

## Reluctant teachers: “Why should English be studied?”

By Satoshi Fukushima

5 With the possibility of English lessons spreading into all the nation’s schools, elementary school teachers are being forced to study the language -- and some are struggling.

The Arakawa Ward Board of Education in Tokyo began an eight-hour English course for all their elementary school teachers last spring. Smiling self-consciously, 20 elementary school teachers tried hard to speak English in their weekly one-hour  
10 lesson.

“Where is the station?”

“Go straight and . . .”

The topic was directions. After the instructor gave some examples, teachers were divided into two groups – one asking for directions and the other replying. Since  
15 the English was easy for the questioner, the teachers competed for the role, causing some laughter.

However, Yukio Otsu, a professor at Keio University critical of English education at elementary schools, has received many letters from teachers complaining about teaching English. One letter reads, “I feel like playing hooky when assistant  
20 language teachers come to the school.” Presently, there are 5,557 ALTs—native English speakers who help teach—assigned places in schools by the central government and 3,090 by regional governments. At elementary schools, Japanese teachers are less involved in English education so the ALTs teach the classes.

Teachers from across the country recently gathered for a meeting at Kawachi  
25 Nagano Municipal Amano Elementary School in Osaka Prefecture. It has been designated by the education ministry as a research and development school to study the current situation at the nation's schools. The study has shown that the number of teachers reluctant to study English is greater than students who want to study it. At the Osaka meeting, one teacher asked: “Fundamental study skills are declining. Why  
30 should English be studied?”

Teacher Hideo Iida, 40, teaches second-graders at No. 6 Nippori Elementary School in Arakawa Ward. He only speaks to the children in English. They responded loudly to his animal picture cards. “Seven goats. Six wolves,” they called out. “At

35 first, I felt uneasy because my English is at a junior high school level. But favorable reactions from the children have gradually increased my interest,” said Iida, who has taught English since the last school year.

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