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My Best Teacher

If Socrates was considered to be the greatest teacher by Pluto, my middle school science teacher, Mr. Denise Tyas, was the greatest teacher I had ever had in the international school I went in Malaysia. The subject he taught was definitely not one of my well-marked classes, which should have been easy. Yet his classes were the most memorable classes I had taken in school, and I guarantee, even for those who took his classes before. If the thing he did in class were considered normal, anyone could fairly guess how extraordinary—the politest way to describe—his personality was. Now that I think back, the one factor that differentiated Mr. Tyas from the other teachers was his student-centered ways of teaching, which I believe corresponds to Krashen’s three hypotheses: acquisition, input and affective filter hypothesis.

Despite being in his 60s, Mr. Tyas never lost his passionate attitude, not even once under my observation from my first day in school to his transfer back to the States 5 years later. Other than jumping up and down on wooden desks which did not look so solid, singing and making cold lesson-related jokes unfortunately drew my attention to his lessons. He did not favor grades from tests nor homework but the creativity and ability to spontaneously apply the scientific knowledge we learned in class into our lifestyle and our way of viewing the world, for example, proving our beliefs with the scientific method. And this, particularly, reflected his understanding on the acquisition hypothesis.

Rather than focusing on the science textbooks, he often took the class into action from experiments, group projects to field trips, whether they may or may not be successful at their level of difficulty, one of my favorite which was the hiking trip in eighth grade to the famous active volcano in Indonesia that blew up few years later. In a lesson, the frankness in his responses for both questions and answers made clear, satisfactory corrections in my learning. On each chapter test, he allowed students to prepare a formatted note with whatever information we wished to include for reference, which showed his consideration on memorization as a lack of importance. After all, his motto in teaching was to bring out the potential in students’ ability to understand the context of each lesson instead of memorizing given words, which certainly went along with the input hypothesis.

As if messing with the volume on the speakers, Mr. Tyas drastically manipulated his intonation in every lesson, whispering at one moment and yelling the next, keeping me on the edge of my seat, and in some cases, waking some students who were nodding their head from last night’s lack of sleep—sometimes including me. Oddly enough, his straightforwardness in leading us to lesson objectives with questions and corrections did not shoot down my confidence or my self-esteem in joining class discussions. His dynamic and energetic physical and verbal expressions kept an animated, relaxed class environment with a twinge of anticipation for an unexpected. Thus it is clear that his lessons appropriately reflect the affective filter hypothesis in class.

Krashen’s three factors of skills that abled my favorite teacher to actively interact and guide students in lessons proved his competence of being an enabled teacher. As a matter of fact, his teaching style based on the emphasis on application on instincts, understanding and absorbing information context, and consistency in classroom atmosphere provides an excellent which I can build on as a foundation for my way of teaching. I absolutely agree with Mr. Tyas that odd is the one color that anyone should never miss out in authenticity, which surely attracts students like bees to colorful flowers, like me to his lessons.