawa, 2011). Having a native Japanese speaker, especially in a classroom in which the main instructor may not be a native speaker, can increase exposure to native-level pronunciation and speech.

B. Non-Traditional Methods

An analysis of interactions from an introductory Japanese as a foreign language classroom at an American liberal arts college revealed that language play is a highly salient feature of the participants' interactions. Language play used as a recognized form of teaching tactic has come into increasing focus in second language acquisition of the last decade. Research in first language learners has long shown the prevalence

of language play in both the language data available to the learner and learner language production, and recent research in second language learners has shown that language play is also a prominent characteristic of the language production of both child and adult second language learners. Analysis of conversations shows how language play functions within the context of the language learning classroom to provide "affordances" for language learning, and to become a resource for sequence-organization. The analysis shows that through the fictional world of language play, the participants were able to engage in the teacher-assigned pedagogical activities on their own terms. Research shows that language play is potentially of great benefit to the linguistic development of second language learners and argue in favor of a model of language learning in which language learning that appears to be non-serious can actually be recognized as a serious effective learning tool (Bushnell, 2009). Language play allows learners to draw on sounds and words from their own native language and draw connections between sounds and words that they are currently learning in a different language.

Although translation of documents from Japanese to the medium language is commonly used within higher level classes, using this method in elementary and intermediate level classes is becoming more prominent. Many Japanese language instructors are now using of Japanese authentic texts in the Japanese second language classroom for all language levels under the belief that they are superior to using texts written for pedagogical purposes. Authentic texts are very useful teaching tools, even for beginners. Research shows that students believe that these texts are more interesting

because they have been written for a communicative purpose and their content promotes the desire to acquire greater fluency. Instructors favoring authentic texts also motivate the learner to learn to read Japanese characters from the beginning of instruction. Communicative philosophy assumes that every dimension of learning should be appropriate to students needs, expectations, and experiences on the one hand and the realities of communication in the target language on the other, which can be realized through the use of authentic texts (Ruddock, 2012). Having overlaps with using authentic documents under more traditional methods, teachers who opt for using these documents in beginner and intermediate levels of Japanese use articles from newspapers, magazines, and journals and select content based on difficulty.

Another method that is on the increase within American liberal arts universities is teaching Japanese literature to Japanese native speakers by comparing English translations to the original texts. Teachers follow a criteria for choosing their texts, which differs depending on the level of study. Studies show that this method gave students a deeper understanding of the original Japanese text (Beichman, 2012). By juxtaposing both the original Japanese text and the English text together, learners will learn the cultural aspects of the writing as well. In a classroom with learners of very different levels, this method may also benefit students who do not have full comprehension of the Japanese text if they are able to at least understand the cultural content of the English translation.

C. Using Media as a Resource

Studies examining the use of electronic mail and the World Wide Web for learning Japanese show how electronic modes of communication are being quickly adapted as a teaching method for Japanese. E-mail message exchanges between teachers and college learners of Japanese at the intermediate to advanced levels based on selected materials show how this can be used for assignments outside of the classroom. An analysis of e-mail messages, interview transcripts, and responses to a questionnaire showed several possible advantages to learning Japanese with online assistance, such as autonomous learning and more opportunities to practice Japanese in authentic communication situations. These studies conclude that properties of the Internet applications may cause both educational advantages and challenges. On the other hand, such obstacles as difficulty in typing in Japanese and absence of nonverbal cues were also found. Many of these educational advantages imply that the Internet applications can serve to enhance instruction and learning (Fukai, 2002). Because communication through text messages, chat applications, and e-mail is extremely prominent in both the United States and Japan, implementing this type of computer based learning may allow learners to communicate through methods besides person-to-person as well. Learners may also benefit from being able to inputting text in a different language through a computer.

In studies showing the teaching of *kanji*, High Speed Projection (HiSP), a classroom technique that employs a standard carousel slide projector, was used to induce conditioned oral responses by students to unfamiliar symbols. HiSP enables

active teaching of Japanese, Korean, and other non-Roman languages, drastically reducing the time and effort students must devote to learning the pronunciation of new symbols. Because HiSP accelerates a student's recognition of writing symbols, it reduces both the time and effort required to learn to read. Students can learn to read before they learn to write symbols by hand, and over a 3-year course of study can learn most of the symbols commonly used in either Japanese. Initial instruction consists of introducing students to groups of a given number of symbols at a time, adding new groups as students become proficient in recognition and pronunciation. Students will soon be able to recognize and pronounce symbols exposed for only a fraction of a second. Once this stage is reached, vocabulary and grammar instruction are incorporated into the lessons, followed by translation (Critchfield, 1993). Similar alternatives that are more well known and are used for the same effect include the projection of characters on Powerpoint slides or the traditional use of image cards or flashcards. In addition, phone applications for memorization such as AnkiDroid are also used to facilitate the memorization of characters.

Pop culture examples of Japanese language input such as "manga" and anime have become more accepted over time and now have become an accepted choice for curriculum designers, material developers, and classroom teachers to make learning "fun". More traditional written only text-based materials are now in direct competition with such materials. While there has been a comfortable relationship in additional language teaching between using text and image, such as pictures, fuzzy felt boards, and sophisticated technology such as Rosetta Stone, the proliferation of "manga" in

Japanese language textbooks and as stand alone course materials, for example, has largely been left unproblematized. Studies of using material examples of Japanese popular culture in the Japanese language classroom and beyond show how focus on "manga" can be used in both language and cultural learning. In addition, using "manga" and other J-pop can impact on how the notions of legitimacy and appropriateness are linked to constructions of learner and teacher identities (Armour, 2011). There are many manga published that specifically address learners of Japanese as a second language. Many of these emphasize manga-specific elements such as the use of sound, the use of pronouns within the sophisticated honorific system, cultural specific words, and so on.

In a Japanese business communication course taught at Clemson University (South Carolina), Japanese television drama is used to help language students understand the style of Japanese communication and improve their communicative ability. Studies show that using carefully chosen drama, animation, and comics can have a positive effect on Japanese perceptions of the language needs for good communication between foreign workers and their co-workers in Japan; research on Japanese communicative behaviors; and the values placed on the group, hierarchy, and harmony as expressed in the Japanese communicative style. Textbooks were not found to introduce or teach these cultural values because they are most often not expressed verbally. A Japanese television drama, animation, or comic that focuses on business and containing English captions can show realistic and appropriate content and language, motivating value, and ease of comprehension. Strategies in studying include

presentation and use of vocabulary before viewing; summarizing in Japanese; detailed questioning and discussing; and special related projects (Kishimoto, 1992). Content of the type of media to be showed to students is not limited to just business, but can also include daily life, food, religion, and other cultural elements of Japan.

II. Learners of Japanese as a Second Language

A. Influence of the First Language

People who are learning a second language at a later age are more cognitively advanced than those who are learning their first language. Transfer is seen as evidence for the learner's working hypothesis concerning the nature of the target language. The existence of transfer from the native language to the second language allows us to see the richness of the native language of the speaker. Another issue raised with regard to endowment in second language learners is that of the critical period (Hakuta, 1989).

Age is positively correlated with vocabulary development in children learning languages that have lots of loan words originating from their native language, suggesting that older learners with more cognitive capacity, pick up vocabulary faster (Hakuta, 1987). Speakers of English may already have a large vocabulary in a language like Japanese, for example, which has many English loan words in the form of *katakana*. Loan words learned in a different language may have different shades of meaning or pronunciation, but knowledge of these loan words in the first language make acquisition of these words a lot faster.

B. Cultural Motivations and Barriers

One of the obvious potential strengths of beginning Japanese language study at a small college is the closeness of communication among the whole student body and the closeness of communication also between faculty and students. Almost everyone, students and faculty alike, is identified or identifiable by everyone else. The built-in communications net of the small college serves as a public-relations or advertising service for the language (Anthony, 1993).

Teaching Japanese without the existence of social science courses which deal with the cultural history of the area or providing that knowledge through the classroom can cause cultural deficiency, even if language acquisition is achieved. The student who attempts to study Japanese without some knowledge of the culture in which the language develops is going to suffer from distinct handicaps. The student of elementary Japanese is likely even in their first year to have encounters with the dating system and references to Taisho, Meiji, Meiji Isshin and other terms that should immediately ring a bell and set up the mnemonic reflexes for a person who has some knowledge of the history of Japan. Furthermore, the various verb forms and modes of address which are associated with Japanese ideas of etiquette and propriety are sources of challenge for students who has no conception of the traditional structure of Japanese society (Anthony, 1993). Those beginning Japanese in college who have not been to the country itself may struggle in non-verbal forms of communication, which can be developed through cultural learning. A small college setting, while building a sense of

community and allowing personal interaction with faculty, may have limited resources to provide learners of Japanese courses that specifically address these cultural facets.

Research suggests that the development of cultural interests in Japanese may be a more important factor for persistence especially among Western-background students. Even before the start of actual study, intermediate students with a larger cultural/linguistic distance who are assumed to have a larger investment in Japanese language study seem to develop more interest in target language culture, and this may help them continue their study. Western-background students beginning their study at an adult age may develop stronger cultural/linguistic interests in Japanese while learning Japanese may have some positive relationship with their sustaining motivation. Western-background students' development of stronger cultural interests may encourage them to further their investment in acquiring a higher level of fluency and knowledge about Japan and the Japanese language (Matsumoto, 2011).

C. Language Development Barriers

Studies of spelling by learners of intermediate Japanese with participants who are all learners of a second language show that there are level differences between students with prior "kanji" (Chinese characters) background and those without. Errors in kanji acquisition made by the students may be attributed to a number of different causes. On the basis of the findings, suggestions for adult learners who do not have a kanji background include: increasing the amount of time used for corrections and writing practices, using more detailed instruction in "kanji" on one's self-study, and of

correct pronunciation instruction; increased practice in the use of dictionaries (Kubota, 2005). Those beginning study of kanji at an older age may benefit from an increased exposure to kanji at the earlier stages of Japanese study whereas those with a non-Japanese kanji background may benefit from pronunciation drills.

Studies comparing Japanese native speakers and speakers learning Japanese as a second language show that the latter should try to adopt target language normative speech act performance at least to a degree that will allow them to function appropriately within the target language and social context. Learners should be aware that there may be a wide range of strategies in any given circumstance, but that it is the learner's own decision to select whichever strategy he or she thinks is most appropriate (Saito and Masako, 1997). In most situations, and as is in the case of most languages, there are multiple ways to say a certain greeting or phrase. It is up to the judgment of the learner to know under which context is each phrase appropriate.

It is only a myth that native speakers of a language uniformly employ a certain usage when performing a speech act. Language usually allows speakers to draw on a wide variety of choices in the same situation. The Japanese normative response indicates the use of a mixture of positive, negative, and avoidance strategies. Introducing typical use. Teaching a variety of appropriate uses. Encouraging learners to make their own choices regarding appropriate uses (Saito and Masako, 1997). Learners who begin their study as an adult whose culture is very different from Japan or even other countries whose culture may have norms similar to Japan may find difficulty to employ certain usages of speech in the right context. It is important for

adult learners to be exposed to speech or readings that facilitate not only the language development, but the cultural settings in which appropriate words are used.

