Teacher as facilitator

It was the time that I was brought to Virginia as an exchange student. I happened to share the apartment with 5 American roommates, who are born in US and have no problem using their own native language. I remember that I couldn’t speak a word in front of them. Feeling blank and numb, I couldn’t remember any fancy sentences that I have learned and studied for 6 years intensively in my middle and high school. The words and sentences were jumbling confusingly in my brain and couldn’t find the pathway to come out through my mouth.

Day by day, I was trying hard to listen to what people were talking about in a regular conversation. My head was on a verge of explosion at one point because I was focusing too hard. After 3 months of intensely being in the environment where I had to speak and to listen for survival, I felt, at one point, my ears popped open and that I have acquired the second language, English.

From this experience, I realized that speaking and listening components were seriously lacking compared to reading and writing components out of 4 language skills in my earlier language learning. The language environment was based on the traditional teaching model where the size of the class room is big, and is lecture-based and teacher oriented. The students were not challenged to speak out the language, to ask any questions or to present their opinions. There were hardly any group activities or pair work involved. I was lucky that I was born with linguistic intelligence and loved writing and reading. However I could notice a lot of my classmates were failing even in reading and writing exams, because they lost interest and motivation to learn the second language all together.

I can now understand why being in the US made it so much easier to learn language than being in the traditional classroom. The average learner retention rate for the lecture is only 5 % where the experiential learning is 80%. I was basically experiencing the language itself everyday life being in the US.

Now that I am looking back these two contrast experiences in my language learning, I am thinking how I can better assist my students to reach what they want, which is accomplishing all 4 areas of language skills. This question leads me into the question of what kind of teacher type that I am pursuing. I was rather shocked when I realized that having been a baby teacher, I was focusing more on how to lecture well, how to deliver certain information better, how to make my own voice loud and explicit and how to impress students through telling fun and interesting stories. I was thinking more like a lecturer than an involver or enabler. I remember that my TESOL teacher told us that we might resemble or copy the teaching style that we have experienced before.

How can I become a good teacher who facilitates the second language learning most effectively? I thought about two things. One is to create the environment that is most similar to the country of the second language where all students can get immersed into. You can let students do role playing on buying foods from the store, taking the subway, going to the hospital and talking on the phone etc. Setting up some rules such as not allowing students to speak their native language in the classroom will be a good one as well. One other thing is that I need to keep striving myself to be an involver and enabler. It is crucial in successful language learning for the teachers to keep encouraging the students to not be afraid of making mistakes, to speak out loud, to discuss actively with their classmates and to teach each other what they have learned. I am looking forward to improving myself to be a better teacher every day.