Two Different Learning Experiences of a Second Language in My Life

Class: Tesol 135

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In my country, English is a mandatory course in most of elementary, middle and high schools and people should continue studying English to get a high grade in their college and find a better job. Despite of more than 12 years of learning experiences, it is not easy to find people who feel comfortable in using English in their real life. Luckily, while studying English Language and teaching methodology, I was able to know that this is because teachers are fail to understand and use effective teaching methods to teach English for foreigners. I would like to describe my two completely different experiences of learning a second language in University to simply show when/why it was successful or not.

I majored in English Language & Literature in a University located in Seoul. When I was a sophomore, I took a novel class and our goal was to read three famous American & British novels that were written in 20th Centuries. The teacher was Korean who had studied English literature in the state and she though us in very traditional ways just as English teachers I have met during my entire school life. One semester is not a long time to read three novels so she spent most of the time in class reading key paragraphs by herself and explain what the part means and why the part is important. Needless to say, TTT was very high and the class style was Mug & Jug. The only audio-visual material she used were short video edits of a movie based on the novel we were reading. Also among four language skills, students were only focusing on ‘reading’ thus the retention rate was really low. I definitely can say that it was a failure as my language learning experience.

However, in the next semester, I could have a completely different experience, which was one of the most successful learning experiences in my life. The subject of the class was ‘Linguistics’ which was not familiar to all the students. The teacher was also a Korean who studied abroad and he was even much older than the other teachers but he knew ‘how a teacher is different from an explainer’.

As he knew that most of the students had difficulty in that subject, he limited the number of the students for a class to only 35 and asked us to make small discussion groups consist of 7 people. After his short lecture, each group worked together to prepare its own presentation to teach/mentor other classmates. During this process, STT was absolutely high and the retention rate went up dramatically. In the class, the teacher was an explainer, an enabler and mostly a leader who intrinsically motivated us to find answers by ourselves.

In ‘Andragogy’ study by Malcolm Knowles, he points out that the old theory of education ‘Pedagogy’ is more close to a ‘child education’ and we need a different approach for adults’ education that he calls ‘Andragogy’. The biggest difference between two teachers I have mentioned above was whether he/she knew this knowledge and applied it to her/his teaching or not. My professor in Linguistics did respect students and let us be autonomous and learn by doing. This was the key fact that made the experience the best learning experience I have ever had.