

Some Implications for Foreign Language Education in Primary Schools in Japan : From an Australian Case

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Abstract

Since 2001, when the Course of Study was revised, a lot of primary schools have introduced foreign (English) language education as a part of integrated study in class periods. However, there are still many problems such as teacher training and cooperation with local communities and other schools/ companies. The aim of this paper is to present some suggestions for foreign language education in Japanese primary schools through the analysis of a case of LOTE (Languages Other Than English) education in Australia.

Firstly, the aims or necessities to introduce foreign language education in primary schools should be clarified. Even in Australia, although LOTE is one of the Key Learning Areas and learning LOTE is regarded to develop communication skills and intercultural understandings, and contribute to the cognitive development. The endurance of learning will be influenced by other priority areas such as literacy and numeracy, or crowded curriculum. While English is not included among the foreign languages in Australia, the most important foreign language in Japan is English. So there is a big difference between Australia and Japan in terms of necessities of learning languages, but it will be important to reconsider the aims or necessities to introduce foreign language education at primary level.

Secondly, specialists in teaching English should be trained. It is clear that the quality of education depends on the quality of teachers. Many Australian schools face a crisis and may have to terminate LOTE education because of lack of professional teachers.

Finally, about the specialists, it will be necessary for schools to involve local communities or companies especially if they do not have enough teachers. Australia is a well known multicultural/ multilingual country and there are many ethnic schools which teach migrants' languages and cultures on Saturdays or Sundays. Because mainstream schools usually cooperate with ethnic schools, students are able to study the language which is not taught in mainstream schools. To utilize facilities in the communities like this will also make it possible to positively change the circumstances.