Sohyun/Sunny Kim

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Three women who taught me Chinese

If I recall my memory, how to study Chinese, it was by chance that I took Chinese as an elective course. When I was junior in the university, I had to choose one of the elective course, and Chinese seemed alright; since that was basic course designed to teach Chinese within a year as basic and intermediate level. After I had completed the basic course, I chose the intermediate level again consecutively, and I kept studying Chinese in China in the coming year. There were three people who mainly inspired, encouraged and led me to study Chinese; they had something in common. Firstly, they had a passion in teaching as well as empathy with students and respect. Secondly, they were enabler type of teachers using modern style teaching skills, and I believe somehow they already knew how to maximize learner’s retention rates by customizing different learner’s modes. Mrs. Yoshimoto, who was my basic and intermediate Chinese lecturer, Mrs. Lee, who was reading teacher at Harbin Educational University and lastly Ms. Liu who was the most influential teacher in adapting Chinese when I was in China.

I met Mrs. Yoshimoto as a Chinese professor, and interestingly she was Japanese who mainly taught Japanese literature at my university. She had completed her degree in China, and wanted to teach Chinese in order to keep her Chinese skills. From that point of view, she always wanted to sharpen her Chinese and shared with students, this attitude was helping students to keep their interests in Chinese too. Because of such attitudes toward studying language, she was able to use effective teaching skills very wisely; her ability to emphasize with other students as a second language learner made her an excellent teacher. She was the one who encouraged me and challenged me to learn more about Chinese. Our Chinese class was not very popular so the class was relatively small, this enabled her to give us suitable feedback within class-hour. Even it was not mandatory course, she was very enthusiastic to teach students and tried to utilize the class-hour most out of it. By practically using small quizzes, students could check their own progress in class. Apart from the textbook, she properly used visual aids as well as other things like old Chinese songs, and we never lost our interests in the subjects. I am not sure that she knew Carl Rogers’ ‘effective teaching’ qualities, she naturally used all these skills; authenticity and respect based on empathy with students.

After I took the elective courses, I decided to study Chinese further in China. Also the experience of travelling China for a month during the summer vacation urged me to go to China. In senior year, I went to China and I met Mrs. Lee who was, reading teacher, in charge of my class. Among classmates, I was the only one who was not majored in Chinese and I barely understood the lecture. Because such an environment, I was pressured with high anxiety with low self-confidence. When we read the passage in the textbook out loud, I used to mumble because I could not follow the speed of others and there were so many words which I do not know. Whenever I stopped to read the passage, she often stood close to me encouraging keep read it through with others. During the class, we took turns talking about our daily life and by doing that we could expand our vocabulary in a self-motivated way. I think she already knew how to establish the favorable environment to acquire Chinese for beginners. She wanted to boost self-esteem and inspire the motivation for students. According to the Stephen Krashen’s theory, Affective Filter Hypothesis, there are four factors which enhance learners’ language acquisition, and Mrs. Lee understood that. Additionally as a main teacher of our class, she advised us separately to enhance our weakest subjects. Whenever she gave us feedback, she provided us useful tips improving our skills just by assigning us slightly difficult homework. By completing such practices, we could go beyond our level gradually. As a result, after the first semester, I could skip the grade. I believe she effectively utilized the Input Hypothesis.

At last, Ms. Liu was my precious friend and teacher who taught me in modern style teaching. Originally she was my friend’s private lecturer and luckily we became friends. She majored in Education and understood useful ways enhancing language acquisition according to learner’s modes. Whenever we met, we talked about variety of subjects; from the ancient Chinese history to the popular dramas. She used to show me different books, videos and many other visual aids at the same time I heard so many interesting stories about various subjects. While we talked, there were many unknown vocabulary and expressions, which led to my questions. Even I asked her more than enough questions, she never got bored and explained those until I got it. Also she asked me what I learned at class to her, by doing that I could review and correct my mistakes. One thing for sure was she is natural born enabler teacher, who had a warm-heart. Outside of the class, she was best teacher I ever had who knew how to improve learner’s retention rates very effectively.

I was very lucky to meet all three enabler teachers when I acquired Chinese. They were all great teachers who had effective teaching skills with modern teaching style based on deep understanding about the leaners’ modes. I wish to be an enabler teaching style teacher who can build a rapport with students and establish favorable environments to some extent. As those teachers do, I would like to teach my students with empathy based on respect and be authentic.