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My Best Teacher Who Taught Me What Practical English Is

My best ESL teacher was Mr. MacPherson who was my professor at Sungkyunkwan University in Korea. He taught me English Practicum during six semesters from my second year to fourthyear. When I first met him in the class, I was in the Speech Emergence Stage. I had barely taken chances to speak English before then since I had focused on listening and writing to pass the college entrance examination. But Mr. MacPherson led me to a new way to learn English through his classes, and I reached the Intermediate Fluency Stage when I graduated.

Mr. MacPherson was a really successful enabler. He used the integrated skill approach in teaching English by doing lots of activities. He wanted us to learn practical English that we could utilize in daily lives and future workplaces instead of grammar-focused English. Usually we were asked to read contents and share our ideas to him or to a group. Then we did role play by utilizing vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and expressions learned in the class. A memorable role play was a ‘guest and secretary’. In order to teach us expressions at workplaces, he called my house at an appointed time pretending to be a guest, and I responded as if I were a secretary by using the expressions learned from the class. An interesting thing was my retention rate of what I learned through those kinds of activities were much higher compared to my prior ESL learning experiences which had been mostly based on traditional chalk and talk teaching style.

And he used various kinds of contents in teaching, including famous TV shows, movies, news articles, and even cartoons. We learned conditional sentences through acting characters in movies like Gone with the Wind and Armageddon, and studied usage of participial phrases through discussing issues from daily news. Since most teaching styles in middle and high schools in those days of Korea mainly focused on lecture and taking notes based on text books, modern teaching style that Mr. MacPherson used in our classroom were fresh. Those were not only fun and interesting but also useful and informative. Learning vocabulary and grammar were full of excitement. Thus we became more active in expressing our opinions and gradually reached the stage of Intermediate Fluency.

If Mr. MacPherson had not boosted our self-confidence through the whole classes, his teaching type of enabler or modern teaching techniques might not work well. But he did. He always tried to lower our anxiety about making mistakes as if he had studied Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. He gave lots of compliments on good works to enhance motivation and offered kind and encouraging words on wrong answers to lower anxiety. Since he really listened to us, and showed respects and empathy on what we said and conducted, we could feel he was so authentic to us. It was the impressive memory that he frequently called our name with eye contact during conversation. He really knew what the effective teaching was.

Thanks to Mr. MacPherson who was an enabler in teaching style with student-centric activities and who helped us experience a modern classroom by addressing various kinds of teaching materials, we reached into Intermediate Fluency Stage. He helped us to gain self-confidence in using English without fear of making mistakes through effective teaching techniques showing authenticity and empathy. Since I myself experienced the effects of his teaching style, he will be my role model when I take a chance to teach students.