MY LONG WAY TO TESOL

Just like in many other non-English speaking countries nowadays, in Russia the study of English is included into the national curriculum. In local authority-governed schools, Russian students are introduced to English as early as grade one, but back in those last few years of the Soviet era when I was an elementary student, foreign languages were not considered to be a priority, and, like most kids, I only began to learn English when I was ten. I liked the subject but had little motivation to go any further than the textbook or the teacher required. I think the main reason for such apathy was that students rarely got a chance to practice their skills in real life. Not too many of us could travel abroad, the opportunities to communicate with native speakers were limited, and so was access to broadcasting, periodicals and records in English.

With higher education admission tests and exams in mind, I spent my high school years studying privately under two experienced teachers, who proved to be very supportive and enthusiastic tutors. They encouraged me to read as much as I could, and always provided me with lots of ideas as to what books and materials to look for in a library/media center. Their influence on my learning and appreciation of the language was so big that I decided to major in linguistics or teaching, and that is how, after years of struggling to learn the language, I eventually found myself being a student at the department of second language studies at a university.

When at university, I truly enjoyed English and German classes, lectures in psychology, English and American literature, culture and stylistics. Semiotics, methodology and Latin I saw as challenging but useful, and I hated theoretical grammar and comparative linguistics.

As for becoming a teacher myself…Well, I had my school-based teaching practice which was quite enjoyable, and I did some private tutoring as well (some extra cash would always come in handy), but at that time I didn’t actually see my future as a teacher as something set and pre-defined. To me a university education was more like an opportunity to flex the brain muscle and to find out what my options were. After graduation, I applied to a PhD program, and spent another few years doing my coursework and research.

Of course my study of English was not confined to the university walls. As a post-graduate student, I took a part-time job as an interpreter with a British-owned travel group. The job paid the bills as I was studying, but also presented a great opportunity to polish my English skills. I literally got to meet and interpret for business-travelers and holiday-makers from all over the English-speaking world.

My diploma still smelled of fresh ink when I had to pack my suitcase and go to Korea - as a good wife, I supported my husband’s decision to accept an interesting research job offer from a Korean chaebol. My life has changed dramatically since I came to this country; however, the eight years of complete dedication to my husband and our three kids who were born here did not take away my passion for language study, and I fell under the spell of Korean language and culture. I studied for pleasure, but I now I also see my knowledge of Korean as a great asset.

At the moment I’m thinking about getting a job in Korea. I know I’m a bit rusty but I’m a capable learner and my hopes are that TESOL training will become a rewarding experience and a sturdy stepping stone to my professional future.

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