III. Japanese Heritage Speakers

A. Advantages of Being a Heritage Speaker

Sociocultural context affects general and specific aspects of Japanese literacy among school-age children of Japanese heritage living abroad through the influence of society, community, and school on literacy development. Analysis of free-style writing and a written test highlight the characteristics of the literacy of Japanese heritage learners, and the need for mainstream support and appropriate teaching material and methods for heritage learners that need to be different than for those learning Japanese a second language . Studies indicate that while the wider sociocultural context contributes significantly to a heritage learners literacy maintenance, community also plays an important role, and proper classroom materials in Japanese has the potential to override negative influences from the wider sociocultural context (Oriyama, 2011). Heritage learners, for example, may be strong in speaking and listening but weaker in reading and writing. Separate class materials focusing on the written form of Japanese would be most beneficial for heritage learners, as opposed to using the reading/writing materials for foreign learners who may not have a foundation to begin with.

There is potential for heritage learners to the Japanese classroom, due to their family context. Heritage speakers may be encouraged to play this role because of the

mere reason that they are able to do so without cost of time (Oguro and Moloney, 2010). This may be beneficial for non-heritage learners because they can learn from a speaker that is approximately the same age as them without the pressure of everything being centered on classroom materials.

B. Needs of Heritage Speakers

Young learners of Japanese heritage language need a solid foundation of oral language to develop strong literacy skills. Considering the limited hours of instruction at JHL schools, oral language and literacy skills rely on a joint effort between the JHL school and parents. JHL schools that help parents understand the nuances of JHL development, will help students read and write more fluently in their heritage language (Douglas, 2007). Japanese heritage learners that enter college, especially those that decide to go away for their study, and may still not be fully native in writing, reading, speaking, and hearing, may lose many chances to communicate if the main source of communication is with family. Upon entering college, heritage learners may choose to or be unable to continue going to Japanese heritage learner school because of location.

In addition, heritage learners, from *any* level of schooling, may lack the background knowledge of Japanese culture and history. They may not know many famous names from Japanese history, the areas of Tokyo, or some famous names in modern literature. Observations from teachers show that the ability of Japanese heritage learners to display knowledge of contemporary issues is difficult unless they have recent experience in Japan. Some teachers also similarly note that heritage

students don't have much knowledge about Japan because they have been in a country away from it for too long. In terms of the cultural identification and orientation of many heritage learners, a number of teachers note that heritage language learners do not identify themselves as Japanese (Oguro and Moloney, 2010).

Studies show that many teachers suggest that a course for Japanese heritage language learners needs rich language content conveyed through a variety of reading texts and media, and through structured opportunity to discuss issues beyond their immediate domestic circle. Students need to learn idiomatic phrases commonly used in media, and background historical and cultural knowledge. These courses need to be flexible, for the differentiation needed due to the diversity within the classroom (Oguro and Moloney, 2010). Material implemented for heritage speakers may need to be flexible to accommodate for non-heritage speakers as well.

Application of Literature Review:

I used what I learned in my literature review to understand instructional approaches when I observed classes at Vassar.

- For example, non-traditional usage of word play or dialogue interactions will give me an insight as to what approaches instructors use that may not necessarily be in the textbook.
- In addition, I will be able to understand if Vassar's implementation of language fellows parallels the role of the Assistant Language Teacher described above.

- I will also understand how Vassar's inclusion of other Japanese native speakers into the classroom when it is possible parallels using the power of dialogue to facilitate genuine language learning.

The information from the literature review will also allow me to understand the types of challenges and needs that heritage speakers need compared to non-heritage speakers, and will help me formulate stronger questions when I engage in dialogue with these students. It also gives me a background as to the social role that being a heritage speaker is, outside of merely learning a language in a classroom, and allows me to have an appropriate approach in formulating my questions. For non-heritage speakers, I now have a better understanding of the motivations underlying why one would choose to study Japanese, which may be beyond merely acquisition of a foreign language

I. Methods

As I mentioned in my introduction, the goal of my research was to find out how is the Japanese language taught at a small liberal arts college where the majority of learners are non-heritage students. Through my research, I hope to accomplish the goal of finding these differences, and possibly how they may differ from institutions with a larger body of students.

Bearing this in mind, it was very important to develop investigation methods that answer the following three questions:

- How is the teaching of Japanese as a second language different from the teaching of other foreign languages?
- What are the difference in abilities and needs between heritage learners and non-heritage learners?
- What are the differences in learning a second language and how does the culture behind a language play a role in this?

Vassar College fits under the description of a small liberal arts college where the majority of students learning Japanese are non-heritage speakers. Like many other small liberal arts colleges, class size is very small. In particular, the average class size at Vassar is 17 students (About Vassar, 2013). As a student currently enrolled at Vassar College in my senior year, I have become familiar with the environment and culture. The familiarity with Vassar's environment allowed me to develop methods that are appropriate for answering the aforementioned questions. In addition, as a student who has studied

Japanese during my time at Vassar, I am familiar with how the Japanese Department operates and can use that to help in my research.

II. Sampling

In order to understand how Japanese is taught at a small liberal arts college, I felt that class observations would be the most effective method because I would get to see firsthand how Japanese was taught. Even though I took many Japanese classes, being an observer would give me a different perspective. Vassar College's Japanese language classes, which do not include literature, history, or culture classes that may be taught in English, is split into four levels, outlined below:

1. Elementary Japanese (First-year) – 5 times a week, 50 minute block
2. Intermediate Japanese (Second-year) – 5 times a week, 50 minute block
3. Advanced Japanese (Third-year) – 3 times a week, 50 minute block
4. Advanced Readings in Japanese (Fourth-year) – 2 times a week, 75 minute block
5. Advanced Readings Original Literary Works (Continuation of “4”)

I chose Advanced Japanese as the center of my class observations because it was a level in which students were expected to have enough control over the language to engage in everyday conversations. Since “Kanji” (Chinese characters used as one of the three written scripts, along with hiragana and katakana) are studied more intensely during this level and its acquisition is what I believe makes the teaching of Japanese different

than the study of another language, I felt that this level was an appropriate choice. I also knew that any class at Advanced Japanese or higher would have most of the instruction through Japanese, which reflected three of the five language classes offered at this language. In addition, because I studied abroad during my junior year at Waseda University, I never took Advanced Japanese and therefore do not have any previous knowledge of specific class content.

My class selection is a clear example of convenience sampling. Although convenience sampling has been traditionally disregarded because it possesses no operational parameters, there was rational as to why I chose Advanced Japanese over the other levels. I have to admit that my selection was based on ease of access because the meeting time of the class every week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday did not interfere with the remainder of my class schedule nor my part-time work schedule. It was of convenience to me as the researcher because I chose the class knowing that Peipei Qiu-sensei, the instructor as well as my Asian Studies correlate advisor, would let me observe her class without any objection due to our familiarity with each other. Although the availability of Advanced Japanese as a sample is designated as convenience sampling, it is still purposive sampling because it was the only class in which I could attend all classes consecutively without gaps in between. However, I bear in mind that even in projects whose sampling is not convenience sampling, all researchers choose populations or samples that are, for whatever reasons, as convenient as possible – either because they are nearby or, if far away, because they afford an opportunity for exotic foreign travel or

the chance to have a personal tribe to study, unspoiled by earlier investigators (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984).

I would like to further emphasize that I had prior knowledge of Peipei Qiu-sensei, who was the instructor of two of my classes: “Women in Chinese and Japanese Literature” and the spring-semester half of “Intermediate Japanese.” This means that I have experience of Qiu-sensei teaching a Japanese language class before. In addition, I do have a personal mentor-mentee relationship with Qiu-sensei outside of the classroom, and she has written me several recommendations, including the one that allowed me to participate in my study abroad exchange program at Waseda University. Furthermore, although I have never taken Advanced Japanese before, I still took Elementary and Intermediate Japanese before, so this prior language experience as a student may cause bias in my observations. Out of the seven students that were being observed, I am personal friends with two students and acquaintances with one. I have also had other classes with some of these students, although they were non-language classes. Although a strength of Vassar's small size is a small community in which many students run into each other, this is a clear weakness that may cause bias in observations to develop.

Even though my method was convenience sampling, I bear in mind that all methods for choosing participants and other research units discussed subsequently have been placed under two general rubrics: probabilistic sampling and criterion-based selection (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). My convenience sampling falls closest to criterion-based selection because it requires that the I establish in advance some set of criteria or list of attributes that the units for my study possessed:

- They took Elementary Japanese and/or Intermediate Japanese before
- They are all majoring OR minoring in Japanese
- They are all third-year students at Vassar College
- They have not taken Japanese in a *classroom setting* before Vassar
- They have all taken at least one class with each other before this one.
- As this is the spring semester portion (second half) of Advanced Japanese, they have all taken the first-half with each other. The decreased class size is a reflection of students who are studying abroad for one-semester or students who for whatever reason cannot take the second half of Advanced Japanese this semester.

I must point out that because Vassar College was selected to be the site for the Japan-America International Forum between Vassar College and Ochanomizu University, for two of the eight observation days, 8 Ochanomizu University students were in the class as guests. They were to be interviewed (in Japanese) by Vassar College students for an assignment.

III. Observations

A. Class Observations

My approach in observing Qiu-sensei's Advanced Japanese class was through noninteractive participation. Having this passive role as an observer came with the intent of not interrupting the class, and with Qiu-sensei teaching as she naturally would had

there not been a guest visitor in the room. Noninteractive participation allowed me to collect ethnographic data with the participants of a study in how the instructor taught and how the students reacted. Although noninteractive participation is one way to collect observations, bearing in mind that I may not be able to locate sufficient, relevant data to address initial themes and problems from just the observations alone, personal interviews with the instructors and some students were necessary to tackle these underlying data.

Nonparticipant observation involves merely watching what is happening and recording events on the spot. I took as many notes as I could in the time I was given, by dividing my sheet into two columns: the left column would represent what I observed and the right column would be the conclusions I drew long after the individual observation was done.

Interaction is impossible to avoid in social situations, and this was the case because Qiu-sensei would intentionally call on me to answer difficult Japanese questions when other students were not able to respond. Although I enjoyed the chance of being Qiu-sensei's student once again, it did contradict my promise to Qiu-sensei's wishes that I would merely be an observant. Everyody sat at one large conference table, and my position at the very back as per Qiu-sensei's request was still a typical position for students, so the functional distinction between participant and nonparticipant observation was still ambiguous. I sat in the back because non-participant observers should seek minimal involvement in whatever is being recorded, which mandates the positioning of the researcher and recording equipment in a location that is as unobstrusive as possible (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). From the very start, I did not introduce myself to the class

as a researcher and labeled myself as a nonparticipant. However, some students already knew who I was because we had classes together before. Nevertheless, I would try my best to minimize interactions with participants in order to focus attention unobtrusively on the pedagogy in the class.

Nonparticipant observation emphasizes the researcher's role as a dispassionate recorder. Participant observation is reflexive; it involves researchers studying themselves as well as other participants in a social setting. However, regardless of their reticence or immersion in a research site, whenever researchers are observing on the scene, they acquire some role and status (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). People publicly knew my role as a Vassar College senior who was researching for an education senior thesis, had studied abroad in Japan for a full-year, and had a business level control of Japanese. In conducting studies in school settings, for example, investigators necessarily interact with the teachers and pupils under consideration – even if only nonverbally – and become, to some extent, participants. I would interact with the students further in the form of interviews, which will be elaborated at a later point.

