A journey of English learning

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There are more and more people learning and speaking English nowadays. In fact, English is the most widely spoken language in the world. It has become more important not only to get into schools, companies but also to get promotions, benefits and opportunities from work places. This is the main reason why I learned English as my second language.

My first experience of learning English was demanding, challenging, and boring. In Korea, it was mandatory for students to learn English since middle school. The class mainly focused on the textbooks. The English teacher was merely an explainer. Even though she knew the subject very well, I could not see her passion or enthusiasm toward us. The English class in middle/high school started with her brief explanation about our lesson of the day and the main contents written on the white board. He/she explained the meaning of the grammar, vocabulary and had students read the books and solve the problems. We hardly spoke or asked unless the teacher told us what to do. Furthermore, there were more than 40 people in my class so we did not have many chances to suggest/ask problems or opinions.

Sometimes, the teacher recommended us to use the personal audio player as a learning assistant tool. We learned pronunciation through the CD player. We heard the pronunciation first then rewind and forwarded the same sound over and over.

We took a vocabulary test in each class and should be expecting the random questions during the class.

In mid-term/final exams, there were multiple choices and short-answer questions, however, there were no essays that required creative and personal stories. I had to spend lots of time on memorizing vocabulary, grammar and practice reading as well as listening. Since I studied for long time, I usually got good result on exams but easily forgot them after several months.

It was almost 100% one-sided, teacher-centered class and students are mostly passive. There was limited knowledge of teaching methodology and limited communication between teachers and students. As teachers usually taught same thing every year to the same grade students, it was hard for them to be inspiring, motivated and passionate about teaching.

I don’t like to admit but this is the truth of the traditional English classroom in Korea.

After graduation of the university in Korea, I decided to study Fashion Merchandising Management in New York City. Since I got a good TOEFL score, I would not worry living abroad. However, it was not easy. There were a lot of projects to interview with people in the fashion industry that I was not familiar with and it required a good personality, communication along with organizing skill;.

My teacher of the Creative Fashion Industry took the whole hour to figure out her students and shared her background with ours. In class, she encouraged us to lead a class with a group discussion and Q&A among students after each presentation. Most of all, she was a good listener and encouraged us to ask whenever we needed. I communicated with her after class and sometimes, emailed her.

I had the worst and best teachers so far.

My best teacher was generous, attentive, respectful and open-minded. She understood students from other countries and tried to give positive and detailed feedbacks after each project we had. It was my first experience to meet a teacher who was student-centered.

In conclusion, it is very essential for students to interact with a good teacher to make the best profit in learning. Like I mentioned above, we see the characteristics of the best and worst teachers I experienced.

To be the effective teacher, we need to be creative, observant, patient and respectful as well as well organized and most of all, should have a great responsibility that comes with our profession.