In order to acquire a second language successfully, I believe from experience that the role of the teacher plays an important part in its success. In order to teach one’s student effectively, the teacher must thoroughly understand the learner’s needs and strengths. My French teacher Madame Forbes recognised these factors perfectly and enabled me to reach my full potential in acquiring the language which led me to continue learning the language through to my A-Levels. In this essay I will use this experience as a model example to explain what I believe is the most successful approach to teaching a second language.

I began learning French at primary school in the United Kingdom from the age of nine but as I was struggling with English at the same time, the experience was hopeless. I met Madame Forbes as I was preparing for my GCSE exams at the age of sixteen and my French was of a pre-intermediate level. She treated me as an adult and respected that I was a young adult with a clear goal, a high grade in my upcoming examinations and a good grasp of the language as a whole. To facilitate my needs as a French student Madame Forbes was undoubtedly the most effective teacher I have ever come across as she knew the language perfectly, having been born and raised in France nearly all her life, and was able to give comprehensive feedback wherever appropriate. She understood my aims and ambitions clearly and oriented our lessons towards them which allowed us to build a positive relationship where we could be honest and straightforward with each other. She was patient when I did not quite follow her teachings and persevered, but also charismatic and prepared to criticise when necessary. I accredit these qualities to Madame Forbes’ being such an effective teacher and believe them to be valuable qualities for all teachers.

Furthermore, to teach me more efficiently, Madame Forbes identified that my linguistic and visual intelligences were stronger than the five others from Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences. She would explain grammar points thoroughly and then instigate them naturally through journal keeping, role playing and general conversation whilst improving my grammar through word games such as Scrabble and Hangman. For homework Madame Forbes would give me approachable French literature to read such as ‘Asterix & Obelix’ and ‘Tin Tin’ and when my concentration dwindled, we would watch clips from French cartoons during lesson time which led me to enjoy learning French. I believe strongly that it is important to enjoy learning the language to be able to flourish at it. As for difficult pronunciations, she would first explain how to articulate my tongue, demonstrate it and ask me to imitate until I got it right. From these teaching approaches, one can infer that Madame Forbes’ teaching style was an amalgam of explainer and involver. This style worked perfectly for me and I was able to graduate middle school and sixth form with a high grade in French which illustrates the importance of understanding and empathising with one’s student and the ability to design lessons towards their goals yet simultaneously keeping the students stimulated.

Having analysed Madame Forbes’ teaching style and paralleled it to teaching concepts learned in TESOL it can be confidently concluded that in order to teach students effectively, it is paramount that the teacher understands the students’ strengths and requirements thoroughly and to orientate the lessons fully towards their goals. To be able to do this it will be crucial to empathise with the students’ appropriately and realise that they are independent individuals with unique learning styles, thus enabling them to achieve their full potential.

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