In order to have a first hand experience about how Japanese is taught at Vassar College, I observed one class (Advanced Japanese) over a period of three weeks. This came to a total of eight class observations done consecutively. The class meets tri-weekly every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. For Spring 2014, when the observations were made, the class was primarily taught by Peipei Qiu-sensei and occasionally by the current language fellow Miku Fukasaku-sensei.

The class had a total of 7 students, although this number fluctuated based on lateness or absences. Even though Advanced Japanese is a yearlong class, there are noticeably less students in the spring half than in the fall. This is due to students who study abroad for a semester during their junior year, which this class is oriented toward.

According to the learning goals set by the department for Advanced Japanese, this course is designed to develop each student's ability to read contemporary Japanese text from newspapers, magazines, and literary works. It also seeks to provide a solid grammatical foundation and mastery of kanji, as well as gaining proficiency in writing at an advanced level. Continued training in aural-oral proficiency in spoken Japanese through exercises, classroom interactions and audio-visual materials (Vassar College Catalogue, 2013). With these learning goals in mind and the participation of students who already have some prior knowledge of Japanese, I would also be able to observe how students with some prior knowledge participate in a class.

For notes, I primarily focused on the pedagogy of the class, but also made sure to include information about how individual students participated. I made observations on how she managed time, engaged the class, responded to student's errors, introduced new material, and included culture. I took note of how students acted in the class, how they reacted to new problems, how they communicated with one another, and the interactions that occurred when their language use was corrected. I took these notes were taken by hand and did not categorize them during the class observations in order to make the best of time. After they were recorded, I separated individual events into the categories.

Student and Teacher Interviews:

For the purpose of this research, heritage students refers to those who have Japanese as their first language, but have lived in the United States for the majority of their life, and at least until the time the research was done. Non-heritage students refers to those in which Japanese is not their first language, but also includes those who may have learned Japanese before entering Vassar College. I understood that class observations were not sufficient to understand the learning process of the students, so I felt that interviews would cover up pedagogy that could not be fully understood from just class observations. In order to understand the differences between teaching heritage students and non-heritage students, something that cannot be seen through the classroom, I interviewed both heritage and non-heritage students. I saw the heritage students as key informants who possessed special knowledge, status, or communicative skills and who were willing to share that knowledge and skill with me (Goetz and LeCompte, 119-120). Interviewing them was helpful because they were long-time residents of the key community institution, this case being Vassar and the fact that they have been at Vassar for more than one year before.

As stated in my research question, bearing in mind that there are not many students taking Japanese as heritage students compared to other languages, and that the instruction of Japanese at Vassar may be inclined toward one type of student over another, I interviewed two each of both heritage students and non-heritage students. Questions asked to both non-heritage and heritage students remained the same. Questions that students were asked included:

- What do you feel is important in teaching a language?
- How do you believe students best learn Japanese?
- How do you best learn Japanese?
- How do you best learn kanji?
- How is learning Japanese different from learning another language?
- How do you feel Japanese is taught differently here than at another institution?
- How is learning Japanese as a heritage/non-heritage student different?
- How can the teaching of Japanese improve at Vassar?
- What is hard/easy about Japanese at Vassar?
- Why did you decide to study Japanese?
- What will you do after Vassar?

I also interviewed Qiu-sensei and Fukasaku-sensei, the instructors of Advanced Japanese. Bearing in mind that what takes place in class can be very different than the preparation made for it, this allows me to understand the type of lesson plans that they prepared long before the class. Direct interviews would allow me to understand what types of strategies they made when planning their lessons. In addition, I will get an understanding of the expectations that they have for students who are beginning their study of Japanese in college, and the overall learning goals that they have set for students. During the interviews, I had the instructors look over my notes from observations to see if they were doing anything other than what I commented on.

Questions that were asked included:

- How does what you do (pedagogy) fit into what you know about how to teach a language?
- How do you believe students best learn Japanese?
- How is this different than maybe learning another language?
- How is teaching Japanese at a small liberal arts college different?
- How is teaching non-heritage students different?

IV. Data Analysis

I used all the data that I recorded from my class observations and student/teacher interviews in my data analysis.

For the observations, I first retyped all of my notes and showed them to Qiu-sensei in order to make sure that they actually made sense. Then, I went through all the notes I recorded in my eight days of observations and identified five categories or common themes that constantly showed up in the notes. Some of these themes included “student's reactions to prompts that he/she does not understand” or “teacher's strategies in improving grammatical errors.” Once these five common themes are isolated, I went through all of my observation notes and mark each time this type of observation occurred. All instances with the same label or theme were grouped together. Using the side notes that I made along with the direct observations, I then talked about how each of these individual themes and their specific occurrences relate to previous research and how they reflect Vassar's pedagogy as a small liberal arts college where Japanese learners are primarily non-heritage.

I analyzed the results of the student interviews and teacher interviews alongside each other since there were many questions that intentionally overlapped. I took one question and group answers that had a similar basis with each other. For example, in the question, “What is hard/easy about Japanese at Vassar?” I grouped all common responses about what is easy with each other and all responses about what is hard with each other. I then referred to the observation to see what consistencies existed between what students told me were difficult and what I observed were struggles in the classroom itself. Since interviews allowed me to see beyond class observation, I also compared individual outlier experiences to what I understood from my review of literature.

Observations

In this section, I will show and categorize the observations that I made from Qiu-sensei's class. The categories will include how the instruction balances English Usage vs. Japanese Usage, the teaching of *kanji*, the teaching of culture in context of class events, as well as the overall class environment. In addition, all of these categories are further separated in order to show recurring patterns of teaching that took place. All of these observations and their significance will be analyzed in the following chapter.

I. English Usage vs. Japanese Usage

Accompanied by Direct Translation

The medium of instruction at Vassar College is English. In foreign language classes, especially for elementary and intermediate levels, English is used as the medium to confirm understanding. Although the instructor told me ahead of time that more instruction would be in mostly in Japanese at the Advanced Level, which was the target of observation, there were uses of English, with many of these occasions accompanied with purpose. Within the Japanese classes, one common trait throughout all of the observations was the instructor's use of English to convey points difficult to understand.

English was often used in conjunction with a Japanese word when the instructor introduced a word that was probably not familiar to the students. We see this in the following:

私の家には丘があります。Hillですね。

Watashi no ie ni wa, oka ga arimasu. Hill desu ne.

“There is an “oka” at my house. It's a hill.”

By introducing the new word “oka” and accompanying it with its English definition, students who did not know “oka” understood the conversation. Note that the instructor did not say “Oka means hill,” but said “hill desu ne,” defining “oka” within the structure of a Japanese sentence.

In the context of a chain of examples, when there was one week in which classes were cancelled because of a snowstorm, the instructor took this opportunity to introduce the word 休講(kyuukou), which means absence from school or school cancellation:

前の授業は大雪で休講となりました。休講は“*cancelled class*”です。

(Mae no jugyou wa ooyuki de, kyuukou to narimashita. Kyuukou wa “cancelled class” desu)

*“The previous **class was cancelled** due to heavy snow. **Kyuukou** means **cancelled class.**”*

The instructor’s use of 休講 (kyuukou) in this sentence equivalates to snow day. In addition, because she believed students may not know what 休講 was, she defined it in English, interestingly using it within a Japanese sentence.

In addition, the instructor decided that it was best to have an extra session to makeup for the day missed due to snow, using this as an opportunity to introduce more sophisticated language. By reading out the various days of the week, such as 月曜日

(getsuyoubi, Monday)、火曜日 (kayoubi, Tuesday)、水曜日 (suiyoubi, Wednesday)、木曜日 (mokuyoubi, Thursday)、金曜日 (kinyoubi, Friday), and asking students to choose amongst them, she conducted review of the days of the week before the lesson started. With each day, she asked whether the students “agreed” 賛成 (sansei) or “disagreed” 反対 (hantai) with the time suggestion.

。。。に賛成する人？反対する人？賛成は “agree”。反対は “disagree”。

(...ni sansei suru hito? Hantai suru hito? Sansei wa “agree.” Hantai wa “disagree.”)

“Who agrees with (this day)? Who disagrees? Sansei means agree. Hantai means disagree.”

After introducing “sansei” for agree and “hantai” for disagree the first time and its reference in English, the instructor went through the days of the week without making another English reference. Students raised their hand accordingly based on the days that they were available to have a makeup session. By introducing “sansei” and “hantai” in this way without a second reference, students had to understand and memorize its meaning in context of weekdays.

Sometimes, the instructor did this while giving directions just to ensure that students understood what they had to do, as seen in the following example:

「まだ練習していない文法を入れました」。Will not grade mistakes but correct them。」

(Mada renshuu shite inai bunpou wo iremashita. Will not grade mistakes but correct them)

We see once again grammar we have not studied yet. Will not grade mistakes but correct them.

Getting Student Translations

Another specific use of English was in getting students to translate comments or answers made by other students, the instructor, or any other individuals. For example, when the students received an essay assignment and were told to write a draft by the next class, she also explained what she would do with the submitted draft in the following:

私は作文を皆に直して返します。これは何の意味ですか？

(Watashi wa sakubun wo minna ni naoshite kaeshimasu. kore wa nan no imi desu ka?)

“I will edit the essays and return them to everyone. What does this mean?”

She then pointed out a student in the class and requested her comment be explained to her classmates. On more than one occasion, selected students instinctively knew that they was supposed to translate this into English. While looking at her classmates, she replied, “She will edit the essays and return them to us.”

In addition, the instructor often requested English translation whenever she read directions off an assignment. and requested translation from another student:

下線を書きました。これは何の意味ですか？

(Kasen wo kakimashita. Kore wa nan no imi desu ka?)

This is underlined. What does this mean?

Another student selected answered, “It means that it is underlined.” Several times during the class, the instructor would get the student to read it in Japanese before translation. This provided students practice with the target word even if they were translating.

One noticeable pattern when the students replied in Japanese was their continuous and sometimes overuse of katakana-go, which refers to loan words, especially from English. They would sometimes use loan words even when there was a Japanese equivalent that sounded more natural, which often reflected their lack of knowledge in the target word. They often would attempt to use these loan words within the Japanese syllabary. Whenever this happened, the instructor would sometimes let the katakana-go pass, but correct sentences with a more appropriate word, as seen in the following:

ビッグプロジェクト *biggu purojekuto* (“big project”)

->重要なプロジェクト *juuyou na purojekuto* (“important project”)

ポケモンをキャッチする *Pokemon wo kyacchi suru* (“catch Pokemon”)

->ポケモンを捕まえる *Pokemon wo tsukamaeru* (“catch Pokemon”)

Although there were occasions where use of katakana-go was allowed, by giving a more natural verb translation, students were encouraged to use more accurate verbs as opposed to loan words as a safety net. Loan words used as a safety net were often **する** *suru* (to do) verbs, which are easily made by adding **suru** to an English word whose pronunciation is changed to match Japanese. Throughout the observations, whenever

students displayed confusion on their face or clearly did not show comprehension due to silence, the instructor was more likely to explain it using simpler Japanese terms. If this failed, the instructor would use English as a last resort.

