Experts weigh import of elementary school English

The Japan Times forum on elementary school English teaching

Questions remain as one-week compulsory “foreign-language activities” lessons are set to start this spring for Japan’s fifth and sixth graders

Kazuko Nakai: I joined the Foreign Languages in General Education Project, which the Japan Times began in 2007. The goal was to help public and private elementary and junior high schools change their view on the teaching of foreign languages. I was a teacher of English at a junior high school in Tokai City, Aichi Prefecture, where I taught English to fifth graders. I was involved in the “English in the classroom” project, which aimed to integrate English into regular classroom activities. This project was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT).

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1992 when we started calling for the integration of English teaching to elementary school children.

Mayeda: It is often said that these statements are made by ALTs, but they are not fully utilized. Isn’t it? Mayeda: The case of our school is different. At the school, the English is more than just a subject to learn; it is a way of life. The teachers believe that it is important to have a multicultural understanding of English. They want to introduce English in a way that is relevant to the students and that will help them to communicate in English. Then why do Japanese teachers think that this is important?

Moderator: Professor Yoshihara. Your view is that this is important for the future of English education.

Professor Yoshihara: I believe that this is important because it is necessary to learn English in order to communicate in the global community. We need to learn English in order to understand other people’s cultures and to work with people from different backgrounds. English is not just a language, but a way of thinking and communicating. Therefore, it is important to learn English in a way that is relevant to the students and that will help them to communicate in English.

Moderator: Thank you, Professor Yoshihara. I would like to ask Professor Nakai what she thinks about this issue.

Professor Nakai: As an English language teacher, I believe that this is important because it is necessary to learn English in order to communicate in the global community. We need to learn English in order to understand other people’s cultures and to work with people from different backgrounds. English is not just a language, but a way of thinking and communicating. Therefore, it is important to learn English in a way that is relevant to the students and that will help them to communicate in English.

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