**Essay : Second Language Acquisition Assignment**

TESOL Class 95th Weekday

Name : ANA(NangYou Kim)

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In Korea, the middle & high school curriculum is generally divided into more than 10 subjects including English. And English is considered as the most important subject. I had my first English class in the first year of junior high school. Before the class I even didn’t know the English alphabet and it didn’t take long to memorize twenty-six letters to avoid punishment. Since then I had no objection to the English education system in Korea before I actually needed to speak in English. Why is the education system in Korea inadequate when it comes to foreign language learning? Why can’t Koreans communicate in English despite all the efforts? In this situation, what should I do as an ESL teacher?

I had met my first English teacher in the Hagwon(private education institute in Korea) in the first semester of a middle-school. She was a ruthless ruler in the small classroom. When she cracked the whip, everyone did not dare to make eye contact with her. We studied a chapter a week and must memorize the whole chapter both verbally and in writing, after listening the teachers’ belief explanation of the basic rules of grammar & vocabularies. If students failed to pass the verbal & writing text, would suffer corporal punishment. Almost of all the students got very good grades in school and the teacher got a reputation. The problem came up after entering the high-school. I came to know I had surprisingly little knowledge about the subjects I score 98 or 100 percent in and also since I had joined another Hagwon which was less strict, my motivation for studying English was vanished. Because I studied English to escape physical punishment.

The first place I learned English of my own free will was a private institute in the Philippines. Since I was too used to the explainer teacher and traditional class, I couldn’t adjust to the new education surroundings easily. Moreover I was a rigid adult learner with my own opinions, values and beliefs which had been built up over 29 years and also worried about being the oldest person in a class and concerned about the impact this might have on my ability to participate with young students. Fortunately some teachers treated me as mature person and were strict enough to guide me in the right direction as well. Also, the Filipino teachers showed empathy for my situation as a second language learner like them and it relieved me tremendously.

Through out 8 hours of conversation classes a day, I started to speak in English. During the class, the teacher gave me a topic and managed the conversation a little and then let me talk and talk. Some teachers recorded what I said and reviewed it later, while others didn’t pick my error out unless I asked them to do. Both ways worked well for me. At that day, I was so eager to learn English so I didn’t find studying 8 hours a day very hard at all. For three months in the Philippines, I believed I got a good result. But as the day of departure for Canada approached, I grew more and more nervous. I was quiet afraid to speak in English in front of native speakers.

In Canada, I had met my first native speaker friend. Contrary to my expectation, I felt I was spinning my wheels with my English. In the school, all the classes were full of activities and group projects. The teachers let us work in pairs or in groups on the project. Almost all of students brought their laptop to prepare presentation and other activities. Once a month, we watched a movie together and discussed it later. Everything was interesting and fun. The teachers were authentically themselves and try to listen to students. But I was frustrated with the real-world situations outside the class. The teachers were nice enough to speak slowly and habituated to hear Korean accent. But the barrister at Starbucks didn’t understand my order well and I didn’t understand exactly what the waiter said. By then I met my Canadian friend by chance. He used to work as an English teacher in Canada and Africa and he was interested in learning Korean. We had a regular meeting and he invited me dinners to with his family from time to time. They let me ‘pick-up’ English just by living and communication at real life. I started to feel a little confident and I didn’t study English out of necessity anymore, I was starting to like English. The best thing my friend did for me was guiding me to read the original book in English and since then it’s a hobby of my life. It helps me a lot to keep up my interest in English and like Krashen’s reading hypothesis, the more I read in English the greater vocabulary will be.

Until now, I have looked back at my steps of learning English and it seems it’s time to add in some more steps that I can take. Since I’m taking a course about teaching English to speakers of other languages, I can’t help thinking about who a good ESL teacher is. One thing I can say from my experiences is it’s not related with what teaching methods the teachers use. Of course there is the more effective way of teaching for a particular condition. But in my opinion, the most important thing is the way teachers treat students. Since their job is not just pouring knowledge to students, the teachers is a guide to lead students to have interest in English and motivate them to learn by really listening them, empathizing them and respecting them.