81 TESOL YL WEEKEND

Ian (Juhyun Park)

ASSIGNMENT #1

Am I a Teacher

Who will Never be Forgotten?

In the first place, God made idiots. That was for practice. Then he made school boards.

-Mark Twain

I asked myself “Am I a teacher that will be remembered by my students in the future?” I couldn’t answer it or I just wanted to evade the answer. I have been teaching English for about 5 years since I quit my former job. I used to work as a computer programmer and I was paid well but I realized that it was time to step back from my work that’s because I had chemistry with English but there was nothing to do with English at the company because I designed and programmed devices. Apparently I have done my best exertion to be responsible for what I decided. Currently, I have three goals. One is to be the best teacher in my town. Another is to teach students at an orphanage when I am middle-aged. The other is to be remembered by my students in the future as the best teacher whom they have ever met. How can I be the best teacher as I mentioned above? To figure this out, I’m now reflecting with my eyes closed to find the best teacher that I have ever had in my life. Back in 1992, there was a little boy wearing dirty clothes. I assume that he was wearing hand-down clothes. He didn’t look neat but his homeroom teacher approached him and said “You look great! I like your style.” It was actually one of the starting points that made him feel confident. It was me. He praised the students for everything. I felt that he didn’t loved just one class. He loved every student that he taught. I really believe that he was the best teacher who I have ever had. That is because he paid attention to the students and he was far above the other teachers in teaching his subject. At that time, our education system was not brilliant so the teachers were just explainers. This educational environment caused students to never have a chance to experience what they learned. Nevertheless, without doubts, my teacher was not only an explainer but also an involver. The reason why I think this way is that he was not obsessed with the text book. He used to get his students involved and no matter what he taught he gave them a chance to experience and practice what they learned. Three activities that we did with him are unforgettable. First of all, he used to ask us to move all the chairs to rear of the class and we enjoyed kinesthetic activities. Although we studied about some topics that were not related to activities, he tried to let us experience and learn it by ourselves. We made small groups to teach each other about what we had learned. I wonder how he knew the retention rates at that time and used epoch-making methods. The last impressive thing he did was that he taught a song named ‘Love Is’ everyday. It starts with ‘love always endures, love is meek and gentle’. It has been twenty years but I still remember the lyrics and I feel like I had grown full of love.

I owe him a debt of gratitude. Without him, I could have not become an English teacher. Here is another story about my teacher. Twenty years ago in Korea, an elementary school didn’t offer any subject related to English. No one could speak English. Ironically, there used to be English speaking contests. I can just guess that contest existed for rich students who had studied at a private language school or studied abroad. I absolutely wanted to participate in the contest and my teacher was willing, even eager, to help me. Even though we ended up only winning a prize of participation, the prize encouraged me to study English harder.

If someone asked me what teaching is, I would probably tell them that “Teaching is like watering plans.” We care for plants, give them warmth and watch them when they are growing up. If we interact with students genuinely and honestly, they will grow for themselves. If we keep watering too much without taking care of them or warmth, they will definitely die.

I have my own philosophy. Teaching is not a lecture but letting students experience what they learn. For instance, suppose that I’m teaching a grammar class to 12-year-old students, I need to make my lesson clear and simple. I don’t have to use up whole the class. I can just explain twenty minutes to make them understand and I need to get them involved through group activities and teaching themselves. I strongly believe that balancing between explaining and involving is one of the most important parts in teaching English as a second language and teachers could be enablers as well. I’m the king in the class and also I can impart my enthusiasm. Unless I slack off, they will respond to my authentic truth. It is my philosophy and I will keep it in my mind always. I will do everything I can to be the best teacher and struggle to be a teacher that will never be forgotten by students. I think my fate is sealed. I was born to be an English teacher. All I have to do is do what I believe I am here to do.