AhYoung’s Learning English Experience

TM TESOL 87

Learning the second language is not an easy thing. However, teaching second language and being a good second language teacher is harder. I remember two English teachers from my childhood. The first teacher was from my middle school in Korea and the other teacher was my ESL teacher in the United States. Both were my English teachers but they were not the same. One of them gave me a horrible memory and fear of English and the other teacher just opened the door to learn English.

Learning English in Korea is not a good memory for me. I learned English from the 7th grade through the 12th grade with so many different Korean English teachers in Korea.

I remember exactly the first time I learned English. I was in the 7th grade in Korea and I was so excited about learning a new language. I even remember the teacher’s name. His name was Sung June Park and he was in his early fifty when I was in the 7th grade. He was very strict and his teaching style was like the ‘explainer’. The first day of class he came to the room and he stood in front of us and said “The only way to learn a second language is memorizing. There is no easy way to learn a second language.” After saying that he wrote twenty five words on the board and made us memorize them for the next day. During the class he only lectured which was 50 minutes long. He and the students never had any interaction and he even did not ask any questions during his lecture.

We, students, only took notes all the time and if we tried to ask a question he always said “After the class. We do not have time for your question. I need to teach you guys so many things today.” Also, he gave out a lot of homework which was memorizing more than 100 words per week. Every Monday he gave us a quiz and if we got the wrong answers, he gave physical punishment.

Most of my classmates’ English level was upper beginner but I believe we had different characteristics from each other. However, the teacher never thought about it. We were only visual learner at that time and I can say the effectiveness of his teaching was very low. The teacher was an explainer and I do not think it is a good teaching style for the second language teacher.

Because of that teacher I did not have any interest in English anymore and furthermore I had fear of English and did not want to speak in English in front of people. Since I am not good at memorizing vocabulary I almost gave up learning English. However, when I went to the America I had to take an ESL class. When I first took ESL class I had fear in English. At that time, I knew how to read English and understand what the teacher was trying to say to me but I did not know how to speak in English. However, I experienced different teaching style from my ESL teacher. The first day of my ESL class she introduced herself to students and we had to introduce ourselves to each other. I was so nervous and I did not know what to say. When my turn came I could only say my name and that was it. There was a silence and I was worried about what the teacher going to say to me. I thought she was going to yell or force me to say more. But she smiled and looked at me and said “Nice to meet you, AhYoung. I want to know you more so you can talk later when you are comfortable.” It was a great experience. After that class I was not scared to talk in English at least in her class. She was very friendly and she wanted to listen about my opinion. She was very authentic to herself, tried to understand problems students had and always respected students. She never forced me to memorize vocabulary which I never was going to use in my life. She had a very warm heart and she wanted to understand students’ stress toward coming to a new country and learn a second language. In the class she demonstrated and explained the subject very well. Also she often divided us into groups and had discussion about students’ thoughts. She was an involver teacher type because she knew the subject very well and made students involved in class. The teacher was aware that all students have different characteristics from one another. All students were autonomous, required relevancy, had life experience and knowledge, were goal-oriented, or should be respected. During the class we read a book and listed to the teacher and did presentations in front of the class. Also we wrote short essays.

Having the ESL class with her was very lucky. Because of her I became interested in English again and I found out the way to learn English is not only memorizing.

Since I experienced two different teachers I know what the better way to teach second language to students is. I want to be like my ESL teacher in the United State. I want to be an involver type of teacher. Also, I will understand, respect my students and share each student’s characteristics. I want to work with students to create the condition to make learning English possible. Even though learning a new language is hard I want to help people to learn English with out fear and pressure.