

International Forum on Acceptance of Foreign Nationals & their Integration into
Japan

Rethinking Japanese-language education for children

Executive Director of the Japan Foundation, Japanese-Language Institute, Urawa

Gunei Sato

Introduction - including a little about myself

- Since the 1980s, being engaged in research on education for children who have experienced cultural migration
- Specialized in intercultural education
- Worked for many years at the Center for Research in International Education, Tokyo Gakugei University

[From the 1990s]

- Education for children with foreign roots
- Developed a curriculum for Japanese-language education (JSL curriculum), etc.

[From 2010]

- Conducted research on children with roots in Japan and children with roots in foreign countries
- Prepared the "Guideline for Accepting Foreign Students"
- Instituted a special curriculum for teaching Japanese

Since April 2020

- Became the Executive Director of the Japan Foundation, Japanese-Language Institute, Urawa
- Interest in "heritage language" education
- Proposing a rethink of Japanese-language education for children

What to talk about: Awareness of the problem

- Enhancement of improving Japanese-language education has been an urgent issue
- Accumulation of results of research and practice in Japanese-language education
- Rethinking the idea that "teaching Japanese = is a good thing"
- Isn't it narrowing the children's Japanese-language education?
- Rethinking how learning and career support should be

Necessity of rethinking Japanese-language education

- “Japanese language ability = is assumed as “privilege
- Structural mechanisms to facilitate adaptation to schools in Japan
 - It has been assumed that the children must adapt to schools in Japan and keep up with learning.
- Entrenched views on the children
 - Poor Japanese proficiency = low academic ability
- Entrenchment of relationships
 - Children end up as the subjects of support as vulnerable people

How to perceive the children

[Until now]

- Have we not viewed migration as a negative factor for the children's growth and development?
- Have we not perceived the children negatively?

[How should we perceive them]

- Make migration interactive
- Learning is possible with the right support = active educational intervention
- Focusing on the multifaceted nature of development (growth through relationships, a hopeful future)

