

People are not throwing rocks at me, but are instead offering a verbal gaijin-doggie treat. Just as one offers a dog treat to entice the dog to perform (trick of some kind), so are the children trying to get the gaijin to perform.

But foreigners are people, not performing monkeys, parrots or "hello machines" (trained to respond on command), and thus deserve to be treated like everyone else—with respect.

Japanese schools currently teach many subjects, from English to mathematics and science to moral education. Perhaps it is time to teach the children to respect and be courteous to those who are different.

Phil Rothenberg
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Speak Nihongo

In Kanazawa, there has been a dramatic increase over the past couple of years in the number of foreign students studying Japanese.

This dramatic influx of foreign students has caused a shortage of host families, which forces some students to turn to cheap accommodation instead and inevitably undermines the most important and effective part of their stay, i.e., an opportunity to learn about our culture through being with a family. This stems, I think, partly from the fact that people in Kanazawa (maybe throughout Japan) misunderstand what role a host family ought to play in accepting a student.

Is it really imperative for a host family to have a good command of English, as the majority of us tend to think? Though we tend to regard English as the only means of international communication, it is time for us to realize this is not necessarily true and may even disappoint some serious students who have spent a considerable amount of money coming here to master Japanese.

Would you be happy staying with a family overseas who spoke Japanese all the time if your goal was to learn English? Naturally you would not,

because you would want to speak English. The same is true for a student studying Japanese.

We should, therefore, bear in mind what individuals visiting Japan need. They might be a tourist, English teacher, businessperson, student or a permanent resident—there is a wide spectrum of foreigners in Japan nowadays. I suggest that we use Japanese in the first instance and see how a person reacts, and then choose whatever language seems appropriate for the situation.

As our precious language is being shared more and more by non-Japanese, it is our individual obligation to help them learn it just as we wish to speak English fluently. It is just a matter of tolerance in letting them try to speak Japanese. Don't take the mickey out of their mistakes or funny sentences. Speak slowly and clearly. This is exactly what we seek from native speakers of English when we go abroad.

If more people in Japan started considering what students really need, there would surely be no shortage of host families and Japan could offer much more in promoting cultural understanding at the grass-roots level.

Yasuhiro Shimizu
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Defining "fake teachers"

I join Dale Bay (June 21 P11) in urging all school administrators to do everything possible to assure quality instruction for their students. That certainly includes refining their screening process for new instructors.

Unfortunately, administrators have little else to go on than the dubious merits of the three C's—countenance, credentials and character references. Bay accurately identifies one of the pitfalls of this selection process, that of credible credentials. But he fails to recognize that even when verified, these artificial evaluation methods pick us into a continuing game of Russian roulette. We can do no more than remove five of the revolver's six

bullets. It is that last round—performance—that will ultimately determine the wisdom of our choice.

When dealing with the individual what he calls "existing staff," it seems to suffer from a kind of obsession with form over substance, a handicap not uncommon among academics. That may well be with the best intentions so often fall victim to that deadly sixth round.

Academic credentials, and the accomplishments they represent, in the final analysis, poor substitutes for actual performance. Ineffective teachers, accredited or not, are not qualified for the job, and teachers who are repeatedly successful in the classroom but whose sheepskin have proved their qualifications for the job.

So when Bay calls for a purge of importers by going through due diligence in search of incriminating credentials, I must qualify my support. I would encourage any movement to root out and dislodge unqualified teachers, but only if the accusative is "unqualified" and not "uncertified." Successful teachers found "uncertified" could be disciplined for an initial transgression but certainly not by an exemplary track record. "Unqualified" with or without certification there can be no pardon. Credible evidence of incompetence can only be found in the classroom, not in a file cabinet.

Where Bay's call to arms harkens to McCarthyism, my own call for across-the-board quality control has a quixotic ring. The honest academic pretenders, both pedantic and counterfeit, are secure in their knowledge that no merit system will ever be implemented for fear it would decimate the teacher ranks in every educational institution.

Fake degrees may vex language instruction in Japan, but fake teachers threaten education everywhere.

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