Learning a New Language

Yeny Seo

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Language is like the fingerprints of a culture. At times the distinctiveness of a culture can be difficult to define in concrete, measurable terms; but language is the factor that brings out the colors of a culture and its people. It makes a culture come alive. It is crucial to understand the great power in language. Languages can be used to lift up or to tear down; to collaborate or to segregate; to allow for progression or regression. Regardless of what it is used for, whether it is for good or evil, languages are used no matter where we go. The power of languages is undeniable.

My first language is Korean. When I first learned to speak English, it was really hard for me to communicate with people who did not speak Korean. I went to an English speaking high school where I was not even allowed to speak Korean to my Korean friends. I was lost in class and felt left out. I became a really quiet person and started to lose self –confidence academically and socially. Eventually, I was able to communicate with my friends more and I started to pick up English faster. Since the concept of language is of great importance to me, I realized the power of words and how they could so easily be used to make beauty or destruction. It is incredibly interesting to note that it takes approximately ten positive things said to a person to erase one negative thing. This shows just how much power words really have. Experiencing these different environments as an English Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) student, I struggled with my classes because it was a different environment, but art was a language that allowed me to express myself. Through art, I was given a chance to build close relationships with my teacher and classmates.

My biggest challenge was speaking English in college where the professor was using the direct method. Because I went to an English speaking high school, I thought my English was satisfactory, until I went to a university in the United States. I didn’t learn English correctly, and I didn’t study hard enough for university. My English skills weren’t sufficient for college.

Sometimes, I had a hard time understanding what the professor was saying in class. I had to record the lesson, which helped me review for the class later. One of my frustrations was that I always needed someone to help me with my English homework. If there was an essay for homework, I wrote it by myself first, and checked the grammar, spelling, and any mistakes that I made. Soon, I became so stressed that I started to lose my confidence because I always felt like I needed someone’s help.

Now, I look back on my experiences, and I feel that this was all because of the lack of teaching abilities from my teachers in grade school and high school. This has motivated me and placed a strong desire in me to become an effective teacher and to explore teaching techniques that my teachers were never educated in.

To become an effective teacher one should organize and develop programs for English development. There are a few standards that teachers should use as an aid in the classroom. First of all, for students to want to learn the new language, a teacher must make it meaningful to them by showing its importance in the contexts of their lives with teachers, peers, their families, and out in the public. Secondly, teachers need to think aloud with students and ask them questions about academic topics. Lastly, students need to think aloud with fellow students as well build community and foster language development in a more comfortable setting for the English Language Learners (ELL).

Some of the characteristics of adult learners that Malcolm Knowles identified on teacher’s roles are facilitators striving to bring out the student’s greatest learning potential through their capabilities and understanding, encourage students to attain their goals, revealing the importance/ values of the goals that are targeted in the classroom, and treat students with respect, allowing them to feel comfortable in sharing their experiences and knowledge.

Furthermore, scaffolding is essential for instruction and teachers need to be aware of the levels of language acquisition, which include: pre-production, early production, speech emergence, and intermediate fluency.  This is also mentioned in Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition. For lessons, teachers need to be aware of the topics that are or are not culturally relevant for their students. If a certain topic is questionable, it is helpful to provide background knowledge. During lessons, the use of academic vocabulary, visual aids and graphic organizers are quite useful. After asking a question, teachers need to wait 3-5 seconds before calling on someone to answer so that students may have time to think through their responses. Another important rule is “10-2.” The teacher teaches for ten minutes and then the students summarize the content with a partner for two minutes. During times when students work collaboratively or individually, teachers should observe their needs and record any observations to use in further instruction. These language-learning techniques, if properly used, will help the student greatly increase their learning potential in language learning.

I strongly believe that the language acquisition is universal and many times difficult to learn. There are many techniques that can be incorporated into the classroom in order to make language acquisition easier for the student and also to help the teacher to reach their maximum potential for meaning instruction. I have a deep heart for teaching overseas. I have always had a passion for teaching and desire to impact kids who are struggling with English, and so that when they are given the beautiful, powerful gift of language, they will use it wisely. All my ESOL students will use it to be lifted up. They will use it to make a difference in a world where language is so easily misconstrued.