

早期英語教育を進めるための地域の教育力導入の問題

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Problems Related to the Use of Personnel Resources for the English Education in Elementary Schools in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

This past July 15, the Education Ministry made the announcement of "The introduction of foreign language education in public elementary schools"¹⁾ and "The improvement of foreign language education in junior and senior high schools." They finally decided to and introduce English at all public elementary schools by the year 2003. Our English education seems to be a turning point. The announcement has disclosed the future course the Ministry will take in the improvement of foreign language education.

The reason behind the announcement, in spite of strict applications and concerns about the curriculum because of the introduction of the five-day school week in 2003 at all public schools, is that English education has to be given when it is best acquired. Neuropsychology has found that languages are best acquired if taught before the age 13.

In addition, we have found ourselves logging behind many other countries in the introduction of English education in elementary schools. Based on the above mentioned present situation, the model schools for the Education Ministry's pilot project in introducing English, have been trying experiments. However to introduce English education in all public elementary schools there is a need to make greater efforts in additional skills practice and preparations.

In this paper the writer will suggest the condi-

tions needed to support the enforcement of English education and of necessary preparations. The writer will recount some of the problems related to the "Foreign Culture with Learning English" through the writer's own experience at O. Elementary School.

I The Modernistic Themes of Intended International Education

The 15th Central Educational Council made clear their new policy to introduce the study of a foreign language (English) into Japanese elementary schools in conjunction with international understanding. Previous to this announcement, in the first report presented in June 1996, they stressed the importance for us to recognize the necessity of richer educational content particularly in pushing internationalization forward. The following describes their fundamental policies.

- (1) To aim at creating attitude and ability of toward a wide field of vision and understanding different cultures respecting their attitude and living together with the people who are of different cultures and behavior.
- (2) To aim at strengthening Japanese identity as an individual as part of international understanding.
- (3) To aim at developing the ability of communication including ability of handling foreign language(s) and expressions, etc. from the basis of fundamental ability in expressing

personal ideas and will with place in global society.

II The Duties and the Means Whereby English Language Education Is to Achieve International Understanding

The first report also refers to the means should focused on from the International Understanding Education view point and especially says it is appropriate to introduce English language education in the elementary stages. There is much argument about the introduction of English Language education in elementary schools, however the report makes clear that it is the introduction of "International Understanding" that is the thrust of their report and says it without emphasis on Language education.

"...about the English language education in elementary schools....we believe that it is appropriate to provide children opportunities of experiencing a foreign language such as English conversation and other life styles, cultures and so on."

III The Significance and the Necessity of Learning English Language in Elementary Schools.

To be able to live as a member within the Global village, it is a matter of course that learning the ability to communicate based on "the idea of the compound eye" and developing flexible (life) attitudes to coexist with foreign people are very effective intercultural skills.

From the developmental psychological point of view it is said that the sense of cultural belongingness develops the ages of 9 to 15 years old and during this period starts having a sense of incompatibility (or unbelongingness) toward different peoples. Very often this results in a disturbing of the child's International understanding and ability to cope with cultural exchange, because of a not fully developed recognition of self insecure behavior, or the complete emotional growth.

Many experts in this field indicate that the skills of understanding the contents through lis-

tening to foreign languages or the skills of communicating should be taught before the age of nine at most to make learning most efficient.

IV The Practical Use of Volunteers Taking into Account the Actual Conditions of Elementary Education

Here the writer will give an example of the elementary school which started using volunteers in their club activities. Using a volunteer in an English club isn't a new idea however, volunteers conducting all club activities is a new concept in Japan.

The O. Elementary School, located in Itabashi-ku, Tokyo, started this unique pathfinding club activity from April 1996. One of the club activities was called "Foreign culture through English". The unique point of the O. Elementary School's trial experiment was that they set up not only the "Foreign culture through English club" but also other clubs with the help of volunteers. The experiment included the introduction of English education in their academic year program and was a pioneering experience. This practice experiment was quite significant from the point of taking in and accepting educational (academic) power existing in the community. This is, so to speak the way that "the open school of the community" should be.

The writer participated in the "Foreign Culture through English club" as a volunteer.

The following are the outlines of the club. Provide children with information about foreign cultures including life styles and languages and have them grow interested in different cultures, peoples along with cultivating a better understanding of them.

To achieve the mentioned above

- (1) Children get acquainted with foreign cultures through lectures, videos, photos, books and other materials.
- (2) Children experience English language and learn how to communicate in English.