A noticeable amount of sidetalk by the students was done in English, especially if the instructor left the room or was setting up a presentation. Under one occasion, the instructor, in Japanese, directly told the class to refrain from their use of English. (英語を使わないで)

II. Teaching of Kanji

With Respect to an Audience of Primarily NonHeritage Learners

As stated before, what differentiates Japanese from languages that use a roman alphabet is the use of character-based *kanji* that carry meaning. Although many of these kanji do overlap with Chinese characters, bearing in mind that Japanese differentiates from the former in its use of the morabased hiragana and katakana, the resulting written language is quite different from any other script. During the class observation, there were noticeable challenges students faced with *kanji* that continuously resurfaced, as well as measures the instructor took to help students better understand *kanji*.

Whenever there was a text, especially a dialogue that students were supposed to read to each other, that included kanji that a student was unable to read, the instructor would correct the reading in front of the class if it was being read for everybody to hear. Very often, because of the small size of the class, the instructor would run over to the side

of the student, and, while watching over shoulders of the student and the text, correct any readings that were difficult. This latter case happened especially if the class was split into groups of two or three to read a skit or roleplay from the textbook.

A large portion of *kanji* that students had difficulty being read were not formally introduced to the class yet, or introduced to the class some time ago. Difficulty in interpreting kanji was not a once in a while occurrence, but a challenge that continuously occurred in all of the classes I observed that included reading. According to the instructor, difficulty in kanji amongst learners of the class, especially those who have no prior Chinese language background, was expected, and her active role in aiding students in reading was important.

Pedagogical Application in Class Materials:

The instructor also frequently used Powerpoints to include slides with example sentences of the grammar point introduced that lesson also served as a means to introduce or review kanji readings. These Powerpoint slides acted more like flashcards, and were almost always accompanied with pictures, usually humorous ones. One example of the instructor's attempt to use kanji was when she introduced the grammar point *まま* *mama* (as something is):

京都には昔のままのお寺や神社が多い。

(Kyoto ni wa, mukashi no mama no otera ya jinja ga ooi.)

“There are many temples and shrines that remained unchanged throughout history in Kyoto.”

Very often, the instructor would have several of these examples, and have each student read one. If she felt that the example sentences included unreadable *kanji*, she would help the student read in front of classmates. Almost always, if the sentence began with *kanji*, the instructor would read the first clause. For example, the aforementioned sentence begins with Kyoto written in *kanji*, which may have been unreadable for some students. The instructor would read out, “Kyoto ni wa,” before choosing a student to read the entire sentence aloud.

窓が開けたままで寝ると、風邪を引いてしまう。

(mado ga aketa mama de neru to, kaze wo hiite shimau.)

“You will catch a cold if you sleep while the window is opening.”

In the aforementioned sentence, the instructor would read out “mado ga,” before choosing a student to finish the sentence. Much of the group work readings included pieces that the students wrote themselves for homework. Another noticeable challenge in kanji was a student’s inability to remember readings they one wrote themselves. On one occasion, a student received help from the instructor when unable to read 卒業 *sotsugyou* (to graduate, graduation), despite the fact that he wrote the character himself. Although the instructor would correct readings in front of all students if a reading was directed to the entire class, she often helped each group separately during small group based reading

practice. According to the instructor, there are huge differences in reading ability, especially pertaining to *kanji*.

On a weekly basis, students received a *kanji* sheet for homework practice. The sheet included readings, example sentences with fill-in-the-blanks for readings or characters (if written in hiragana, students would fill the blank with *kanji* and vice versa), as well as an area to practice writing the new characters several times. According to the instructor, actual *kanji* practice was almost always done outside of the class.

The instructor almost always took time out to explain readings, even if they were not on the *kanji* sheet, especially if they were part of a review. For example, on February 20th, the instructor asked the class what the current date was. Some students replied with *nijyuunichi*, and she corrected by saying *hatsuka*, which is a special reading for the 20th. According to the counting system, it would be intuitive to assume the 20th was *nijyuunichi*, which literally translates into the “20th day.” She held up a small board in her hand with 20日 for the 20th and the *hatsuka* reading written below it in *hiragana* form はつか. She had the class repeat this reading. This shows the instructor’s use of circumstances outside the class, such as the fact it was the 20th, in order to review a difficult reading. In addition, in another class after giving out a handout about the 桜祭り *sakura matsuri* festival that happens in the Japanese department every year, the instructor wanted students to think during spring break about what activities they would like to perform during the festival. She used this opportunity to introduce the reading for 桜 *sakura* (cherry blossom) and 祭り *matsuri* (festival), which were written on the

information handout. This shows an introduction or review of two *kanji* in conjunction with a campus event the class would participate in later in the semester.

III. Teaching Culture in Context of Class Events

Interviews with other Japanese University Students

In the previous sessions, the instructor used the *sakura matsuri* later in the semester in context with the *kanji* that she taught. In teaching cultural elements, the instructor also used upcoming campus events to discuss Japanese culture. In mid and late February, students from Ochanomizu University, Vassar's sister college in Japan, participated in the United States/Japan International Forum, with Vassar College chosen as this year's host location. The instructor decided to have the presence of Ochanomizu students, who were all Japanese, as a learning opportunity. She had all of her Advanced Japanese students prepare interview questions for the incoming Ochanomizu students. The language learners would use these questions to interview an Ochanomizu student that they were paired with. The content of the interview was the personal decision of the students, but the theme of the questions was oriented towards Japanese culture or potentially probing questions about differences between the United States and Japan.

During interview practice, the instructor taught about the importance of 謙遜 *kenson*, which refers to humility or modesty characteristic within Japanese people. Students learned about why giving off an aura of modesty was important even during an interview, and how this type of behavior may not be as valued, or valued differently, from

an American perspective. Although the majority of students had at least two years of experience learning the language, and understood the presence of level differences in respect in the language, the instructor taught them phrases that would be useful in an interview context. One such included:

ご協力ありがとうございます。

(Gokyoryoku, arigatou gozaimasu.)

Thank you for your cooperation.

The instructor stressed how even though her students already knew very well how to say *arigatou gozaimasu* for thank you, it was important to be able to learn appropriate ways of showing appreciation.

After the interviews were conducted outside of class as a homework assignment, there were two class sessions in which the instructor had all of the involved Ochanomizu students attend class. On these days, the usual count of 7 students multiplied to about 16 (even though each Ochanomizu visitor was paired with one Vassar student, there were also other Ochanomizu related observers). Each Vassar student worked with their Ochanomizu partner, and the instructor had each pair go over the content of their interview for about ten minutes, to refresh their information or in case their initial interview was of unclear quality. Afterwards, each participant talked, in Japanese, about what their partner reported to them. The instructor assigned another student to translate into English what the presenter said. In order to understand some of the cultural learning

Vassar students went through, below is an English translation of the *content* of what one of the many interview reports that Vassar students spoke about her Ochanomizu partner (both announced to class and in written form) in an interview about cultural and gender discrimination:

- “A lot of Japanese people may not be fond of foreigners because they (foreigners) do not know much about Japanese manners, so they end up doing things that they shouldn’t be doing. Even though this definitely doesn’t apply to all foreigners, it leaves a really bad image on foreigners as a whole. For example, some there was one time where my partner saw foreigners holding food in their hands and walking into a Kyoto shop that sold traditional goods.”
- “My partner suffered a lot of gender discrimination as a women. For example, she is an instructor at *juku* (cram school, especially in preparation for university entrance examinations). There were some parents of her students that were told that she is probably a bad *juku* instructor because she is a women.”

In addition to what was stated in front of the class, after given the chance to look at interview notes, the Ochanomizu partner also drew the *kanji* for woman 女 *onna* and explained about how it is in relation to 好 *suki*, which means “to like.” Bearing in mind that the *kanji* for “to like” consists of the radicals 女 *onna* for woman and 子 *ko* for child, she explained about how to some extent in Japanese society even today, women are only liked when they are with their children, elaborating on the homemaker/housewife position that many mothers take entirely once they have children. She elaborates how in many Japanese households, in order to raise children, mothers quit their job and do not

have to worry about money. Additionally, the Ochanomizu partner also believed that this was not fair for males either, who feel that they must work unreasonably long hours under social pressure to support women and their families. The interview notes also review the Ochanomizu partner's desire to change this way of thinking. Directly pulled out of the interview notes was the following written piece:

Make a system that breaks 女=家 and 男=劳

(女 *onna* refers to women、家 *ie* refers to house、男 *otoko* refers to men、劳 *ro* refers to work)

Having gotten a chance to overlook one of the interviews during the five minutes it was being reviewed, the two talked about how Ochanomizu University, being a women only institution, is a place that empowers women. The Ochanomizu student talked about how “being in an environment with few men gave them a chance to develop their independent skills.” In addition, she explained the school's history, that “Ochanomizu University was born because women were initially not able to get education.” It is an environment that “gives women some powers that they could not get elsewhere” as well as being a “good impression in society.”

In an interview segment about how being a women affected her childhood, the Ochanomizu student spoke of how “during high school,” she had “liked same boy and developed a rivalry with another girl. When she “gave a birthday present to that boy,” she was “hated by the other girl.” As a result, “during Valentine, that girl did not give presents or Halloween candy” to her (the Ochanomizu student), and explained how this type of relationship was not uncommon in her school amongst girls. In information gathered that

was less culturally relevant but gave an understanding of the partner's background, the Ochanomizu partner talked about how she began learning English in middle school and French in high school. She also talked about how she was very impressed to see the Phantom of the Opera during her two day tour of New York City, how the songs were beautiful and short, and how she remembered many of the lines of the play.

Interview content about other Ochanomizu students that was announced included an explanation of "how do Japanese use 敬語 *keigo* (honorifics or terms of respect)? The informer talked about how Japanese people "use it naturally but do learn it in school." Another conversation about fashion talked about how "pressure to get the latest fashion in Japan is high," but "in Ochanomizu University, there aren't any people interested." Another interview presentation was about what their partner felt about ゲームセンター *geimu sentaa* (game centers), and whether or not they visited them often.

Because the Japanese speech was sometimes too fast for the Vassar students to pick up, the instructor sometimes asked the Ochanomizu partners to repeat their statements once or twice, or request the same content be repeated more slowly. Overall, using interviews in conjunction with the fact that the Ochanomizu students were coming this year (and bearing in mind that this event did not happen last year and may not take place at Vassar next year), shows the instructor's ability to use events outside of the class as a learning opportunity. By interviewing other Ochanomizu visitors about topics as diverse as popular sports or what types of foreign music are currently popular, Vassar students learned about Japanese culture (or identities) from a firsthand perspective. Consequently, even though the conversations were in Japanese, the Ochanomizu visitors

also learned much about United States culture from their Vassar partner. Having the interviews also allowed them to take what they practice before the Ochanomizu visitors came into use. Seeing that the Ochanomizu visitors were also university students between ages 19-22, this allowed Vassar students to practice conversation with native Japanese speakers that were closer to their age, as opposed to just the language fellow or instructors that may be much older.

Context with Campus

There are also other ways in which the instructor uses culture in context with the time of the year or the resources available on the Vassar campus. Many instructors stated that they enjoy using seasonal holidays, both those that are celebrated on a more American context, as well as whatever holidays may be happening in Japan, to teach culture to the class. An example of such was the use of Valentine's Day during the week that followed the holiday (February 17th to February 21st), in order to teach the differences and similarities between the holiday in Japan and the United States.

