Sean Kim

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Passion, Patience and Understanding

What memories do you have 20 years ago? This is a long time back, and I am sure that many would not remember the exact incidents of what happened in the year 1998, whether it be personal or historic. To jog our memories, let’s take a flash back of 20 years ago. The financial crisis was at its peak in Korea and France was crowned winner of the World Cup series. Even though there were many ongoing events which were interesting or important, my vivid memories of back when I was in my 6th grade involved a great teacher, Mr. Kim Jong-Hoon. He taught us all the required mandatory subjects all Korean students had to learn in elementary school, from Korean and math to music and physical education. I’m sure that many of my past peers can argue that his teaching methods were not up-to-date and a little harsh from time to time. However, in my point of view, Mr. Kim’s classes and time I spent with him were always helpful. His passion for education, patience with the students, and understanding of each individual’s academic level status was what made him a true teacher.

Mr. Kim, our home room teacher, was harsh at times, especially when his students did not complete assignments or were rude in class. He made a very strict set of policies for us which we had comply with. However, we could all see that his rules were set for the sake of educating us and drawing out our potential to its fullest. The basic and stern rules were the foundation for his students to study and benefit from his classes. Without completing assignments, there were many situations in where his students could not follow up with the class. Through strictly making students to complete homework, which were very often assignments which needed teamwork, creative thinking, and self-assessment, he enabled us to motivate ourselves and benefit not only academically from his classes but develop a sense of interest.

Methods of teaching have evolved throughout history. The traditional and modern teaching techniques have its strengths and weaknesses. Also another large factor which goes into teaching involves the number students which are in a certain class room. Our classroom with Mr. Kim had a total of more than forty children, which is not common these days. Students were packed and squeezed into a lecture room. And back then there were no large TV screens or internet to aid the class. However, through a combination of the conservative and contemporary teaching skills, Mr. Kim made interesting classes. The main point was communication. He would always ask us our opinions on subjects and matters as we learned. However, he did also use traditional methods of teaching. We would sometimes just have to memorize important quotes from a book and be tested. All in all, this teaching combination method worked on a majority of the large student group.

I had just come back to Korea when I met Mr. Kim from Britain, after a long absence of nine years; from age three to twelve. My mother language could be assumed as English back then. I could only understand half of his instructions and explanations at first. But I could see that Mr. Kim wanted me to get more involved in his classes since he would especially ask me in particular if I understood what assignments I had to do, and even spent more time with me after class periods to see that I was following with the academic schedule. He understood about my situation and gave consideration that student levels were different. I can firmly assert that, if it wasn’t for him, I would have had a much harder time in adapting into the Korean education curriculum.

There are surely many teacher types and also techniques and skill sets of teaching students in a classroom. Mr. Kim used a combination of all methods and techniques to efficiently guide us through our 6th grade. He was at times strict. However, he still knew how to motivate us. We could feel his passion for us and most importantly, he tried to communicate with us at all times. I have always seen him as my role model in teaching and have learned immensely from his classes. Through his communication skills and activities, he increased participation and interest rates of his students, in and out of the classroom. In my opinion he knew the core essence of what education is, and through this passion of education, he was able to play a large role in my first steps of learning Korean.