How to view language education

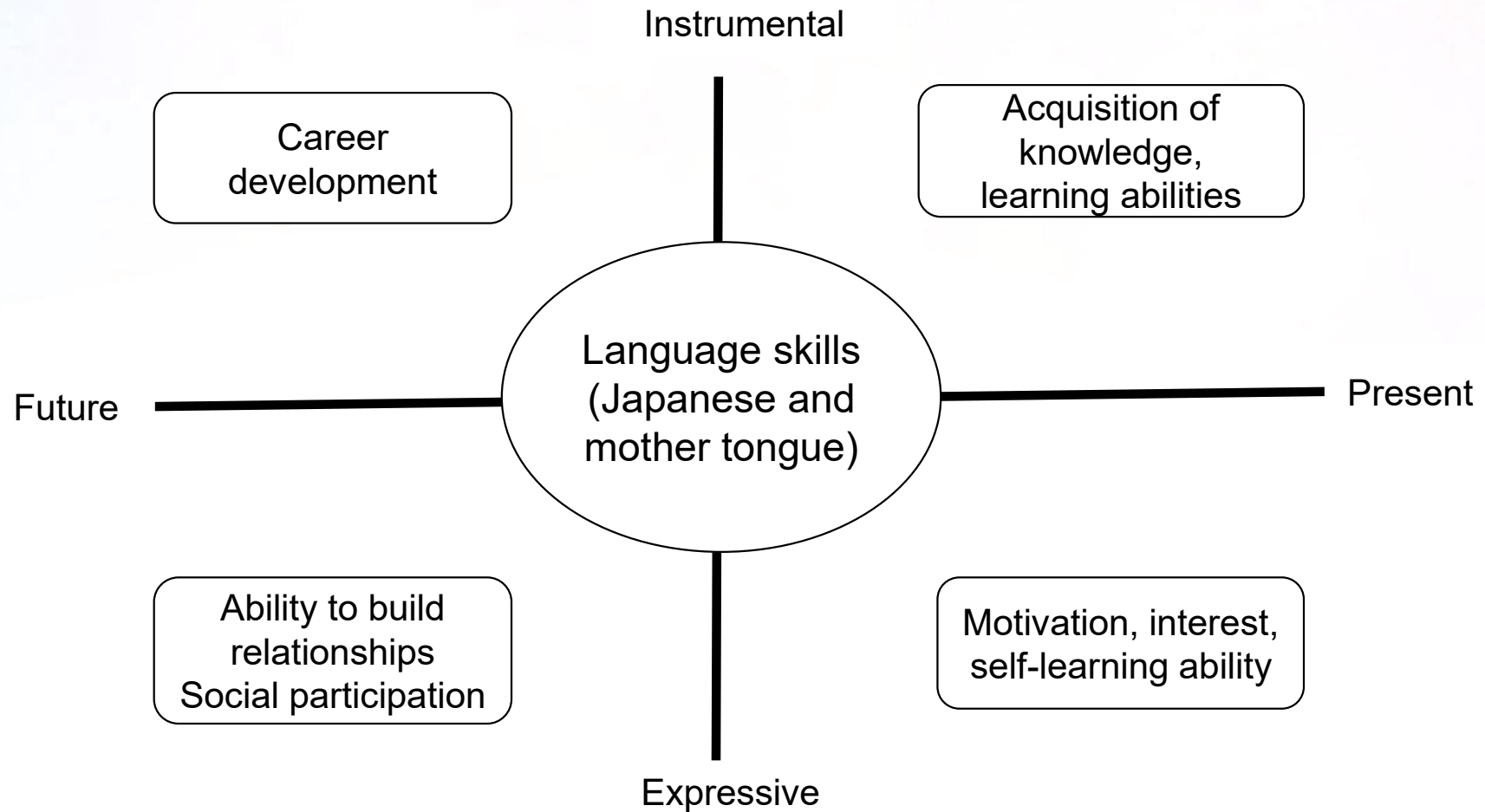
[Aren't we thinking this way?]

- "To improve one's Japanese language skills, one must use only Japanese language." "Aiming to acquire almost the same level of Japanese ability as Japanese children"?

[Shouldn't we have a different perspective?]

- Development of "overall language skills" (the ability to think, feel, imagine, and express)
- Positioning the mother tongue as a resource (plurilingualism)
- Attention to the multifaceted nature of a language

Attention to the multifaceted nature of academic abilities



Source: Gunei Sato (2010) "Intercultural Education," published by Akashi Shoten

How to proceed with Japanese-language education

- Japanese-language education that supports the diverse ways in which the children grow and develop
 - Participation in learning
 - Expressing oneself
 - Building relationships with friends, teachers, and other adults
- Japanese-language education to open up the children's lives and futures
 - Participation in school and social life
 - Identity formation
 - Career development
- An individual's learning of the Japanese language should be developed through their own experiences both in Japanese and their mother tongue. (*The importance of one's mother tongue* is stated in the Act on Promotion of Japanese-Language Education (Article 3, Paragraph 7).)-

Learning support according to the multifaceted nature of academic abilities

- Curricular support
 - Support for interests and study habits that form the basis of learning
 - Support for learning from relationships among children (creating a learning community)
 - Support that gives hope for the future, such as through the role models
- Develop the children's "overall language skills" through a range of support options

Career support for the children

- Creation of social resources to support the children
 - Human resources, learning support services, provision of information related to schools and career paths, providing places where they feel they belong, and networking with people with the same roots and in their home countries, etc.
- Support for the children to acquire new career perspectives
- Support from a medium- to long-term perspective (support for living in Japan)
- Support with a view to transnational migration

Issues to be considered in the future

- Fostering human resources who practice Japanese-language education
- Collaboration with schools, communities, NPOs, and governments
- Budgetary measures
- To establish a curriculum subject of "Japanese language" and a teaching license of "Japanese language"