On the week immediately following Valentine's Day, the instructor asked students about what they did on Valentine's Day as a way to start off a Monday morning, in which students were to reply in Japanese. It was observed that on Mondays that did not neighbor a recent holiday, the instructor was more likely to ask students what they did on their weekends.

After students shared about what they did during Valentine's Day, the instructor used a combination of English and Japanese to explain how in Japan, teaching how it is

primarily women who give presents to men, and that this is an occasion for them to express feelings to whoever they had feelings toward. Furthermore, students learned how it is normal for women to fight over piece of paper during this time. In addition, the instructor also introduced 結婚チョコレート *kekkon chokoreeto* (marriage chocolate), and how it is used in the context of marriage during Valentine's Day. Discussions about how not only is Valentine's Day a time for women to give chocolate to men, but for coworkers to share chocolate amongst each other as well. Her ability to take the seasonal occasion to the class was more appropriate than introducing an arbitrary holiday at a less contextual time of the year. After students learned more about how Valentine's Day worked in Japan, the instructor asked each student, especially those with a heritage besides or alongside American, how Valentine's Day is celebrated in their place of origin. This gave students a chance to express their own personal beliefs, as well as a way to reduce distance between each other.

Other Ways to Use Relevant Culture:

Evidence of cultural learning existed in the gestures that students displayed towards the instructor. For example, students would use both hands when receiving handouts or when handing in homework, which is considered common Japanese etiquette. This behavior may have been taught by instructors at an earlier stage in study, and is an example of how behavior in a specific language environment may differ from another learning environment.

The instructor drew heavily on how grammar and language use reflects this culture. For example, the instructor taught how the passive form can be used to elevate the subject of a sentence to a higher status as an expansion of a previously learned verb conjugation:

深作先生、今日 *Language Table* へ行きます → 深作先生、今日 *Language Table* へ行かれま
 (*Fukasaku-sensei, kyou Language Table e ikimasu -> Fukasaku-sensei, kyou Language Table e ikaremasu.*)
 ”*Fukasaku-sensei goes to the language table.*”

In the aforementioned example, the instructor called on Miku Fukasaku, who acted as the language fellow and assistant for the 2013-2014 school year. This example took into account that *sensei* meaning teacher is used as an honorific attached to her name, in addition to being a person that Japanese language students should be familiar with already. Because students knew culturally that teachers have a social distinction (or anybody with the honorific *sensei* in their name) the instructor provided a familial association in which it is appropriate to use this conjugation form.

IV. Class Environment

Encouragement and Support

One of the most noticeable characteristics of the observations was the amount of encouragement and support that the instructor directed toward students. Words of

encouragement and praise, more so after a student answers accurately or showed effort, were constantly given in Japanese (and English in few occasions). Many students told me that this type of support is extremely characteristic of the Japanese department at Vassar College, and is a noticeable aspect in all levels of Japanese.

On multiple occasions, when the instructor presented a difficult text, or when a student struggled in the middle of reading a text, she would say: 「 *dekiru dake yonde kudasai*, which means “try to read as much of it as you can.”

As stated in the *kanji* section, if there were difficult *kanji*, the instructor was likely to help students every time they encountered an unreadable character. However, the aforementioned set phrase was often used to encourage students to continue finish what they started reading. Although the instructor never stopped the student from reading and called on a different person, there were occasions in which fellow classmates would help alongside, especially if it was a *kanji* reading they knew.

In addition, the instructor almost always praised a student who read example sentences, many of which were on the projected Powerpoints. For example, we see this in a grammar lesson explaining the phrase しかない *shikanai* “cannot help but”:

「大学の本屋にこの本がないなら、アマゾンで買うよりしかがいない。」

(Daigaku no honya ni kono hon ga nai nara, Amazon de kau yori shika ga nai)

*If this book isn't in the college bookstore, we **have no choice** but to buy it on Amazon.*

Even though the student who read this did so at a slow pace, the instructor praised him, along with any other student who read following examples of this introduced grammar point. The phrase used was 良くできました *yoku dekimashita*, which means “job well done.” The instructor would, of course, praise any other student that read the examples pertaining to this introduced grammar point. In English on occasion, the instructor stated her desire to “urge everybody to fluently read” as they can, even if they make mistakes. Whenever a handout was given, or written/typed answers were to be read to the class, the instructor always gave a choice to read it directly off the sheet if the student was not fully confident, and did not clearly show a different outlook on students who read without referring to materials. After noticing a particularly difficult set of attempts to read, the instructor said on more than one occasion, 「皆、もっと流暢に話して下さい」 *minna, motto ryuuchou ni hanashite kudasai* (Let’s all try to speak more fluently,” in order to encourage students to improve their speaking ability.

The instructor did not enforce a late policy for the class, nor did she actively take attendance, showing leniency towards latecomers. The decision to not take attendance through calling names may be due to the small size of the class (7 students). There were many occasions in which the lesson itself would start 34 minutes late, often because only 4 or 5 of students were present, with the teacher stating her desire to wait an extra few minutes for everybody to come. This was primarily because either vocabulary or *kanji* quizzes were given at the beginning of almost every class. Once these extra minutes elapsed, the teacher would give the quiz even if not all students were present. If students came in during the middle of the quiz, the teacher would give them the quiz and allow

latecomers to finish the quiz within the same timeframe as others who came to class on time. The instructor would always set her Powerpoint during the quiz period to save time. Although this type of classroom management does show leniency, by having quizzes at the beginning of every class, it still partially holds extreme latecomers accountable for their actions; students who came after the daily quiz finished were not allowed to take it, but the instructor more often than not allowed them to retake it after class or during office hours, whether or not they gave an excuse for being late or absent, another show of leniency.

In addition, the instructor showed great consideration towards the schedule and commitments students had outside of her class. For example, bearing in mind that the midterm period is immediately before spring break (which began on Friday, March 7th), and that students had additional midterms during this period, the instructor decided to have an oral test instead of the midterm before break. The oral test, which tested ability to read new grammar and have conversation with the instructor on a one-on-one basis, was a bimonthly assessment that bore a much lower grade weight than the midterm or final. She decided to do the midterm a week after the break in order to give more time to study. Furthermore, even though the oral test was meant to be done in a single day, the instructor also allowed students with schedule conflicts a chance to do oral exams on a different day of their choice, further showing flexibility towards individual needs.

The instructor consistently strived to create a learning environment where students could make mistakes without worrying about being penalized. Along with other Japanese instructors at Vassar, she felt that making mistakes should be part of the learning mistake,

and that being penalized may further discourage students from forming difficult ideas in a language they are not fully familiar, and may inadvertently corner students into using grammar structures and vocabulary they know are correct but not necessarily sophisticated. The instructor said in front of the class in both languages: “「まだ練習していない文法を入れました」 *mada renshuu shite inai bunpou wo iremashita* (we see once again grammar points that we have not yet studied). But don't worry when you write because I will not grade your mistakes but correct them,” to show her desire to create a class space where trial and error does not come with scoring consequences. More than once, if students made noticeable errors in a presentation, or otherwise did but wholly misinterpreted directions of an assignment, the instructor always allowed them to redo it and submit it on a later date without penalization.

In almost every observed class, the instructor encouraged students to continue studying Japanese on their own time, outside of homework and on a future scale. Another set form of encouragement words she would often use was, “「これから自信を持っていくように日本語を続けましょう」 *korekara jishin wo motte iru you ni, nihongo wo tsudukemashou* (From now on, have confidence and continue studying Japanese).” This shows personal emphasis on how language study should not merely be for credit or class grade, and should not be merely evaluated by quizzes and other assessments, but a challenge that can be done long after one finishes a class or graduates college.

Atmosphere Among Students:

In general, the instructor makes sure to create a positive atmosphere with respect to learning Japanese. There was one instance when an explanation of カタカナ語 *katakana-go* for English loanwords made the students laugh. During discussions in general, it was very common for students to laugh amongst each other while still remaining on task. Overall, there appeared to be a sense of community amongst students learning Japanese at Vassar, magnified by the fact that the 7 students in this class had taken at least one previous Japanese language class before this. Because it is more likely that students take language classes in order of Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced, especially for individuals that begin language study as a freshman, the likelihood of taking a class with another classmate, or having that same shared background, is higher. When students are asked to share their ideas, the instructor feels no need to control the flow of conversation. For example, when one student was asked about what types of extracurricular activities he does at Vassar, he replied:

「今、ヴァッサー農業で教えています」

(Ima, Vassar nougyou de oshieteimasu)

“I am currently teaching on the Vassar farm.”

The students gave many examples of club activities, part time jobs, and fieldwork opportunities. Without having to raise her hand, another student asked in reply:

どんなインターンシップですか？

(Donna intaanshippu desu ka?)

“*What kind of internship is it?*”

According to the instructor, allowing students to participate at any time, provided they are using the target language, allows them to help each other. It may also reduce the distance between students and grant a form of community based learning. During the days surrounding Valentine’s Day, the instructor gave everybody Japanese chocolate at the end of class, which they enjoyed eating. Not only did this reflect the cultural phenomena of Japanese coworkers sharing chocolate during Valentine’s Day, which was taught as a side lesson during that week, it also showed commitment to the class outside of merely curriculum, and a stress on importance of promoting community in the class. Other Japanese instructors have also done the same, sometimes giving out *senbei* rice crackers or stickers on occasion.

In another discussion where the instructor was talking about raising pets, students talked about what pets they have or had raised before. When one student replied that she raises a “シベリアンハスキー *shiberian hasukii* (siberian husky)” at home, the entire class replied in unison, “「□□□□□□□□ eh? *kawaii!* (wow! How cute!)” accompanied by laughter. Other discussions that sought the opinions and experiences of students included whether or not one wanted to work in New York City someday, or whether or not anybody ever went to a 同窓会 *sousoukai* (class reunion) before. While on the topic of career, the instructor also demonstrated on many appropriate occasions her own personal history into the class, such as in how her son currently works with Amazon. Even though

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my role was to be an observer, the instructor personally asked me if I ever experienced a 同窓会, under the reasoning that I was a senior who studied abroad in Tokyo and may have went to such an event before.

Analysis:

The following section will outline the observations made over the eight observations in the spring semester, and analyze how they relate to previously done research about Japanese language pedagogy outlined in the literature review. In addition, through interactions with both heritage-speakers and non-heritage speakers, I will discuss how the individual needs of each type of learner at Vassar College affects their learning experience, how these needs may influence the types of pedagogies that an instructor may choose, as well as several strategies that instructor may find useful when they teach the Japanese language in a small liberal arts college with speakers of English (whether or not they are heritage or non-heritage learners of Japanese). The analysis will be divided into Traditional Methods, Non-Traditional Methods, Media, Cultural Motivation/Barriers, Needs of Heritage Students, and Needs of Non-Heritage Students.

I. Traditional Methods

I concluded that Japanese language instruction at Vassar does use English as a medium and a tool of instruction. This was evident in how the instructor I observed had students translate texts from Japanese to English. Therefore, Vassar does not use a fully immersed language environment in all of its language instruction. The instructor often translated comments or answers, and occasionally other readings from the original text, made by other students into English when students did not understand, showing how the

instructor was using English as a tool to clarify understanding. Because the instructor occasionally had students translate text or comments into English, English was also used as a tool of assessment. Past research of an advanced-level Japanese language subject taught at a liberal arts university shows by incorporating translation and interpreting in advanced-level Japanese language teaching, students are exposed to genuine documents from the target language. Positive aspects of learning experiences through translation and interpreting identified in past research include relevance to real-life and interaction with genuine texts, which directly contributes to promoting students' learning (Takimoto and Hashimoto, 2011). Using documents from Japanese newspapers, magazines, and other articles as opposed to class materials that are solely meant for teaching language can expose students to the types of material students would encounter through travel, work, or study in Japan.

