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Secondary Language Acquisition Experience

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TESOL 106

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Depending on teaching techniques and class atmosphere, students can develop different experiences regarding language learning. I have experienced language learning in numerous environments and believe that a language class should have both input and output, not lean towards a single side. For effective teaching, it is important to involve students and actively engage them in various activities, so they can learn successfully. Below, I have used examples to illustrate the three teacher types and the effects they can have on learning.

The first example of a personal learning experience was in a French class in Korea. In a typical traditional classroom environment, the teacher was only an 'Explainer'. She explained and read grammatical examples from the textbook and only used receptive language skills. The teacher simply stood in front of the class and there were no special activities, visual aids, handouts, role plays or any other materials to support the explanations, besides the blackboard. STT was always low and after exams students did not remember much of the materials they had learned. Due to the 'chalk & talk' characteristics of the class, students were not motivated at all to learn French. Furthermore, because of the teaching style with extremely high TTT, there was also no rapport. The students were there to prepare for tests and repeat after the teacher like a machine, doing the same action over and over again. One and a half years of deductive French classes left me with some basic vocabulary and my experience of previous learning did not help when I moved to French speaking regions. Later, I realized that the pronunciation of French words or phrases learned in Korea were not possible to understand by French speakers in Geneva or Montreal.

On the other hand, a Russian teacher in middle school showed me that even low interest in a language can be changed by positive attitudes of the teacher. As a complete beginner, it was difficult to follow the class materials when I moved to a new school. It could have been a hard semester, but an enthusiastic teacher who spent extra hours after classes for new students helped me to learn an unfamiliar language. From pronunciation to cursive writing, the teacher would always be a great help and encouraged everyone to practice Russian. He empathized with the students’ problems and remained patient with students who needed longer times to find the right answer. Also, he used various visual and auditory materials and was an 'Involver' who created a positive learning atmosphere. He was not only a kind teacher, but he also understood the different levels which existed in one class and checked whether everyone understood the concept or rules of the language.

The most effective language learning experience happened during a university German course. The professor used all four language skills for further improvement of German. Students had an active role in class, taking part in multiple discussions, research projects, group presentations and creative essay writing. The professor was an' Enabler', and the high participation rate of students, or high TTT, created a successful learning environment. The seating arrangement made it easy for students to move their chairs around, so during class, students could often discuss and share their opinions in small or large groups. The teacher would provide feedbacks and guide the students to the next activity. There were opportunities to work and practice even outside the classes and appropriate homework materials were given to students, which needed extra research and thinking. Students were graded by their different language skills, not only by exams of multiple choice questions. After a certain level, it is difficult to increase one's language skills. The class became a stepping stone for a higher level in German, because it was not an excessive focus in grammar, but an emphasis on fluency, accuracy and even some cultural aspects of the language.

In conclusion, the French class of the explainer teacher was a failure. In contrast, the Enabler and Involver teachers’ classes were well balanced overall and became a good memory of successful learning. Learning does not simple take place because there is a teacher. Learning requires an interaction between the teacher and the students, but because of poor communication and deductive teaching methods, the French classes did not lead to learning. Students need more than explanations and the Russian and German classes actively encouraged students to learn with excellent teaching methods.