

If We Get a Clue, We Can Understand Each Other

“What should we do? We can’t practice at all.” We frowned. It happened when I participated in a ballet competition as a junior high school student. Although there was only one rehearsal room for all the competitors, a group of contestants from other Asian countries occupied a huge area of the room, so us Japanese contestants couldn’t practice. I was very surprised and disappointed with their manners, and I couldn’t imagine any Japanese doing that.

Today, more and more foreign people are coming to Japan. Every year, a huge number of Asian travelers come to Fukuoka, my hometown, by big cruise ships. I also see many foreigners working at the convenience stores and the gas station in my neighborhood. We can often see people from China, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and various other Asian countries. Even though I understood that we have to accept a variety of people from around the world in this multicultural age, I was still a little bit uncomfortable. To be honest, I felt that Japan could become less safe if the foreign population increased. However, working with Asian children changed me.

I had a chance to help Asian children study in Kitakyushu as volunteer work. I taught Japanese to Chinese and Indian children. There were gentle and nice children, but I had difficulty dealing with a naughty Chinese boy. The boy could not sit still, moved around the room, and even hit me on the head many times while I was teaching him. Instead of scolding him, I ignored his mischief and made an angry expression. However, he didn't seem to realize that what he was doing was wrong. I was not good at scolding children, but finally, I told him that if he didn't sit still and study seriously he wouldn't get better, and he would have a hard time fitting in at a Japanese school. As I explained, he looked at my face carefully. After that, he began to study seriously. I noticed the difference between our cultures. In Japan, people often express their feelings through facial expressions. However, it is often difficult for foreign people to understand our feelings only by looking at these expressions. I thought about my actions from his point of view. I should have spoken my feelings directly from the beginning. After that, I started to speak to the students clearly and directly. They immediately became attached to me and started to listen to me earnestly. I began to think that they were adorable, honest and clever children. To my surprise, they have totally changed my impression of Asian people.

Looking back, I started to wonder what my ballet rehearsal experience really was. In Japan, it is rude to express our discomfort directly. But in the other Asian countries, it might be rude and even childish to complain behind someone's back instead of speaking to them directly. In that rehearsal room, we were both acting according to what is right and polite in our own cultures. If we could have spoken directly, we might have been able to understand each other. If we learn to communicate better, we will realize that we have much in common and share many values.

Our government is now trying to deal with Japan's labor shortage by increasing the number of foreign laborers. I feel that our country is becoming more multicultural. Just as my life became more colorful by working with Asian children, the lives of all Japanese people can become more interesting and stimulating by accepting diversity. I hope that everyone will work hard to understand each other and create a community where everyone can enjoy their lives.

(625words)