**The Second Language Environment that I have experienced**

**submitted by Jeanhee Rah (T 88)**

I started learning English in 1976, when I entered middle school. I was 13 when I first wrote English alphabet. At that time, there were not many tools to learn foreign languages, let a lone English. I was lucky to have a recorder, through which I could listen to native speakers reading of English text book. It was rather obligatory, as the recorder was given to me for study purpose, for me to practice English at that time. I played the recorder wearing headphone, and repeatedly followed speakers’ voice. A surprising moment happened. When I put away the headphone and imitated speakers’ English words, I felt that my pronunciation sounded differently. It was a very pleasantly exciting experience that I still remembered that moment.

I enjoyed speaking English, however, English class at school was rather reading and writing oriented. Grammar was far more important and the English tests focused on reading. English conversation was almost impossible in the class because there were almost 60 students in a class. English teaching was very much traditional – much chalk talk, lecture based on passive students, individual work, text book focus, accuracy was emphasized. In other words, it was teacher centered with limited students’ participation. It was a typical traditional teaching, not like that of modern where teachers played a facilitator role.

Come to think of it, the teaching style of my English teachers at school days was stereotyped. They were all explainer type. There were teachers who tried to be an enabler, but did not work alright. All the teachers, unfortunately, explained the meaning of the words, explained sentence structures and explained how to articulate. I hardly remember I had opportunities to research and present the word meaning myself. I never collected sound samples and communicated with other students. Certainly the teaching style was one-way relationship from teacher to student and there was hardly a good teaching methodology. There are many effective teaching qualities i.e. really listen to students, enthusiastic, knows the subject matter well, patent, emphasizes with student’s problems, honest, authentically him/herself, well organized, shows respect, gives clear, positive feedback, etc. The most important teaching quality is to communicate clearly. In this regard, the second language environment that I experienced was lacking communication too. I wish my middle and high school teachers learned about Carl Rogers’ ideal qualities of teacher of EAR - Empathy, Authenticity and Respect.

Sadly enough, after I graduated from high school, most of the English class I experienced was very traditional. There were not much difference and the classroom environment did not much change. I don’t think it is because the teachers did not know about good teaching, rather the environment they faced did not allow them to employ what they learned as teachers. There were simply too many students and the classroom was too small to do any activity for students regardless their ages.

I remember some private language institutes that I recently enrolled and learned understand adult learners. They seemed to know about Malcolm Knowles’ five characteristics of adult learners, which are adult learners are autonomous and self-directed, goal-oriented, relevancy oriented and they need to be shown respect not to mention of being life-experienced and knowledgeable. I clearly the learning environment for second language in Korea is changing for the better. Students are far more globalized, teachers are full of knowledge geared with teaching techniques, and teaching materials and hard wares are sophisticated. I cannot even compare the days I started learning English. The second language environment now has completely changed. The future generation will enjoy this state-of-the-art teaching method. I am glad that I can enjoy the part of it now.