Memories of My ESL (English as a Second Language) Days

Songhee Moon

(588 words)

My memories of ESL days are bits and pieces but I still feel it is a valuable source of personal reflection to look back my own experience of learning English and be reminded of some of wonderful teachers I had as the images will help me to develop my own teaching style. My family moved to the Philippines as I was going into grade nine, when it all started. It was a time of challenge, shock, and exploration. Rather concluding my English learning experience as a success or a failure, I would just like to describe them in three different perspectives, my characteristics as a learner, learning environment, characteristics of great teachers I had as I reminisce with nostalgia.

I have always been fascinated with foreign languages as a child and for some reason, my parents believed that I have a talent for acquiring languages. Their belief was based on the fact that I learned to speak and read relatively earlier age than my peers. My first day in the school I was placed in the ESL course before taking the regular course(it was called the mainstream class), during the recess time, I saw native English speaking students who were in the regular course, to me they meant more than idol stars. As a learner, I was most motivated to acquire English as my second first language, I dreamt about learning to speak as if it was my first language and in general I was confident by the end of the school year, I will be like one of those native English speaking students I saw at the canteen. I believe my strong motivation and confidence played a crucial part in learning English.

Being surrounded in the English speaking environment is just as important as motivation as a lot about language as well as cultures can be picked up without recognizing that you are learning something. I was fortunate to be attending an international school where English was the official language used in class and all school activities. In the school where I attended, there was a clear distinction between the ESL students and the mainstream class. I made efforts not to hang out with other Korean or ESL students to adjust into the mainstream classes. I believe learning environment is the easiest component of acquiring a language as this does not necessarily come from your own efforts, if the circumstances allow.

Lastly, teachers play a crucial part of school life and made a significant influence to my adolescence. Although I can recall very little about any specific lessons I learned from the class or their teaching methods and techniques, my memories of my impression of them and how I felt in the class, how I enjoyed being around them. Some of my favorite teachers really listened to my problems and empathized with me as if it was their own problems. They listened to my opinions as if they were very important to them. The feeling of being understood by teachers worked as a good ground to explore academics.

While it is not possible to include all my memories from ESL experience in this paper, the ones I have presented above are three main components which have influenced my language learning experience. Language learning requires motivation and confidence, exposures and situations to practice, and good teachers who are supportive so that the learning can happen. It is my hope that I can become as inspiring and supportive teachers to my students as my teachers have been to me.