In addition to having students translate readings into English, the instructor would sometimes have students explain directions to their classmates in English, especially if one student's control of Japanese was stronger than another's. Students she selected instinctively knew that they were supposed to translate whatever was previously said into English, showing that this may be a technique that the instructor uses often for clarification. This type of translation use may be to reduce the level gap between students with stronger control of the language and those who are not as strong.

In addition, when the teacher read directions for an assignment, she occasionally requested direct translation from another student. Likewise, the instructor would get one student to read directions in Japanese before having the directions translated by other

student into English. This provided students practice with vocabulary words in the original language before hearing the directions clarified in English. There are, however, many models of language instruction (and for other languages as well), especially for students that study abroad in Japan, that suggest "teaching Japanese in Japanese" may be a stronger method because it increases exposure. This is especially the case for higher level classes, where difficult content can be explained in simpler language that students have already mastered from previous years of study (Japan Foundation, 2009). Pedagogy that supports teaching a target language through a target language, however, is more common for environments where students may not all have a common language they are proficient in (for example, it may be difficult for a Japanese Language School with students from the United States, Korea, China, and Vietnam to use English as a language of reference if all learners do not have English proficiency) and therefore common competency in English at Vassar at least allows the possibility of English translations to be used as assessment .

Whenever students were assigned to read dialogues to each other or aloud, especially those that included kanji that a student was unable to read, the instructor would correct the reading in front of the class. Because of the small size of the class, the instructor often moved to the side of the student who was struggling with a kanji reading, and, corrected any readings the student struggled with while watching over his or her shoulder. This latter case happened especially if the class was split into groups of two or three in order to read a skit or roleplay from the textbook. We see here again that by using original texts in language learning (although they may be heavily edited to be used as

class materials), students were exposed to kanji in a similar state that they would be encountered if students were to visit the country. Although the small size of a small liberal arts college may prevent instructors from having more specialized language courses, in this case, the size does allow the teacher to provide individual attention during the class. The seating arrangement of the class makes this possible as well. All of the learners sat in one large conference table, allowing the instructor to see the entire class and for classmates to easily see each other.

Struggles in learning kanji are not specific to Vassar. Errors in kanji acquisition made by the students may be attributed to a number of different causes. Research on study of character-based languages suggests that adult learners who do not have a kanji background may benefit from increasing the amount of time used for corrections and writing practices, using more detailed instruction in "kanji" on one's self-study, and of correct pronunciation instruction; increased practice in the use of dictionaries (Kubota, 2005). Those who begin to study kanji at an older age may benefit from an increased exposure to kanji at the earlier stages of Japanese study whereas those with a kanji background of a non-Japanese language may benefit from pronunciation drills. Bearing this in mind, it may be better to give kanji instruction more attention during class, as opposed to just through homework. These forms of instruction may be lacking at Vassar because analysis of textbooks from elementary and intermediate level show very limited use of kanji, with some texts being written in mostly the syllabic hiragana and katakana. Students attending the Advanced Japanese class may be at a disadvantage if they do not study supplementary kanji extensively on their own,

evident by how the instructor constantly needed to correct readings throughout the class. It may be better to see kanji as a main, living component of the language, as opposed to a component that is learned on the side through primarily homework and self-study.

The instructor constantly encouraged students in their language study using words of praise, generally approaching the class with a positive attitude. The instructor did not enforce a late policy for the class, nor did she actively take attendance. Her decision to not take attendance through role call may be due to the small size of the class (7 students). On several observations, the teacher would start the lesson about 3 – 4 minutes late because two or three students were not present, stating her desire to wait an extra few minutes for everybody to come. This was primarily because either vocabulary or *kanji* quizzes were given at the beginning of almost every class. If missing students still did not come after 3 – 4 minutes, the teacher began the quiz. If students came in during the middle of the quiz, the teacher would give them the quiz and allow latecomers to finish the quiz within the same timeframe as others who came to class on time. Although this type of classroom management does show leniency, by having quizzes at the beginning of every class, it still partially holds extreme latecomers accountable for their actions because missing multiple quizzes or not having sufficient time to finish may have an impact on the overall grade of the individual. On the other hand, the instructor may benefit from having a stricter late policy in order to further discourage tardiness and maximize time used for language instruction.

II. Non-Traditional Methods

The instructor almost always took time out to explain readings using concrete examples learners could relate to, even if they were not on the *kanji* sheet, especially if they were part of a review. For example, when it was February 20th, the instructor asked the class what the current date was. Some students replied with *nijyuunichi*, and she corrected by saying *hatsuka*, pointing out that it was a special reading for the 20th. The instructor understood that learners would logically assume that the 20th was *nijyuunichi* according to the counting system which literally translates into the “20th day,” and her decision to use this possible misperception shows the instructor’s ability to take advantage of current circumstances (that it was February 20th) in order to review a difficult reading.

In another class meeting, the instructor gave out a handout about the 桜祭り *sakura matsuri* festival that happens in the Japanese department every year, and wanted students to think during spring break about what activities they would like to perform during the festival. She used this opportunity to introduce the reading for 桜 *sakura* (cherry blossom) and 祭り *matsuri* (festival), which were written on the information handout. This further shows the instructor's ability to relate *kanji* in conjunction with an on-campus event that the class would participate in later in the semester.

The teacher usually allowed students to use katakana-go (loan words, especially from English) in their replies to posed questions, even though she was aware that they may have sometimes overused and generalized some of these loan words. Students sometimes played with the English language in order to produce katakana-go, even for

loan words they may not have formally learned. In allowing them to do so, students were able to use derived katakana-go, without the barrier of constantly having to ask the instructor how to say a certain phrase. Because students often used loan words even when there was a Japanese equivalent that sounded more natural, this reflects their lack of knowledge in the target word, but shows the instructor's desire to allow learners to express their ideas without interruption. The instructor saw the attempts of students to make English words into Japanese sounding, often humorous, versions as a form of wordplay. Although the instructor would let this type of wordplay pass, but correct students if there was clearly a stronger Japanese language equivalent or if a loan word was clearly being used out of context.

Research shows that language play is a highly salient feature of students' interactions, and analysis of conversations shows how language play functions within the context of the language learning classroom to provide "affordances" for language learning. Through the fictional world of language play, learners engage in the teacher-assigned pedagogical activities on their own terms. Research shows that language play can actually be recognized as a serious effective learning tool (Bushnell, 2009). Language play allows learners to draw on sounds and words from their own native language and draw connections between sounds and words that they are currently learning in a different language. In the case of Vassar students, students often used or even "created" loan words from their dominant language, drawing from their familiarity with the pronunciation and meaning of these words, and used them in the form of katakana-go. These katakana-go often had a pronunciation changed to match

the Japanese phonetic range, but shared similar meaning to the original source language. The instructor may increase fluency by preventing overuse of loan words by encouraging students to use non-loan words that are more natural sounding. The instructor may also reduce misuse by warning students that loan words used in Japanese may have a very different meaning from the original language, and that it may be dangerous to draw assumptions based on one's prior knowledge of a word. Although allowing wordplay through katakana-go allows learners to use their knowledge from a prior language, it may be better to encourage its use as a supplement to speech and writing instead of simply being allowed as a crutch when one does not know a word in the target language.

Having Miku Fukusaku, the Japanese language fellow for the academic year 2013-2014, teach in several classes a month (in multiple language levels) gives students opportunity to hear the language through a different speaker. Although the instructor of Advanced Japanese for this semester is fluent, she is not a native speaker, but this does not necessarily impact the pedagogy and learning of students. However, having a language fellow does allow the voice of a native speaker to be heard provides a language resource besides the main instructor. Miku takes on a role that is very much similar to the role of ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers). In addition, Fukasaku (and the other language fellows) are much younger than professors teaching the language, allowing learners to hear and learn from a person closer to their age. Because Fukasaku, like many other language fellows, takes several classes as a student at Vassar, the psychological distance between teacher and student is also reduced and

may make language learning more of an approachable endeavor. Research on other schools that implement volunteer Japanese assistant teachers or systems similar to language fellows into their classroom show that these assistants are often seen as an indispensable asset to school language programs (Hasegawa, 2011). This service is overwhelmingly attractive to school language teachers in general because it may allow them to observe their classroom from a non-teaching position as well as reducing the amount of time sacrificed for associated administrative tasks such as homework grading and lesson planning.

III. Media

The instructor frequently used Powerpoints that included slides with example sentences of grammar points introduced in her lessons. These Powerpoints also allowed her to introduce or review any *kanji* readings. Because these Powerpoint slides with pictures were often used like flashcards, especially those that introduced or reviewed *kanji*, the instructor displayed grammar practice that extended beyond reading or writing and stressed importance on using visuals and image association in learning *kanji*. Because *kanji* are visual in nature and can be broken up into radicals, the instructor may find it useful to extend her use of visuals in order to explain the logic between the radicals that a *kanji* make and the overall character that it forms.

As stated before, research from spelling by learners of intermediate Japanese with participants who are all learners of a second language show that there are level

differences between students with prior "kanji" (Chinese characters) background and those without. Errors in kanji acquisition made by students may be attributed to a number of different causes, such as the lack of visual ways to study (Kutoba, 2005). On the basis of this research, suggestions for adult learners who do not have a kanji background include: using more detailed instruction in "kanji" on one's self-study and incorporating pronunciation instruction during class. Because the instructor does have to correct *kanji* readings when students read out loud, she may benefit from increasing her visual teaching of *kanji* to the same degree that she does so in accompanying grammar points with pictures.

The instructor further incorporated media by using the presence of Ochanomizu students who were Japanese at Vassar for the Ochanomizu-Vassar International Forum as a learning opportunity. She had all of her Advanced Japanese students prepare interview questions for the incoming Ochanomizu students. During the e-mail exchange, the language learners informed Ochanomizu students the theme of the interview as well as several questions to bear in mind. The content of the interview was the personal decision of the students, but the theme of the questions should be oriented toward Japanese culture or differences between the United States and Japan. E-mail exchange before the Ochanomizu visitors arrived at Vassar also allowed them to interact in dialogues that they created themselves outside of prepared class materials as well as practice typing Japanese on the computer.

The approach was a type of role play with pairs of students preparing a dialogue according to a situation provided by the instructor and then performed in

class. These situations were designed so that students can utilize newly learned grammar and expressions, and drafts of interview content were checked by the instructor prior to the performance in order to ensure smooth online communication. The types of dialogues during the interviews gave students the opportunity to act out Japanese scenarios and learn the Japanese way of communication in varying situations, such as through computer-facilitated text. Because Vassar students were assigned the Ochanomizu student that they would be interviewing, they were also expected to communicate schedule meeting times and informal self-introductions through e-mails, showing how Internet media can also be used in language learning. Through this, students were able learn aspects of Japanese culture such as cooperation, teamwork, and consensus building (Nakajima, 2012). Role play through reading dialogue and creating one's own dialogue as a language tool allowed students to use probing questions concerning cultural differences between the United States and Japan ranging from anime, manga, pop culture, fashion, and many other topics when they met the Ochanomizu visitor in person. Because many of these cultural elements have a strong influence in the United States, students were able to understand how these media are viewed in their country of origin.

