Jeesoo (Jay) Seo

Essay Module 2

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Sweetness and Bitterness

*“You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation.”*

*By Brigham Young*

Since I was really little, English was the most considerable and hottest issue around the parents. All of my friends’ parents were also trying to send their kids to institution which was famous for teaching English. Because my mom didn’t want me to get behind of others, she sent me one of the most famous institutions in our town, and that was where I first met Mr. Miles. In order to be part of them, I had to pass the test. Back then, I was just a little girl, who just got into the elementary school, was not able to know what English really is. Then they just gave me this whole bunch of papers to fill in, and set me up to the class that I should be in. Even after I graduated from elementary school, my mom always wake me up with the importance of learning English. She pointed out that it would be very important to know how to speak English in my generation. And she said learning English is not just all about learning language, it’s about learning their culture and people. Because there were lots of people who came in and out, she thought it would be good to learn. We didn’t plan to go to States at that time, but by the time I had a year to go for graduating middle school, there was the biggest turning point of my life.

‘May I go to the bathroom’, ‘I have a question’, ‘I don’t understand’, ‘Thank you’. Those sentences were written on the side of the wall that everyone can see from their seats. It was big enough to see from the very back, so it almost feels like the class was covered with the letters. Mr. Miles was the teacher of that class. He introduced himself in English and looked like he could only speak English. He had dark hair and eyes just like me, but American. He said he does not say “No” unless we speak different languages but English. Then he pointed the side of the wall that the sentences were written and those became the most commonly used sentences throughout the entire course. Even though it was beginners’ class, he didn’t let the students to speak any Korean to each other. It was English only class, so Korean was prohibited. So if he caught me speaking Korean, then he gave me extra homework to do. Homework was mostly from reading, so I had to read double pages for punishment. Students were all young included me, so we were not able to make a complete sentence when we spoke. But it was better to communicate with the words by words, than get double for homework. It was very challenging for everyone for sure. All of a sudden we were sent this place by force, and then we needed to speak the language that we didn’t much know. Most of us got caught in the first, but as time went by, we all got used to it and started to make sentences to communicate. Now, I think it was very effective way to help students to learn English faster and easily. He set the environment so the students could speak English naturally. He didn’t just told us to speak English in the class, but sent us home to practice using English. By this way leaners or students were naturally exposed to the environment that they could use English.

It was right before the school starts in 9th grade in high school. When I was in States, there were several people who helped our family to adapt to the new environment. They were very welcoming, so we kept in touch with those people even after we were stabled. One of them was the ESL teacher in high school which I was about to get in. So my mom wanted me to talk to her and get some advices. When I visited her, she said there would be nothing that I have to worry about, and all I should do was coming to school every day. When the school started, I got to see her every day because I had her class. She was pretty much easy-going teacher, and her class was fun. But she was only strict about one thing, which was attendance. There were several students from Burma, who were constantly late and even skip the classes. However, they could not skip or be late for her class because of class rule. Since there were 20 of us, we only got 1chances for each of us to be absent. And if we followed the rule, by the end of month, there would be a pizza party. So it’s not the teacher who was telling those kids not to be absent, but it was students. In order to have pizza party, they had to come to school. So we all took care of each other so that no one was going to be absent. She considered 2 lates for 1 absence, so we even had to watch our time to be on time too. It was very good motivation for students and we all got to learn taking care of others and not to be so selfish and giving negative impact on others.

Young language learners really benefit from natural input as they are more adapt to learning language naturally before the critical period. Infants and kindergarten students naturally soak up information, but as students become older they rely more on cognitive reasoning strategies to acquire language. For young learners, this is not a major concern, but for older language learners this needs to be considered as they will develop cognitive strategies for language production. Because of Mr. Miles, I was able to question myself “Do students have an environment where they can interact with the language, or are they isolated to their native language when leaving the classroom?” and “How often are the students exposed to the language?” as the teachers’ perspective. One of the pros for English only class is students gain more opportunity to think in English to analyze the language and how to express themselves. Some students, especially lower levels, tend to think in the native language and translate. English only class forces them to speak in English and over time builds experience and the ability to automatize commonly used language structure. Also an English only classroom can provide the students with a safe structured place to explore the language before using it in a natural setting. The confidence the student acquires in the classroom can carry over to the outside world. In the other hand, there are cons for the English only class style. Some students, especially lower level students, will feel burdened by their inability to speak in the language. This can lead to a decline in confidence and demotivate the students from participating. Also if students are restrained by language, then those who do not possess the language will remain quiet. If the students are able to speak the native language and receive feedback from other students or the educator, then they have more opportunity to use the target language. Those pros and cons will always follow, but we need to know the educator is responsible for building the classroom to increase opportunities for the students to learn and reach higher levels. In some instances, English only classrooms are perfect for the students to achieve the next level; however, English only classrooms can deter advancement and have adverse effects on learning. In my thoughts on attendance policy, I think educators have to be very strict about this. Especially for young learners, they need to be cared to be in the environment where they can learn. If the educators show the in air of indifference, students won’t be able to engage themselves into the education. However, teachers should not push the students too hard. Too hardy punishment can lead the students into more trouble. This can cause the students to be demotivated from learning.