A Second Language

Environment

TESOL Class #140

Teacher: Dulles Schafer

Name: Jung Hye Hyun (jen)

As an English teacher, it’s weird to recall my personal learning experience. Although my teaching goal is based on what I’ve learned before, I never thought that I’ve been familiar with the theory of SLA. However, talking about SLA, we usually mention the processes done by tutored setting, so I am going to explore my own ESL teaching beliefs. I had several second language environments, and here are my stories.

My very first memory of learning English was the time I entered middle school. I and my classmates encountered the whole new world, - literally new words- which we’ve never imagined. The English was challenge itself. I’m not sure that my English teacher had any ideas about theories such as language systems, skills, or VAK and so on. She focused on reading paragraphs and translated into Korean. The text was so simple that I could easily understand and even memorize everything. That was typical traditional classrooms. We didn’t get extra time for vocabulary but had enough time for story. So there was no stress for quiz except excitement that we could read book written in foreign language. Another thing she highlighted was the sounds. The way she taught pronunciation wasn’t well organized but I could mimic American accent. And of course, she didn’t pay attention the individuals’ intelligence. She barely handled each lesson. The class was unusual gifts for both of us. Then I had “The National Listening Test”, which I almost got but misspelled “apple”. From that time I had vocabulary trauma until graduating university. Vocabulary became everything to me, but without context, the worlds weren’t come to me.

Time goes by, I entered the university. My major didn’t seem to need English at all. The colleagues bought “VOCA 2200”, “Toefl Test” and joined the clubs like “Times”, “New York Daily”. I ignored that, it not costing me at all. After graduating, I wanted to study abroad. So I enrolled “The preparation of Toefl Test” class. But the day I attended was the last day of class, because the vocabulary killed me. After searching school, I found the training center for flight attendant and pilot. The school had different objective. The teachers understood the methodology. They were involver and drew our personal intelligences. I had to speak only English and that was my first EFL. We practiced conversation which was needed to communicate with experts but didn’t focus on grammar. They picked our weakness and helped change to productive skills by using VAK. I learned how to express my ideas. It was a dynamic, modern class which presented both exciting and devastating. However, the more I learn, the more I feel empty. I needed more than practicing.

Finally, the following year I was at the immigration office in LAX, saying “Hi”. There was one course which many foreign students scared to death. It was “English 101”. This is the gate for freshmen and it’s hard for Korean who just passed TOEFL. I needed to check my language ability and prepare for the essay assignment, so took it. The professor was authentic English teacher who taught the usage, lexis and communicative skills. I was happy to step on the advanced academic course. He pointed the main concept in the book and told us to read and asked how we think. Most of the students were native speakers who really need to improve their skills. And I was sitting there, waiting for a great lecture which could meet my expectation. But I didn’t get into the fact that why we were all mixed and what was the assignments for until I accomplished it. He was an enabler who changed my attitude for learning languages.

Looking back the process, I feel that I was lucky to meet the special teachers and also realize that there were more teachers I’ve never imagined. My apartment managers who always responded my questions, clerks working in the grocery who explained about my curiosity, and neighborhood who comforted me like family were there, as well. And most of all, I had TV station. I could be visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learner. I was accustomed to hear what they said and catch the meaning, imitated them, and gestured like them. Each channel had special intelligence so I choose what I want; News for 24 hours, sitcom, drama, sports. It was never boring. I was with J Leno at night and Oprah Winfrey in the afternoon. Isn’t it amazing?

References:

Jim, Scrivener. (2010) Learning Teaching – The Essential Guide to English Language Teaching (3rd edition). Oxford: Macmillan Books For Teachers.

Ellis, R. (1985) Understanding second language acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.