

The Kids and I

by Maki Okabe



“Do you like kids?” When my boss asked me this question at the job interview, I thought “You’ve just asked me if I want this job or not, haven’t

you?” so I said, “Yes”. If I’d answered the question honestly at the time, my reply would have had to be “I don’t know” because there weren’t any kids around me then, and I’d never studied teaching children or anything like that. I didn’t even know how to talk to kids so I only used English in the lessons from the start. That’s why some teachers say I’m a good teacher...No. I just felt a little stupid and embarrassed about using THAT kind of language. Talking to kids feels easier in English than in Japanese.

I’ve only been teaching for 2 and half years but during that time, I’ve met many many interesting kids. There’s the girl who stopped me from quitting my job with one sentence: “I’m going to be 6 years old soon!”. I’d known her since she was a 3-year-old so I thought “I can’t quit yet”. Then there’s the boy who always gets angry when the other students call me “monkey” and shouts

“Don’t say that to her!”.

The other day one of my students asked me what my job was. When I told him I was a teacher and that this was my job, he seemed very surprised and said, “Is this really your job? I thought you were teaching because you just liked it and wanted to do it”. I was happy to hear that, but I was also surprised because when he first came into my class he was one of the most badly behaved students I’d come across in my teaching life, and I used to scold him a lot. I think I was always knitting my eyebrows at him, but this boy thought that I liked teaching!

I’d like to tell you what happened with one of my students. I’ll call her Yoko. Last year Yoko entered elementary school and so many things around her changed. She had to sit and study and the teachers didn’t play with her a lot any more. I think she felt very sad about that. I usually sing songs and play games with the children, and have little conversations with each student like a preschool teacher. That’s why Yoko enjoyed my lessons even though she wasn’t happy at elementary school. But she thought of me as HER teacher so strongly that she didn’t even want me to talk with the other students. And then she started trying to get all of my atten-

tion and to do that she used the other students: she would hit and kick them, throw chairs at them, tear their craft work and so on. As I mentioned before, I’d never studied kids so I didn’t know what to do. But I knew one thing. Scolding her wouldn’t help. I thought that I should help her. So I gave her a hug to tell her I cared about her, and told her that I liked her. I always made sure that she was sitting next to me, or on my lap. Then she didn’t do anything to her friends. The other students didn’t complain about it. I thought they would say “It’s not fair!” or something because there were 7 students in the class and 5 of them were younger than she was. But they didn’t say anything. I think they understood. This continued for about 2 months. One day when I was getting ready for the next class as usual, I found a note on the table. It was from her and it said, “Thank you, Teacher”.

I usually don’t notice how great my students are. On the contrary I often feel like kicking some of them out of the classroom. But when I think back, I realize that they always make me laugh when I am angry, make me smile when I am sad, and teach me how to teach. I don’t think my boss is going to ask me that question again. But now, I can answer the question from my heart...

Do you want to write for Snakes & Ladders?

If you feel that you have something to say, then why not write for us? The editors welcome contributions to be considered for publication either as feature articles or as part of one of the regular sections.

For further information, write to the editors at: snakesandladdersjp@yahoo.co.uk, or send a fax to (082) 244-2651.



©2002
a publication of

ETJ

English Teachers in Japan

e-mail:

snakesandladdersjp@yahoo.co.uk

other correspondence:

David English House
Polesta Biru 3F, 7-5 Nakamachi
Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0037
Tel: 082 244-2633
Fax: 082 244-2651

Editors

Kate Tindle
Stephen Brivati

Publisher

David Paul

Section Editors

Jane Takizawa
Nicky Suga
Sharon Abe

Designer

Lynn Dennett

Editorial Advisory Board

Aleda Krause
Alison Miyake
Anna Isozaki
Gregory Mihaich
Jim Kahny
Tom Merner