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**My Best Teacher**

Over the course of my school years, I had many great teachers who impressed and inspired me with their commitment, passion and dedication to teaching and helping students, as well as their intellect and knowledge. Mr. Arnault, my French composition teacher at high school was one such individual. I first met him in 1997, when I was 4th grade in *ecole secondaire*, which is equivalent to 11th grade in the school system in the United States. He was bespectacled, thin and balding middle aged man who often wore yellow t-shirt and a pair of jeans. In retrospect, he looked a lot like the character Doug Stamper from the TV series, *House of Cards*. I think his composition class was a great success, because all of the students in his class passed the graduation exam, which is a state-administered essay composition test at the end of the final high school year. In the province of Quebec, high school students need to pass the exam in order to graduate, but the test was - and I believe it still is - infamous for its high fail rate which was, if I remember correctly, about 30 percent. The fact that even I, whose entire French vocabulary consisted of just about three words 3 years prior to the test, have passed the exam attests to the effectiveness of Mr. Arnault’s teaching method. What’s even more remarkable is that one of my classmates was a staunch gay activist who stubbornly tried to link any essay theme that came his way to LGBT issues. The mental gymnastics that our composition teacher routinely performed in order to make my friend’s essay work was, to say the least, simply mesmerizing. In the end, even my gay activist friend passed the exam. The final reason why I think his classes were successful was the simple fact that he managed to get 30 something teenagers in his class to write 900 words essays every other day for two years. Of course, there were always some students who did not submit their essays on time, but most of the times, the students did their assignments.

From what I learned from TESOL class, I think my high school teacher was an enabler with traditional style. He spent a significant portion of his class explaining how to plan out and write essays and the students were expected to listen and take notes as necessary. However he never discouraged students from speaking out questions or making comments during the class. He understood well that it was crucial for the students to get on the right track as soon as possible, so welcomed every opportunity to solve and clarify issues the students might have with his explanation or their own essays. Also, he made the students correct their own essays after he was done with the explanation. Sure, it wasn’t the most interesting activity, but was pretty effective as essay writing activities go, because the students could apply what they learned to their own essays and see how it improved them.

There was no doubt that the French composition classes were effective, because I could see that I was getting better at writing a passable essay in a limited time with minimum grammar errors and typos with each passing month. Perhaps I was not being taught to become another Honoré de Balzac or Victor Hugo, but I was in the process of becoming a student who would pass the high school graduation test.

What Mr. Arnault was good at was assessing student’s levels, weaknesses and strengths and plan out appropriate strategy for each of his charges. For example, he’d advise a student who spends too much time to come up with enticing introduction to abandon the part altogether as it will only cost him 15 points or so, and focus on writing solid body and conclusion paragraphs instead. For me, his advice was to stick to the words I know and shorten my essay as much as possible to reduce the number of grammatical mistakes and typos which I found very helpful since I was an intermediate level French speaker at best. Another thing I found especially remarkable about his teaching method was his way of treating the students. Even though none of us was over 18 years-old, he always addressed us with “Mister” or “Miss”, which could have come across as patronizing, but it did not. He did give tongue lashings to unruly or distracted students, but they were in general witty and funny. The students who got reprimanded didn’t take offense most of the time, and even those few times they did, they couldn’t help but laugh with the rest of the class at the teacher’s witticism. Looking back, I think he understood that hurting students’ feelings who were on the verge of adulthood could only affect negatively the students learning process. However, I don’t think Mr. Arnault was well versed in different types of learners or multiple intelligences because he often berated a student who was clearly a kinesthetic-tactile learner for taking every opportunity to stand up and pace around the classroom, much less preparing any classroom activities that uses and stimulates different types of smarts. All his classes consisted of him explaining the students what their mistakes were and how they could be corrected, and then us revising our own essays.

To sum up, I think Mr. Arnault’s teaching method was, albeit simple, a very effective one. He was an enabler with a traditional style. While he spent a lot of time explaining the students’ mistakes and different ways to correct them, he also encouraged his students to ask questions. However, he didn’t use various activities nor do I think he was familiar with concepts like various types of teachers, intelligences or learner modes, but the students who took his classes all passed a very difficult essay composition test, including a non-native speaker whose mastery of language was shaky at best and a very stubborn students who always tried to write about a theme he wanted instead of the one that was given to him. If I ever get a chance to teach a composition class, I’ll probably end up using a different method, because I doubt I have his charm and wit necessary to control in-class dynamics, but I certainly wish that I could one day.

(Word Count: 1,056)