My Two Language Learning Experiences

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Teachers need to think about adult learner characteristics, classroom types, teacher types and effective teaching.

My Two Language Learning Experiences

I’ve learned English for many years and I have many English teachers. While I am learning English, I haven’t thought about the quality of teachers or the environments. I have only thought about why students cannot improve their English that much. After studying about teaching now, I’ve realized there were many aspects to think about in teaching languages.

I went to a middle school in Korea in 90’s. That was when I started to learn English for the first in my life. In a traditional classroom, I studied alphabet with fifty-five classmates, being able to read short sentences later on. I had my textbooks and notebooks, and had to read many paragraphs, memorizing a lot of vocabularies. From time to time, I had some chances to give out presentations, but mostly, I had my teacher’s lectures, taking notes, so that it kept me being able to read and memorize continuously. Under the teacher’s instruction, I didn’t study much for writing skill. Instead, I studied and memorized a lot of grammar rules for the tests. So when I came to a moment that I had to write something in English, it became very difficult because I’d never learned or practiced how the grammar would actually function in writing sentences.

One day, my English teacher, Mrs. Kim couldn’t make a class, because of a kind of meeting that she had to attend. In the English class on that day, my classmates and I had a self-study session because we didn’t have our teacher who was actually supposed to lead the class by giving out lectures. Since we didn’t have any instruction for the period, a class couldn’t occur.

Mrs. Kim was the explainer. As an effective teacher, she knew the subject matter well and also knew the easiest way for students to approach a kind of concept of grammar. Many times, she introduced to us many ways how to memorize a certain rule of grammar easily, which really helped me a lot. The grammar rules that we memorized with those ways that she’d taught us actually let us have good grades on our tests, and it really worked out when we read articles. We, however, didn’t have many chances to participate in class. We didn’t have to prepare anything for any activities like students under the involver- all we needed to do was just to be in class with well-finished homework- nor have to face a nervous-teaching moment like students under the enabler, which would actually have been helpful a lot in acquiring a particular knowledge.

After I left for the States, unlike Mrs. Kim’s class from my middle school, I had to be very-well prepared for Mr. Griffin’s class- he was my English teacher for ESL (English as a Second Language). After finishing reading one chapter through a period or two, we were given another period to discuss the chapter that we had read as groups. In order to participate lively in this discussion, each student had to know well enough the content. Everyone needed to be sure they know about this chapter and prepared whatever they were going to say in their groups for the discussion. So the entire period of this class was taken place by the students’ discussion. No matter whether Mr. Griffin was there or not, the class was to occur, and this meant he was the enabler. After the discussion period, we had to write a research paper based on what we had read. For the first draft of paper that we were supposed to write in the class, we had to bring all the information and materials that we had looked into. During the writing period, there was no lecture. The teacher was just walking around, helping and guiding each student in writing their essays. As modern classroom, there were many group activities and we could study for productive skills such as writing and speaking.

My classmates in this class were eager to learn English, not like those from my middle school. Because I took this class in my first year at college, as ESL students, they, including myself, really needed to learn how to read that big amount of textbook in a short period of time, how to write an essay effectively and how to give out presentation in front of many people, for their following years at college. They had a goal. And the goal was to graduate from college. In order for them to graduate from college, they had to know how to study in English. That was what they wanted to learn. This was the reason that made them work.

In addition to being goal-oriented, another characteristic of adult learners is adults are autonomous and self-directed. All the group works that we had and Mr. Griffin’s teacher type, the enabler, which he could be were actually possible to be happened because we, the students were the adults. If the manner of this class had happened to the English class from my middle school, nothing could have been possible for sure. That would have required some other ways to approach for better teaching the middle school students.

For some qualities as an effective teaching, he was an excellent teacher who taught very well-I’ve learned a lot from him. Now I can tell he really knew how to guide students back then, but he had lack of patience. Sometimes, he was even mean. I, however, personally think that the strict regulation actually made many things possible for the students to achieve their works.

After discussing now, I realized teaching languages well and leading the class effectively are not easy jobs to do. As teachers, purely, teachers need to have good qualities for effective teaching. Teachers also need to be the involvers and the enablers, not just staying at the explainers. Not only they have to be able to know the adult learners’ characteristics, but also teachers need to be encouraged to strive for modern classroom.