V Outline of the Volunteer Activities from the View Point of the Introduction of English Education

- (1) O. Elementary School set up a 60-minute-club activity period conducted by volunteers besides the regular club activities in 1996.
- (2) These new club activities were conducted entirely by the volunteers who were collected from the public in conjunction with assigned club teachers who were full time teachers at O. Elementary School. The volunteer and the club teacher made lesson plans together and worked in close cooperation to push the club activity forward.

How the "Foreign Culture through English Club" was dealt with by the two volunteers and the club teacher.

The 60-minute-club activity period was divided into two parts. The first part was conducted by a Mexican volunteer who talked about Mexico in English and Japanese. The writer conducted the latter part entirely in English with gestures. The children learned basically through the Graded Direct Method and enjoyed other activities such as learning some English songs and games.

VI Problems Arising between Teachers and Volunteers

The Foreign Culture Club with learning English at the school was conducted by three persons, two volunteers, a Mexican and the writer, and the club teacher. The following are the management problems that surfaced through the year long club activity.

- (1) **Problems based on quality of the club teacher**
Since the club teacher had little experience in English education she couldn't use the volunteers effectively because of her lack of leadership.

- (2) **Communication problems arising from curriculum and preparation needs**

The club teacher and the volunteers should share a common understanding about the curriculum throughout the year and spend enough time for arrangement and preparation in advance for each club activity.

- (3) **Problems arising from involvement of the community**

There must be many people who are interested in teaching English as volunteers in club activities in the community; not only foreigners, but also Japanese who have lived in abroad, Japanese English language teachers who teach at private language schools or at home. However, there is no system which organizes and selects the volunteers or taps the wealth of educational power neither in the school nor in the community.

VII Necessary Policies for the Improvement of the Management of the Volunteers

Through developed policy making and proper management of volunteers, successful use of volunteers will lead to deepening the exchange between schools and the community and to encourage plans for the future aims in the school to become more open to the public and to build up close connections between volunteers and the school teachers, improvement in school management operations such as setting up a new system as a necessary improvement for Japanese children's further education.

In addition to this, collecting available English language teachers is crucial.

JASTEC (The Japan Association for the Study of Teaching English to Children) suggests the following in their suggestions from the introduction of English in Japanese elementary schools.

- (1) **Retraining the present teachers in elementary schools**

1. Train some teachers as leaders who can

deal with foreign language among the elementary school teachers.

2. Training some English language teachers in junior high schools to be English language teachers in elementary schools.
- (2) Establishment of a teachers training program in undergraduate schools.

The program should include courses not only for improving the student's working knowledge of English, teaching techniques, and skills but also for understanding about the learners feelings such as in Developmental Psychology, Linguistic Psychology, Language Theory courses and drills such as Micro-teaching and provided much time for student-teacher programs.

- (3) Hiring applicants from the public and rehiring retired teachers

It is necessary to consider the rehiring retired teachers and the using keenly enthusiastic people especially those who have lived in foreign countries, or who have experience in teaching English to small children.

- (4) Hiring teachers whose native tongue is English or skilled speakers of English²⁾

Conclusion

The introduction of English education in the elementary level still has some problems as mentioned above. Reflecting upon Japanese Education through these problems, we can discover and suggest necessary policies for future development.

Today, a necessary policy needing research for the development of the education is the establishment of a support system. It has been getting more and more difficult for the present school system to achieve its purpose of education without using the support of volunteers from outside of the schools. For this to develop, it is important to accept and recognize the educational power that exists outside in the community. Bringing and utilizing this academic expertise found in the

community and introducing it into schools is one answer to the problems present schools are facing. That's why the idea of "Opening schools to the public" has started to be emphasized as an enlightened ideology for future school management. In this paper the writer introduced the example of using the academic skills found within the community and the acceptance of volunteers in schools as one of the means to impliment the Ministry of Education's proposals.

When we compare the educational conditions found in the United States of America and in Japan, the U.S.A. is much further ahead than we, as for their capacity for organization and their power of execution such as their schools located in the community.

I'd like to emphasize the importance of examining such methods of supporting our own schools before I end this paper.

NOTES

- 1) 『朝日新聞』1997年7月15日付ほか。
- 2) 国際理解プロジェクトチーム(伊藤克敏ほか)「公立小学校における国際理解教育の一環としての外国語教育—基本的枠組に関する提言」『日本児童英語教育学会(JASTEC)研究紀要』第12号, 1993. pp. 78-79.

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