An analysis of e-mail messages, interview transcripts, and responses to a questionnaire showed several possible advantages to learning Japanese with online assistance, such as autonomous learning and more opportunities to practice Japanese in authentic communication situations. These studies conclude that properties of the Internet applications may create both educational advantages and challenges. On the

other hand, such obstacles as difficulty in typing in Japanese and absence of nonverbal cues were also found (Fukai, 2002). Many of these educational advantages imply that the Internet applications can serve to enhance instruction and learning. E-mail exchange may allow some of these students to overcome these obstacles, as both their interviews with Ochanomizu students and Internet interaction with the instructor, and e-mail based interaction at Vassar occur early as first year Elementary Japanese. Because communication through text messages, chat applications, and e-mail are extremely prominent in both the United States and Japan, implementing this type of computer based learning allow learners to communicate through methods besides person-to-person as well. Also, since the use of computers for typing essays and projects is commonplace for many departments at Vassar, it may be appropriate to leave no exception for languages such as Japanese, bearing in mind that keyboard input systems may be vastly different. Learners benefit from being able to inputting text in a different language through a computer because typing in Japanese can often require switching from one script to another amongst five (*hiragana, katakana, kanji, alphabet, and numbers*). Communicating with the Ochanomizu students in such a way prepares them for formal social interaction in Japanese using media. Even though the Ochanomizu students were an available resource for this year due to the Ochanomizu-Vassar International Forum taking place at Vassar, the instructor may still be able to encourage media based communication even in years where this is not a resource. The instructor can potentially create an e-mail pen pal type of system in order to facilitate this type of e-mail based dialogue. Having students interact with Ochanomizu visitors

allows them to use Japanese with students of very similar age, in the same fashion that the presence of a language fellow allows communication with an age group that is different from the main instructor. Learners that may not have any people that they know in Japan will also get a chance to have develop connections with native speakers.

Another form of media that the instructor incorporated was pop culture examples of Japanese language input such as "manga" and "anime." Studies of the use of material examples of Japanese popular culture in the Japanese language classroom and beyond show how focus on "manga" can be used in both language and cultural learning (Armour, 2011). In addition, using "manga" and other J-pop can impact on how the notions of legitimacy and appropriateness are linked to constructions of learner and teacher identities. One example I noted in my observations was the use of Pokemon in ポケモンを捕まえる *Pokemon wo tsukamaeru* (Catching Pokemon). In the Advanced class, students were allowed and even encouraged to use their own personal experiences from anime, manga, and games, as seen in the aforementioned quote. The language table, which several members of this class attend, is held in the student cafeteria every week on Thursday, although it is not a formal form of instruction nor is it mandatory. One week, the language fellow used 擬態語 *gitaigo* (sound words used in manga) as a theme as well as showing a movie directed by Ghibli in another week. There are many manga published that specifically address learners of Japanese as a second language. Some anime and manga, especially those

made specifically for learners, address topics such as the use of sound, the use of pronouns within the sophisticated honorific system, cultural specific words, etc.

The instructor does not often make use of difficult newspapers, magazines, or journals, or texts that are not edited for the purpose of instruction. Research suggests that instructors who favor authentic texts also motivate learners to learn to read Japanese characters from the beginning of instruction (Ruddock, 2012). Every dimension of learning should be appropriate to students needs, expectations, and experiences on the one hand and the realities of communication in the target language on the other, which can be realized through the use of authentic texts. Even though the students may succeed on an academic level, it may be difficult for them to fully understand genuine texts or news broadcasts if they were to go to Japan itself. Many language teachers who opt for using authentic documents in beginner and intermediate levels of Japanese use articles from newspapers, magazines, and journals and select content based on difficulty. This type of instruction, however, can be seen in Advanced Readings and Original Literary Works for Japanese, offered as a fourth year level class. Seeing that there are many students who have studied abroad or intend to study abroad during their third year at Vassar (and within the Advanced level class), it may be beneficial to have a similar curriculum used for the fourth year level class in earlier level classes, with the difficulty level of texts appropriately adjusted.

IV. Cultural Motivation/Barriers

During interview practice, the instructor taught the importance of 謙遜 *kenson*, which refers to humility or modesty characteristic within native Japanese. This shows how the instructor puts emphasis not just on merely knowing a language, but the culture associated with a language. Students learned about why being modest was important during their interviews with Ochanomizu visitors and how this type of behavior may have lesser or different value from an American perspective. Although the majority of students had at least two years of experience learning the language, and understood the presence of level differences in respect in the language, the instructor taught and reviewed phrases that would be useful in the context of an interview.

Learners should be aware that there may be a wide range of words to indicate respect level in any given circumstance, but it is the learner's own decision to select whichever strategy he or she thinks is most appropriate (Saito and Masako, 1997). In most situations, there are multiple ways to say a certain greeting or phrase. It is up to the judgment of the learner to know under which context is each phrase appropriate. The instructor's stress on learning keigo (humble language) and sonkeigo (respectful language), especially before interviewing Ochanomizu students or interacting with other Japanese language faculty, is useful both linguistically and culturally. According to the instructor, emphasis on age difference and levels of respect are emphasized starting from the first semester of study, and is valued throughout one's study.

In addition to media, using interviews in conjunction with the presence of Ochanomizu students (and bearing in mind that this event did not happen last year and

may not take place at Vassar the following year), shows the instructor's ability to use events outside of the class as a learning opportunity for culture. By interviewing other Ochanomizu visitors about topics as diverse as popular sports or foreign music are currently popular, Vassar students learned about Japanese culture (or identities) from a firsthand perspective. Consequently, even though the conversations were in Japanese, the Ochanomizu visitors also learned much about United States culture from their Vassar partner. The interviews also allowed them to be culturally sensitive in their dialogues, which may prove useful should they engage in future dialogue with Japanese people.

As stated before, although using the Ochanomizu students showed resourcefulness, the instructor was responsible for the fact that this chance may not happen again in following years. As such, seeing that interaction with other Japanese students of similar age is a valuable resource, the instructor may benefit from continuing this type of pedagogy, even if it is from just e-mail interactions. One of the obvious potential strengths of beginning Japanese language study at a small college is the closeness of communication among faculty and students. Almost everyone, students and faculty alike, is identified or identifiable by everyone else. The built-in communications net of the small college serves as a public-relations or advertising service for the language (Anthony, 1993). Because the number of Ochanomizu University students coming to Vassar was limited, having a small number of students in the Advanced class allowed each Vassar student to have a strong one-on-one interaction with each visitor. In years that do not have visitors such as this, the instructor may be able to take advantage of the

small number of Japanese international or heritage students on campus that are willing to participate in these types of activities in order to facilitate culturally sensitive dialogues.

Within the week immediately following Valentine's Day, the instructor asked students about what they did on Valentine's Day as a way to begin a Monday morning. On Mondays that were not close to a recent holiday, the instructor was more likely to ask students what they did on their weekends. Because this class specifically met in the morning, having a relevant question would be a good way to adjust the class atmosphere, and in context of a holiday, may be used as a gateway into further discussion.

Students practiced behavior that was culturally appropriate in the class that they may not have displayed in a non-Japanese language class. For example, students would use both hands when receiving handouts or when handing in homework, which is considered common Japanese etiquette. According to the instructor, this behavior is taught at an earlier stage in study, and shows behavior in a specific language environment may differ from another language learning environment. This also shows that Vassar puts emphasis on culturally comprehending a language as well. In a larger institution, the physical distance between teacher and student, contact such as handing homework to the instructor's hands may not be available. Students may not be able to show other cultural behavior specific to Japanese because there may be less one-on-one interaction, such as adding filler dialogue to show that he or she is listening

Research suggests that developing cultural interests in Japanese may be a more important factor for persistence especially among Western-background students (Matsumoto, 2011). Even before the start of actual study, students having an interest in

the culture of the target language, and this interest may help them continue their study. Although there are some international students from Asian countries learning Japanese at Vassar, the majority of the class body are American born students. Western-background students beginning their study at an adult age may develop stronger cultural/linguistic interests in Japanese while learning Japanese may have some positive relationship with fulfilling these cultural/linguistic interests. Western students' interests may encourage them to further their investment in acquiring a higher level of fluency and knowledge about Japan and the Japanese language (Matsumoto, 2011). Within the Advanced class, this is evident in the students who have studied abroad for a semester or for a short-term summer program. In addition, the instructor creates an environment that welcomes their cultural interests by using Powerpoint slides that occasionally draw from anime and manga, and encourages dialogue that stem from these forms of media.

V. Needs of Heritage Learners

This section will cover the needs that heritage and non-heritage learners may have in a small liberal arts college where English is the main language of instruction. The discussion will begin with the discussion of two heritage learners followed by two non-heritage learners, and describe their experiences learning Japanese at Vassar, in addition to the role that the language department plays in adapting to their individual needs. Learners used in this analysis are all proficient in English, and the two non-

heritage learners are also proficient in a language besides English. All interviewed participants have their names changed in order to ensure confidentiality.

One of the heritage students in this study, who will be referred to as Kenny, felt that the spoken language is more important because knowing the spoken language makes it much easier to learn the written language. Learning the written form first, on the other hand, is much rarer and mostly unheard of. Kenny felt that he was able to learn the written part because he understood the spoken part through speaking Japanese with his family. Learning the writing system, especially *kanji*, helps him the most because he is already used to using spoken Japanese with his family, but had little chance or even necessity to write. Using a program called Quizlet.com that allows *kanji* review in a flashcard-style quiz as well as writing *kanji* repeatedly are tasks Kenny does to practice. In addition, Kenny openly states that readings help him learn cultural facts, which may have been lost due to his upbringing in the United States. The fictional stories he reads during class are apparently not very useful in improving language ability in and of itself, they do help him understand his own culture better. Studies show that many teachers suggest that a course for Japanese heritage language learners needs rich language content conveyed through a variety of reading texts and media as well as structured opportunity to discuss issues beyond their immediate domestic circle (Oguro and Moloney, 2010). Students like Kenny need to learn idiomatic phrases commonly used in media, and background historical and cultural knowledge. These resources may be difficult at a small liberal arts college such as Vassar, where the small student body may make it difficult to have specialized

courses for heritage students. According to one of the language instructors, there would not be enough heritage students on campus to open a specialized class. Even if there were such a number, as per any class that may attract interest, the number of heritage students who would actually take those classes may still be far less.

Kenny learned Japanese as his first language and at what he described as a good pace. Like many heritage students, he attended a Japanese Language School in his hometown up until the sixth grade. Because the school in his city ended in June, there would be approximately three weeks where he would attend school in Japan, where he was able to keep up with the workload despite his primary education setting being in the United States. Kenny continued returning to Japan every year until the end of third grade, but learned most of his Japanese through speaking to his father and greater family. Kenny's position parallels research that shows how Japanese heritage learners entering college, especially those that decide to go away for their study, and may still not be fully native in writing, reading, speaking, and hearing, may lose many chances to communicate if the main source of communication is with family. Upon entering college, heritage learners like Kenny may choose to stop going to schools for Japanese heritage learners or they may simply be unable to do so because of location (Oguro and Moloney, 2010). Kenny, on the other hand, is an example of a student who does choose to continue taking the language in some form through the fourth year seminar, even though the class may be oriented towards non-heritage learners.

