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It has been widely believed that one of the objectives of kanji learning is to enable learners to effectively memorize and reproduce target kanji vocabulary and that learners' kanji ability is properly assessed by the number of kanji vocabulary items they can recognize and reproduce. Due to these unwarranted assumptions, kanji learning has often and unfortunately been reduced to the rote memorization of decontextualized kanji.

This paper proposes a new type of kanji syllabus for beginning-level learners with no kanji background. In this syllabus, learners are taught to use a Japanese-English kanji dictionary and an electronic dictionary to search for the meaning of unknown kanji vocabulary in authentic texts, utilizing their knowledge of the orthography and its use. The aim of the new syllabus is to promote learners' systematic understanding of the structure and use of kanji as well as skills in performing authentic kanji-related language tasks.

The paper concludes with discussion of the view that, rather than a simple and monotonous operation of memorizing a series of decontextualized kanji, learning kanji is interwoven with various aspects of language learning and authentic language use, including conversation skills and grammatical knowledge.

Keywords: beginning-level kanji syllabus, dictionary use, structure and usage of kanji, autonomous learning, authentic materials