Learning a New Language: Challenges and Joys

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I started having interests in learning a language when I traveled to some European countries a few years ago. Since then, English has always been a source of pleasure and given me many chances to have a broader understanding of the world. Looking back, I realized that I have met many language teachers, some of whom played an important role in my life in terms of not only improving language skills, but also building self-confidence. Now I remember one particular teacher who I met in an interpretation and translation program in Vancouver. Thanks to the teacher, I could continue to pursue my study after returning to Korea.

There were certain requirements in order to enter the program such as TOEIC score or TOEFL. Back then, I had never taken such tests, so couldn’t meet the requirements. Obviously, I was unqualified due to my lack of linguistic skills, but With 3 month-long hard working I managed to get into the program as the last person in the class. I was determined to reach my goal (goal-oriented): improving English skills to some degree where I could read news articles in English and interpret back and forth between Korean and English. Even though I felt that I was falling behind, my inner motivation was strong enough to get through the stress and pressure (intrinsic motivation).

I liked the program and the contents for the class as they were practical and real issues that we face every now and then (practical). At first, I was merely trying to take in the words of an article and barely understood the whole concept, but after putting a lot of efforts and time, I became more comfortable at reading and better at it. It helped me build and broaden my perspective of the world.

Sometimes, the teacher made us look for news articles ourselves based on individuals’ interests within a big topic (modern classrooms: consider individual interests). He was a little different from some other teachers whom I had met before in Korea in a way that he didn’t give many lectures in the classroom. Instead, he asked the students to explain what we learned from the articles to the rest of the classmates, leading to high STT and low TTT (enabler). Basically, he introduced a topic of the class and a background to an article, if necessary, in the beginning of the class. Other than creating a condition in which the students can concentrate on the subject properly and making sure everyone was participating in the class, he only involved when students asked him about questions (managerial).

As I mentioned earlier, it was a big challenge for me to keep up with the interpretation and translation course. When I was struggling with the class, the teacher helped me get through all the course by supporting and encouraging me to keep on working. I honestly thought completing the course was above my ability. When I had a chance to speak with the teacher, I got off my chest, saying that I was truly happy and already satisfied with the fact that I could attend the course and that I wasn’t dreaming of finishing up with a good score. After listening to what I said patiently, he empathized and shared his similar experience too (empathy). Although he didn’t really push me hard, with his proper guidance and advice, I was able to come up with better ways to study which were effective based on my personality and my intelligences, and finally receive the diploma with a fairly good score in the end.

One of the main reasons I could keep my interests in English alive is because the teacher respected me fully in the class and English itself gives me joy. Not only was the teacher my mentor, but he had an effective way of teaching skills. I realized good teachers can be unforgettable. I wish many Korean teachers including me could offer students various ways of teaching techniques by incorporating the knowledge and techniques all together, and be remembered as a caring and competent teacher.