66기 주말TESOL

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Essay #1. Second Language Acquisition

It’s quite a pleasure to bring back the memory when I firstly started having an interest to learn English. If I right, it would be my third or fourth grade in Elementary school. I was passing by the bakery near my home with mom. And I saw the one girl who seemed to be unusual, having blond hair and speaking English (at that time, I never knew what English was). She carried her dog, and it suddenly barked at me. I was freeze and hid myself behind of my mom. Then, she came to us and apologized with some words in English. I, of course, couldn’t understand any. But, there was one word that I could hear from her. It was a ‘dog’. Maybe, I had heard of such words like ‘dog’, ‘cat’ before. So, I could make a guess what she wanted to tell us: to apologize for barking. Nonetheless, I knew little of English, the fact that I was able to know what she meant let me feel sort of pride. After that, I got an interest to that new language, English, and wanted to learn more words to communicate with others.

Very good startup, right? But it didn’t last long, soon, I was getting lose my interest to English. Because the classes in Korea middle and high school were pretty strict and teachers required only grammar and reading skills. We were hardly exposed to native speakers’ sounds and even we were not taught of how to read phonetic sign. We, ironically, knew the spelling of words, but couldn’t read or listen correctly. English classes mostly were filled with memorizing words, grammar and there was a little time of chances to talk. I felt like I was ‘false beginner’ quite a long time, despite learning English continuously. What a worse is, the goal of learning English was on the competition to get higher scores than others, not on learning English itself. Therefore, students, including myself, would feel sick of it.

After I grew up, I took several English conversation classes in my university, and those helped a lot to improve my poor parts of English: speaking and listening. Communication chances were rich and teachers enabled us to talk in many ways, using media, tools...Etc. At the very least, they tried not to be just explainers. Students were encouraged regardless of test results, so no burden we had to take courses. My goal of learning English had been changed as well. No more of obsessed with grammar or making correct sentences. Rather, I put stress more on my fluency to communicate well, not perfectly accurate though.

I always think that the class, especially teaching foreign language class should be focused on encouraging individuals. Losing confidence might be the worst thing, whatever we learn. Language acquisition is not like an academic study, isn’t it? It can be acquired by an experience as I learned a word, ‘dog’. It is needed to let students not to be so serious to learn a language, indeed. Furthermore, I think, having senses of empathy and showing authenticity to each student are also the core features that teachers must have in mind. Because students’ competences in English are diverse, and they’ve got different backgrounds respectively, the lecture-based, one-way explainer types of teaching hardly fit each learner’s request. And as we know, teaching and learning are also the human relationships. Building good rapport could be the big part of learning a language well and fast. Of course, to let the students participate in class more actively and lively also might be the essentials to manage the class well.

Therefore, if I get a chance to be a teacher someday, I would like to be ‘enabler’ type of teacher. And I want every single student in my class to have an interest to English and have a clear goal to learn it. Might be not easy, I know. But it seems to be really worth for doing it.