According to Qiu-sensei, who has experience with language instruction at a larger university before, bigger schools may have a higher level course that people would want,

and one that fits the needs (or is even oriented) toward heritage students. Bearing in mind that the number of Japanese speakers on Vassar campus is much lower than speakers of other non-English languages (such as Chinese or Spanish), Vassar's size in and of itself may not provide enough students with the same linguistic pursuits as Kenny. Although there are a few international Japanese students, including non-heritage speakers with high proficiency, their numbers are very small. From Kenny's perspective, it would be helpful to have a class focusing on purely on improving the flow of his writing and reading as opposed to speaking or learning vocabulary. Although he ultimately decided to finish the yearlong senior seminar class, Kenny states, "I feel like I'm spending time on something I don't really need." Heritage learners such as Kenny may be strong in speaking and listening but weaker in reading and writing. This means that separate class materials that focus on the written form of Japanese would be most beneficial for heritage learners like Kenny, as opposed to using the reading/writing materials for foreign learners who may not have a foundation to begin with (Oriyama, 2011).

Another heritage student in the study, who will be referred to as John, took Japanese at his public high school. Although John grew up in a predominantly Japanese heritage neighborhood, it did not have a language school for heritage learners. Despite having occasional conversation done in Japanese in his home, John feels that he would have benefited from a family environment where English was not an option, since it was the language of communication mostly used at home. John may have benefited if Vassar forced students to speak Japanese starting from the second year. Some heritage language

schools, such as Kenny's. Although John is exposed to culture because of the large population of ethnically Japanese people where he grew up, there is little linguistic exposure. Although there is the large population of heritage speakers, students in his environment are not likely to develop sufficient language knowledge if they do not go out of their way to attend a language school. Furthermore, because the culture of John's hometown is very mixed with people from other Asian heritage backgrounds, he often confuses some cultural facts that he believes are Japanese culture with other countries. Even though John grew up in a more culturally rich environment, heritage learners of his background may still benefit from a culturally rich curriculum.

In addition, John noticed within his neighborhood that, along with heritage speakers that have a much stronger command of language, he may not understand implicit endings of sentences that a native speaker would easily decode. It may be easier for a native speaker to interpret how sentences would end due to the implicit nature of the language and the acceptability of a sentence being left grammatically unfinished. However, as a heritage speaker growing up in an American environment, it would be harder for non-native speakers to understand the indirect nature of these sentences. Bearing in mind the indirect nature of the Japanese language, both heritage speakers who had limited cultural exposure as well as non-heritage speakers who may have little to no cultural exposure may benefit from pedagogy that: shows learners the grammatical nature of sentences that use implicitness, teaches learners how to speak with this implicit nature especially if a full sentence is not necessary, and enables students how to interpret the implicit nature of sentences they hear.

What John learned in a non-language specialized school was mostly memorizing words, kanji, and the role of particles in sentences. From his own admittance, high school Japanese was simple but ineffective. Sociocultural context affects general and specific aspects of Japanese literacy among school-age children of Japanese heritage living abroad through the influence of society, community, and school on literacy development. Studies indicate that while the wider sociocultural context contributes significantly to a heritage learners literacy maintenance, community also plays an important role, and proper classroom materials in Japanese have the potential to override negative influences from the wider sociocultural context (Oriyama, 2011).

Like many other heritage students, John chose to continue studying Japanese at college because of his heritage, and will continue to self-study after graduation. Research shows that in terms of the cultural identification and orientation of many heritage learners, many do not identify themselves as Japanese, which may socially be a demotivator for John and other heritage students in his situation using Japanese amongst each other (Oguro and Moloney, 2010). John was born in the United States in a heritage environment, but being in an environment that is already fluent and culturally comfortable with English may not necessarily encourage heritage language development.

VI. Needs of Non-Heritage Students

For non-heritage students like Susan, who may have little to no cultural or linguistic exposure, watching Japanese television shows in that language enables her

cultural exposure. One source specifically that Susan and many other non-heritage learners use for Japanese is anime and manga, often with English subtitles. As stated earlier in the use of entertainment media in the classroom, pop culture examples of Japanese language input such as "manga" and "anime" have become more accepted over time and now have become an accepted choice for curriculum designers, material developers, and classroom teachers to make learning "fun" (Kishimoto, 1992). In a discussion with Susan (native English and fluent Spanish speaker) who has watched anime and manga throughout her childhood up to the present day, studying abroad helped a lot because it made her more confident in wanting to learn more through complete language immersion, as well as clearing up stereotypes and misrepresentations of culture that may be generated through anime or manga content. English speakers such as Susan may already have a large vocabulary in a language like Japanese, for example, which has many English loan words in the form of *katakana*. As such, a learner like Susan, who has prior knowledge in two languages (English and Spanish) may be able to draw on even more connections with loan words (Hakuta, 1987). Even though a noticeable number of *gairaigo* (loan words) draw on English, some draw on other languages, especially Spanish and Portuguese, and instructors may gain from pointing out these word origins.

Learning the writing system is one of the biggest challenges non-heritage students like Susan. Although the pronunciation of individual *mora* or syllables is strongly consistent to the sound that each *hiragana* or *katakana* represents, learning Japanese as an English speaker is different than learning it as a native Spanish speaker (as Susan is). Susan notices that there are many syllables in Japanese that match her native language of

Spanish, even if vocabulary and grammar is largely different. Although Vassar students are expected to be fluent in English, instructors can benefit from being aware of learners of different native language backgrounds. Since Spanish is commonly studied as a second language in the United States as well as well used in several areas, the instructor may also be able to draw from this prior experience with foreign language study.

Although Susan does not feel that having prior proficiency in two languages in necessarily gives her an advantage, she feels that having Spanish as a heritage language helps her learn correct pronunciation and phonology of the language faster than people who learn it with only one prior language. Besides the similarities in certain syllables within the phonetic systems, there are not many common grounds with Spanish (or other languages known by students in this class). Heritage learners who have never been exposed to the language before outside of media may come in with very different perceptions of the culture. Although useful, non-heritage learners may develop cultural and linguistic stereotypes of culture if anime and manga being the only form of exposure. It is important for non-heritage learners to challenge these perceptions, and teachers may benefit from challenging ideas in the classroom when it is appropriate.

Another non-heritage student (referred to as Mel), who is bilingual in English and German, feels that she gains the most by talking with somebody with better control of the language than she has. Although using anime and manga with subtitles is a resource that non-heritage learners may use, Mel believes that talking to native speakers is more effective than the Internet because online translations may be inaccurate and inconsistent.

As previously noted, Mel believes that one of the merits of learning at a small liberal arts college like Vassar is that teachers are very involved with class discussion. Teachers in larger schools, however, may have a one-sided teaching role and may not get the full attention of students, as Mel felt during her study abroad at Nanzai University. Learners with no prior language background and would like to get a solid foundation in verbal communication may value speaking and listening, which is what the small classroom size typical of liberal arts colleges like Vassar do allow.

For both heritage speakers and non-heritage speakers, it is difficult for Mel to befriend other Japanese native speakers to practice the language with. There is, however, often at least a resource of movies and other media to study the language through the campus library or departments such as Asian Studies or Japanese, which Mel does take advantage of. Instructors may encourage further study through informing learners the location of these extra resources, along with specific resources that they find useful. Vassar and other liberal arts colleges similar to it may be strong in culture and history based classes that are multidisciplinary and applicable to several concentrations through Asian studies, history, economics, and other humanities. This may increase cultural comprehension that class time may not allow. This will help both heritage and non-heritage learners, who may not know many famous names from Japanese history, the areas of Tokyo, or some important authors in modern literature. Research shows that the ability of Japanese heritage learners (and non-heritage by extension) to display knowledge of contemporary issues is difficult unless they have recent experience in Japan. Some teachers in this research also similarly note that heritage students and even

students who have studied abroad in Japan may lose knowledge about Japan because they have been in a country away from it for too long, so it may be beneficial to implement texts of similar depth from English-taught content courses into language courses as well (Ogoro and Moloney, 2010).

One of Mel's personal reasons to study Japanese was because she had a relative live in Japan for a few years, in addition to having parents and grandparents who had some study of the language. Another reason that may be applicable to more non-heritage speakers was that she always wanted to go to the country, but did not like the notion of going there without knowing the language. Instructors, as such, should remember that although learning Japanese may allow students to understand anime, manga, and other pop culture through the original medium of the language, they should also understand its role as a medium of communication with native speakers. Although students who have already studied abroad like Mel may have already developed the minimum linguistic competence to live abroad, learners who begin their study as an adult whose culture is very different from Japan may find difficulty in employing language appropriately (Saito and Masako, 1997). It is important for adult learners to be exposed to speech or readings that facilitate not only language development, but also on the cultural settings in which appropriate words from Japanese are used. As stated earlier, this can focus on the form of levels of respects or the implicit endings of sentences. For classes taught to higher level learners, especially those with many students like Mel who have returned from study abroad and may have a stronger vocabulary, a focus on improving natural speech and pronunciation may be effective.

Conclusion –

Creating a Context for Language Learning

This study offers insight into how Japanese is taught at a small liberal college with primarily non-heritage students. The evidence I collected highlights the value of context-specific use of culture in order to teach language. A learner's position as a heritage or non-heritage student influences how personally beneficial his or her learning experience is. Instructors at Vassar provide individual attention to all learners. However, a small institution may lack resources to provide specialized courses for all learners. Non-heritage learners may benefit from initiating interviews with other Japanese students and taking frequent vocabulary quizzes, and learning new grammar through traditional methods. This study also identifies the specific aspects of language pedagogy that contribute to how students respond to instruction, such as through bringing one's own interests into the classroom, participating in activities that are culturally relevant, learning material in an instructional level that continues from their previous study, and working under encouragement and a positive class atmosphere. The students that I observed learned in a context that encouraged participation, but may not have been provided all the tools needed to work with genuine documents such as newspapers, scholarly publications, and the like.

Also, this look at a third-year Japanese language classroom allows us to better understand how discussions related to culture can become learning experiences for all students. Some of these discussions included comparing how Valentine's Day is celebrated

in other countries and speaking with Ochanomizu students of a closer age. It is, however, difficult for a small liberal arts college, further compounded by small enrollment in this specific language, that there may not be more (or different) resources available for heritage students or learners who already have enough culturally relevant experiences and would like to continue with more advanced texts. Allowing personal relevance in activities and discussions can make students feel motivated. A classroom with an instructor who uses humor and praises success can close the distance between student and *sensei*.

This study questions the notion of struggle in learning a language that may be very different from the native language of its learners as well as the practice of making learning interactive through the best use of (limited) resources available at an institution. If we consider that Vassar's environment as a small liberal arts college allows small class sizes for discussion based classes, we must also consider learners that may gain from this verbal discussion as well as students that may gain more from methods besides tradition. Instructors can then challenge themselves to create contexts in which both heritage and non-heritage, culturally experienced and inexperienced learners can learn the best even when faculty size and available opportunities for study may be limited.

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