Dean Kim

November 2, 2015

**My Best Teacher**

 The best teacher that I ever had was Susan Bloem, an elderly woman who taught me Afrikaans, a daughter language of Dutch, during my high school career in South Africa. She was my school teacher but also my private lesson teacher. I recall her classes being a great success: she gave simple yet clearly defined explanations in grammar and literature; used many teaching techniques, such as making the class have discussions about a topic, which aided us in keeping a high memory retention rate, but above all she was our mentor from whom we could seek help beyond ‘learning a language’.

 Mrs. Bloem had characteristics of both an involver and an enabler. Having much knowledge of the subject matter and vast experience being a given thing, she incorporated various teaching methods and tried to involve the students by often requesting feedback from students and using interesting activities such as role play. However, she still had a firm control over the class. What also makes her an enabler is that she had a clear awareness of the individual’s and class’ thoughts and feelings. This could be clearly seen by her changing her lesson plan to make it more student-friendly and bringing up relevant topics in order to let the students practise the speaking skill and allow the students to freshen up.

My teacher was closer to a traditional teacher than a modern teacher. Having a greater emphasis on grammar, she would give lectures and make the students memorize the rules. She relied more on textbooks and printed materials than the web and the table arrangement was normally set in a single way although they would be changed when doing group work. This did not meant that her classes were ‘boring’ though. Her teaching method was interactive enough that all the students received an equal amount of attention from her and there was a healthful amount of student-to-student interaction.

Reflecting back on her classes, I believe that she had a fair understanding of language acquisition. Although her focus was primarily on rote learning and memorization, she would often encourage me to make an effort to speak Afrikaans in everyday situations and not just in class. This shows that she does understand that learning is one thing, but being able to speak spontaneously without thinking is ‘acquired’. She understood the Natural Order Hypothesis because she was patient with me in the pre-production phase; complimented me in order to boost my confidence in the early production phase and then started pointing out my errors in the speech emergence and intermediate fluency phase. She also understood the Monitor Hypothesis which is shown by her giving me enough time to think in the beginning and then of course, helping me with the phonology- a focus on form- and then wisely controlling the balance of correction so that neither over correction nor under correction occurred. The Input Hypothesis is where she shined because her lessons were just challenging enough that I actually learned something but at the same time interesting. This was achieved through visual aids and her constant positive feedback was a great support. My teacher also tried her best to maintain a low-anxiety learning environment and keep the students’ motivation and self-confidence high so that they would make mistakes without fear- a clear sign of her understanding of the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

 All in all, I have high respect for Mrs. Bloem. It was clear that she had both theoretical knowledge as well as practical knowledge. Although some people may dislike her traditional-leaned teaching style, I believe that she had the right balance of it and was effective, shown by the increase of marks of many students in her class. For the most part, I would indeed like to teach in a similar style to her even though I would wish to incorporate more modern methods and technologies in to my own teaching. A little bit of less focus on rote learning and more emphasis on discussions in order to improve speaking is another change I would make, but the most important point is being a guide and an advisor not only in teaching language but other aspects of life as well- just like my teacher.