Become a Positive Reward Yourself!

TESOL 75 / Soo-Yeon Kim

Essay Assignment #2

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*“Practice is the best of all instructors.” – Publilius Syrus*

I agree with this statement for I believe that exposure and practice is the only way a person can learn a language. Therefore, should I become an English teacher, I would stick to the “English Only” policy.

Back in year 2003, I had been hired as a teacher at SELC[[1]](#endnote-2). SELC was rather strict about its “English Only” policy and at that time I had doubts for I thought it might bring silence to the classrooms, keep students from asking questions and so forth. However, penalization and prizes were used to enforce the policy. Teachers would give stamps to students when they did a good job, and when they collected 100 stamps they could exchange the stamps for one of the prizes the institution had prepared. Usually the students couldn’t wait to collect 100 stamps just because the prize was something they so much wanted. Thus, SELC used positive rewards to encourage students into using English. On the other hand, they also used negative punishments for teachers would erase stamps should the student speak in Korean.

I had seen even the shyest students try to speak in English just to get stamps, which proved that if the reward is strong enough, you could probably encourage anyone to speak. It’s just a matter of finding the right reward. Based on my previous experience at SELC, I have come to agree that an “English Only” policy should be embedded in all English institutions, and positive rewards and negative punishments could act as reinforcement tools. As mentioned above, you need to provide the right rewards and punishments, and therefore these would differ depending on the students. While toys and snacks might be considered a good prize for younger students, these may not work for older students. However, as older students are more goal-oriented, they would be more conscious about their performance and grades. Therefore, implementing a grading system, as Times Tesol is doing, and giving bonus points for use of English and checking off grades when Korean is used might work. Of course, in the long run, prizes alone will not be enough. However, by implementing this method, I believe students may get to feel a sense of achievement, which would also reinforce their speaking, and eventually become a habit.

Other than the “English Only” policy, there are 2 major factors I would consider a “must,” and these would be punctuality and attendance. As I had mentioned in my first essay, making a joyful, exciting classroom would be a goal to have, for this classroom atmosphere would promote students’ participation. This could probably be a positive reward, for students would ‘want’ to come to class.

While I believe teachers should keep a friendly relationship with students, I still believe some authoritative figures are needed to prevent the negativities, such as absences and tardiness. Therefore, while doing my best to make an entertaining class, I’d also use positive punishments, such as having students do the activities they had missed as homework or have students erase the board during their breaks[[2]](#endnote-3). Again, the punishments would differ depending on the student or class profile.

As for long termed assignments that might take a whole year to prepare, I’d probably go over the assignment with each student and assist them in breaking the assignment down into smaller projects. Then, I’d have them make a calendar or schedule for which they’ll do their broken-down projects and meet regularly with each student to make sure they’re preparing the project according to schedule and check if they’re having any difficulties in doing so. For younger students, I’d check more often, maybe on a weekly basis, or maybe every other week. However, I believe older students are more responsible and therefore I’d meet with them less often, probably on a monthly basis or so.

Based on my past experiences and what I’ve just noted above, the most important thing the teacher needs to work on is trying to make a classroom environment where students want to come, rather than having to come due to responsibility. Having said this, I’d like to become a teacher like Ben, our current teacher at Times Tesol. His enthusiasm would have been enough to keep me concentrating through the lesson plans, but all his activities just make it more exciting and has me waiting for the next class to see what we’ll be doing next. In that sense, Ben, himself is a positive reward, and that’s what I’d like to be as well.

1. A private English institution located in Bundang, Gyeonggi Province, teaching mostly elementary school students. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Having students erase the board during their break could be regarded a positive punishment in the sense that I would be applying a punishment on them, but could also be regarded a negative punishment since I would be taking their break time away. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)