Title: Lessons from good teachers and bad teachers

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Use what language you will, you can never say anything but what you are.

* Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thanks to Ben’s assignment I got an opportunity to look back my past years in studying and school teachers. Just like you I have met many different kinds of teachers. Unfortunately, the first image come up to my head is most of them were explainers.

Especially, I remember one teacher from high school. He was an old English teacher who is waiting for his retirement. Mainly he taught grammar, idioms and important words for the exams with very flat intonation. Because of his emotionless voice and the tone we used to call him an English speaking robot. To make matters worse he didn’t make any communication or eye contacts with his students despite the subject he was teaching is language. After all, not many students were interested in his class. Many students including me were sleeping or doing other things such as chatting with friends and doing homework in his class. But it didn’t bother him at all. He only continued what he had to do for the day. If I describe it I would say he was talking to himself pretending we were not even there. Moreover, he didn’t know many of students name even after 1 year. Sadly, I was only No. 31 to him. This showed he didn’t really care about his students.

Now let me introduce an “Involver” style of English teacher who I met at missionary training institute in Korea when I was 19 years old.

He was a British university student who volunteered for English training for Korean missionaries. Although his character was quiet and calm he overwhelmed the students with his passion and sense of humor. He prepared many games. No, I mean “Activities” by using English words and useful expression. Although it is almost 14 years ago I still remember the colorful tools and board games he used. Sometimes we had us play and debate. At first time I felt it is too much for our English level. But later everyone enjoyed speaking English and not afraid of making mistakes. So I was looking forward to his class even though I was not good at English.

Comparing these two teachers I realized no matter how much knowledge you have in teaching, it is meaningless if you don’t interact with your students.

My high school teacher (the “Explainer”) was more professional and had more education than my university student teacher (the “Involver”). But the outcome was totally different. The reason is the explainer taught English only for the high score in exams. Therefore, his teaching method had to be cramming. Besides, the communication was only one-way direction and he didn’t check whether the students were following him or now. After 1 week of TESOL course, now I can see ice-breaking, Lead-in, eliciting, CCQ’s and ICQ’s were missing in his class.

Meantime, the involver completed all these requirements. For example he sometimes asked what we did last evening and what we had for lunch to lead-in. And he drew our attention by introducing English board games he used to play. For CCQ’s he checked our facial expression and if he though we didn’t understand he explained over and over until we all understood.

The best thing about him was he never forgets to pay a compliment even when we spoke simple sentence.

TESOL teaches me how to teach the students well and effectively. And my past experiences teach me how to be a good teacher. Even from bad teachers I still learn what was wrong and what I shouldn’t do for teaching. If I combine these points I will be a good teacher. And one more thing…I will always remember teaching is not just conveying the knowledge. It is interaction after all.

When I heard Ralph Waldo Emerson’s quote first time it really impressed me.

I felt whether you speak English or Korean and whether you speak fluently or not, the most important thing is the message you are trying to deliver. So if I become a teacher I will try to speak/teach with all my heart although I might not be a perfect teacher because that is what I have inside of me. Likewise, I will try to listen to my students’ voice and message very carefully and figure out what they really want and need although they can’t speak English fluently.