

Why I Am Here Today

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During the past seven years, I have made five speeches in this speech contest. Some of my friends have asked me, "Why do you participate in that speech contest so often?" Others said to me, "We would rather buy books and study at home than go to Tokyo to speak English for only eight minutes." Let me tell you why I decided to enter this speech contest seven years ago. At that time, I was teaching at a commercial high school.

One day during the lesson, a boy suddenly stood up and yelled, "Sir, we don't like your English lesson; you always tell us to study and you give us a lot of homework, but what are you teachers doing? You teachers are relaxing in the teachers' room, chatting and smoking. Are you teachers studying as much as you want us to study?" All the rest of the students clapped their hands indicating their agreement with him.

Was I doing my best to improve my own English ability? No. Was I trying to discover more effective methods of teaching the students? No. Then what was I doing for them? I compelled them to study regardless of their interest or ability by giving them much homework and many tests, and if they didn't follow me, I labeled them incapable students. That was all I had done for them. "Are you studying as much as you want us to study?" The student's voice lingered in my ears for a long time. Finally I said to myself, "I will cultivate myself and

show the students my sincere attitude toward the study of English." In this way I decided to take part in this speech contest. I told the class about my decision, but they were indifferent to me. Even when I handed them my text for the contest, they paid no attention to it.

But, whenever I found time between lessons, I stood before the students to practice my speech. A few students listened to me with the texts on their desks, but most of them laughed at me and sang as if to show their indifference. I had an American record my text and asked the students to compare my English with that of the American's. A few girls accepted my request and made a careful comparison of my English with the American's. Their English was not good enough to point out my mistakes in pronunciation or sentence structure, but they could notice my wrong phrasing. One of the girls bought a book on "Speech" and made me such suggestions as "Don't make such big gestures." or "When you are speaking, look at all the audience."

The number of students interested in my speech increased day by day and the classroom became



the place for me to practice it.

Two days before my departure for Tokyo, some students wrote on the blackboard, "We wish you great success in the contest." With their warm-hearted encouragement in my mind, I stood on this stage for the first time. Though I didn't receive a prize, this experience created a great incentive to study for all of us.

Urged by the students, I made up my mind to enter the contest the following year and I talked about their flower growing in the school garden. They were curious about my text entitled "Flowers and My Students" and used their dictionaries to see what was written in it. Some recorded my speech on their tape-recorders and memorized it. One day, the boy who had criticized me the year before said to me, "Sir, I am sorry I was lazy last year. I will study English as hard as you. Here is a potted flower which I grew myself. Please show this flower to the audience in Tokyo."

Six years ago, I stood here with that potted flower on the table and in that contest, I won a prize. On coming back to the classroom, I was presented a bunch of flowers with a brief note attached to it in which was written "Congratulations on your success in the contest. We are proud of you."

Where they had once complained of my harshness and

neglected my admonitions, now they were willing to study. Where they had once been reluctant to use dictionaries, now they were eager to consult them. Where they had once been negligent in using their tape-recorders, now they became constant listeners. They did follow me when I tried to improve myself. Each year that I entered the contest, I came with the warm support and enthusiasm of my students followed by their emulation of the example I set them.

About four months ago, at a class reunion, my former students talked about their high school days. All of them said that they would never forget my speech for this contest. And to my great surprise, they remember my text even now. They said, "This English is a treasure of our youth."

Today, we blame the young for being too weak to cope with difficulties, but are we adults strong? We grown-ups grieve over young people's impoliteness, but are we polite? I am here today not because of any exceptional skills in speaking English but because I firmly believe that only by improving myself, can I expect the young to want to improve themselves. To speak for just eight minutes may be only one small drop of water, but I am sure this will become a big ocean when the young follow me.



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中学・高等学校教員英語弁論大会(1979年)』で、
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