Aria

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My Best Teacher

My best teacher was an English professor at Yonsei University. Her name was Tae Lee. I took only one of her classes, English presentation and communication, but this one class helped me grow up so much that I can tell without missing a beat that she is the best teacher ever. I was a freshman who had no idea how to communicate with others in English. However, thanks to Ms. Lee’s enabling, modern, and effective teaching styles, I made it through the course, giving a touching speech in front of the whole class at the end of the semester. She made me quite a speaker!

To begin with, Ms. Lee was a successful enabler. As an assignment, we watched diverse TED talks and chose one of them to share with our classmates in the class. During the class, we watched the chosen talks together and discuss the speakers’ good and bad points. When we missed out on details, Mrs. Lee asked us questions that led us to find them. Later on, we chose our own topics, discussed in groups, and did our own presentations in front of the class. After each presentation, all students gave feedback to the speaker. She always encouraged us to have confidence and share our own original thoughts and stories in whatever way we want. Showing many great speakers with accents, she taught us that it is not a problem if we cannot speak like native speakers. Also, she quickly figured out each student’s characteristics and helped us how to use them to develop our unique styles. There was no certain rule or standard of speaking and writing. This boosted students’ self-confidence, while lowering anxiety, which was an ideal language-learning environment according to Stephen Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis. Plus, since we chose our own topics, we could talk about something that we care about the most, rather than some boring issues in a textbook. This increased our motivation. The fact that every class was mostly comprised of our discussions and presentations, not a lecture, also motivated us to take part more enthusiastically.

Furthermore, Ms. Lee used very modern teaching techniques. She used the integrated-skill approach. We listened to our classmates’ speeches, read many articles and wrote drafts while preparing for our presentations, and were speaking all the time during discussion and presentations. Moreover, her classroom was a kind of a flipped classroom; after watching ted talks at home, we discussed on them during the class. Besides, those discussions were usually done in small groups so that each and every one could have many chances to speak and interact with others. We were also playing diverse games. For example, each student makes up a short story of a given topic and the others guess what it is. There was no textbook at all. Instead, Mrs. Lee used articles and video clips on the internet and our own presentations as learning materials. She also used a video camera to film us giving a speech, uploaded the recordings on her website, and got us to watch them again and comment on them as homework. Filming made all presentations exciting and real. I felt like an important public figure speaking in front of a huge audience. All those discussions, presentations as an experiential learning, and commenting as teaching others are the three best techniques to increase the learner retention rate.

In addition, Ms. Lee was an effective teacher with all three qualities of empathy, authenticity, and respect. She started by taking her armor off and showing who she is honestly. She told us about how she felt lost when she first came to Korea and started teaching, how much discrimination she gets as a working mom, and what kind of silly habits she has. Also, she listened to all of our stories with open, sincere heart, no judgment at all. With her, it felt safe to be myself. When she read through my draft for the presentation on my experience of mental illnesses, she burst into tears and told me about her friend who committed suicide out of depression. Also, she said that my story was beautiful and thanked me for being honest. Knowing that she totally gets me gave me courage to share the story with the rest of the class. She always respected our ideas. She never criticized or tried to change our arguments, but only helped us to support them more convincingly.

For these three reasons, prof. Lee was the best teacher in my life. As an enabler, she made a low-anxiety learning environment so that we could lead every class on our own and learn from one another. As a modern teacher, she harnessed the integrated-skill approach and many other activities that helped boost the retention rate. As an effective teacher, she was authentically herself, empathized with students’ problems, and showed respect. I want to be such a great teacher like her.