

# *T e a c h i n g*

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*It was a wonderful day for Kobo. He had taken first place in the Ashikaga speech contest. As with all the other students in the contest, he chose a topic to talk about and presented it to be judged by way of content and clarity. That day, Kobo was pretty much flawless in both respects. I, myself, was so happy for Kobo because he was my student. More so, he had chosen to write his speech about me.*

*Kobo's story was about how he had to overcome his initial shyness and fear of English in order to talk with me. He was a bright and curious student who loved English. But his lack of confidence was what came in the way of practicing his foreign language with previous AETs. In Kobo's speech, he talked about how this frustrated him greatly. So much, in fact, that he was determined to approach this new AET no matter what the consequences would be. And that was how we met.*

*At first, Kobo was shy to talk to me. He stumbled with his words and his face turned bright red. To tell you the truth, I felt a bit sorry for him and tried to get him to relax just a bit. After he had slowed down and felt more comfortable, he told me about his love of the English language and how he had always longed to communicate with a foreigner. Kobo was passionate about English and much of this had to do with his desire to someday visit America. Like any other boy his age, he was excited about American movies, music, sports and fashion. I made a joke that I was interested in Japanese movies, Japanese music, Japanese sports and Japanese fashion. We both laughed.*

*Through countless other exchanges, both Kobo and I came to be close to each other. Friends. I found that he was an exceptionally bright student and unlike others, his conversations with me were all in English. I could see that this was a student who was really serious about learning a new language. This impressed me. He would say that he would study English at least an hour everyday. One time, I remember asking him about what kept him motivated to study English so hard. He replied, "You! You are my good friend and one day I want to visit you in America, so I must study hard!"*

*Sometimes I would go skateboarding with Kobo on the weekends. One time we went to a skateboard park and had such a great time there. Sometimes we would go out for lunch. I remember when he taught me how to fish in the nearby river. Whenever we went out, we could relax and have fun. We would talk about anything-our own foreign cultures, school life, daily pressures, weekend hobbies, our dreams, etc. Through all of this I now realize that I don't even think of Kobo as a student anymore, but rather a good friend.*

*Kobo's first place English speech was well deserved. After all was done, he approached me, beaming with pride. "Thank you, Chris," he said. "Thank you for giving me the confidence to speak English. Thank you for showing me that I can do it." Needless to say, I was so happy and proud of Kobo for all his hard work and determination. He is truly a special boy. One day, perhaps we will meet in my own country and I can show him the America that he always is dreaming about. I really hope so.*

*There are many facets to education. Teaching is not just "filling the empty vessel." It is not just telling students what to learn. It is showing them how to develop their own thinking processes in order to gain confidence and a desire to explore their area of interest. It is crucial for teachers to be the role models who initiate this creative process. Only then can students truly benefit from their teachers. And I feel in this way that Kobo will always challenge himself to control his own learning and future.*