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My Experience in Learning English in an English Speaking Country

I went to London about 15 years ago to study English after taking time off from University. I enrolled in an intermediate course of a language school and met a middle-aged female teacher. I unfortunately don’t remember her name now but remember her as the best teacher I’ve met so far. When I just arrived in London, I spoke only basic expressions in English and hardly spoke long sentences. My confidence in speaking English was low and I had difficulties in continuing conversation with classmates, but she encouraged me a lot and corrected my English when she heard wrong expressions or words. Thanks to her teaching, I reached the upper intermediate course after six months since I took her course. Looking back on her class, she was an enabler and an effective teacher who taught us in the modern teaching style.

Firstly, she was an enabler as she gave us many chances to practice English conversation with classmates in groups and paid attention to each group to give feedback. The number of students was around ten and she switched conversation partners by turns so all students had a chance to talk with different partners. When all conditions for students to discuss with each other were ready, she told us to discuss topics by ourselves and she didn’t intervene but listened to us. It was actually very helpful to talk about the same topic in a different perspective using different expressions by switching partners. She only listened till all classmates talked with different partners and asked us to speak up about what was discussed and then, gave us feedback. Like this, she always gave us a chance to talk in groups and let us lead the class by ourselves. Actually, her first impression was like a strict teacher, but she was friendly and active more than anyone else when teaching. When I had to speak up in front of my classmates and was struggling for expressing what I wanted to say, she carefully listened and helped me to continue what I was trying to say. In the circumstance that I might have been very embarrassed, she was a great enabler who helped me to finish my presentation and boosted my confidence.

Secondly, she taught us in the modern teaching style. Her teaching was student-centered and she always gave us plenty of chances to have a discussion with classmates and to speak up about our opinions. I actually had bias that teachers of the old generation tend to stick to the traditional teaching style and lead their class in their own way, but she was the person who broke my bias. The material she taught us with was just a textbook but she often came up with new ideas like games and role-paly, etc. for us not to lose an interest but to have fun till the class was over. We spontaneously participated in the games and role-play and we led the whole process by ourselves without her visible involvement. After we were done with the games or role-play, she first asked us how we felt about it and gave us feedback. This way of her teaching English is still memorable as she made all of us participate in and enjoy her class. By letting us participate voluntarily in group work and providing a friendly and relaxing atmosphere, we felt more familiar with English and enjoyed the group work. What I think important in teaching is to provide an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable and friendly so students can keep an interest in study and join the class enjoyably. She was surely a student-centered teacher who helped us lead the class by ourselves, not controlling us.

Lastly, she was an effective teacher who had these three qualifications; authenticity, respect and empathy. Authenticity in teaching, I think, is recognizing students’ feelings, keeping a relationship with students, choosing teaching techniques considering students’ individual level and critically self-reflecting on teaching. There were around ten students in the course. On the first day, she let us introduce ourselves first and she also introduced herself. After getting to know each other, awkward feelings soon disappeared and we felt much closer. This friendly atmosphere made us discuss not only with other students but also with the teacher, freely. And her modern teaching style was so effective that all students enjoyed themselves in group work and learnt so much about English expressions and cultures, etc. by talking with students from different countries. Another qualification she had is that she always showed respect with a positive way of speaking. Her attitude in treating us was so gentle and respectful that I felt she was not thinking she was superior to us but she actually treated us equally as herself. We also showed respect to her and our relationship became closer like friends as time went by. Thanks to this atmosphere, discussing and sharing stories with each other became more comfortable and easier. Also, it was very impressive that she knew how to empathize with us. When we were giving our opinions, she always carefully listened to us and asked us why we were thinking that and then, she said that she liked certain parts of our opinions and kindly added other ideas. Teachers might tend to stick to only their own stories but she liked listening to us and sharing stories. The way she tried to get close to us was very helpful to keep a good relationship with each other, to share ideas and to learn more about English.

In conclusion, she was such a good teacher as an enabler teaching effectively in the modern teaching style. She didn’t visibly control the class but the class went well by our spontaneous participation in activities without her intervention. Her student-centered teaching style embodied all qualifications that teachers should have; authenticity, respect and empathy. These qualifications of her proves that she was an effective teacher and made us not to lose an interest in the class but have fun by letting us join the group work, voluntarily. Thanks to her modern teaching style, I enjoyed the class and was able to finish the course with my English ability improved. Someday when I become an English teacher, I want to teach students by modeling her teaching techniques and her attitude in treating students.