

Describe an important intellectual experience you have had

Work

It was an exhausting evening when I had just arrived home from a vacation after our school year was complete. I was thinking of engrossing myself with my guitar to let some steam out after such a busy May of final exams when the phone rang. I lifted the receiver with reluctance, and on the other line was a strange woman's voice. Her name was Van and she asked if I was looking for a job as a guitar tutor. At first I thought she was mistaken, but then I remembered applying for a summer work program at my school, and I said yes. We arranged to meet on the following day, and after fifteen minutes, I was employed. My job was to teach Ms Van's son, a fourteen-year-old boy named Linh, some basic skills to play the classical guitar. The very idea of teaching never occurred to me, so I was filled with nervousness and anxiety before the first meeting. Consequently, my first lesson was a real mess, as I didn't know what to do. Linh and I sat opposite to each other, and I felt as though I was sitting in front of a strict supervisor instead of an eighth grader. I remembered performing music before my school, making speeches in front of my English club, competing with skilled players in the district and city's sports contests, all with smoothness and confidence. But this was different. It was a whole new experience that I had never sustained before. Linh, however, listened patiently as I stammered about the history of the classical guitar as though he was sympathetic with my nervousness. I ended the first lesson with a talk about some skills required to learn the guitar. The lesson was finished. A big failure.

I went home tired and distressed. The picture of the first class haunted me until the next day.

But I wasn't let down. I spent the following days working seriously on a "syllabus", outlining the work to be done and timing myself as well. I held my guitar and sat before the mirror, pretending that my reflection was Linh and started practicing. At first it was awkward but gradually the practice lessons flowed more coherently. My next class with Linh was so much better than the first and my diligent preparations seemed to pay off. I gained more confidence, flexibility and fluency. The following classes were more concrete and effective as more and more effort was invested each day. Just then I realized how much effort and patience a teacher is required.

As our lessons continued, I began to feel teaching to be a great pleasure and benefit. I was more serious, punctual and responsible. I found every lesson not just a matter of teaching and learning the guitar, but also a chance to understand a certain person, to get close to him. I treated Linh more like a friend than a student. We always spent some time after the lesson to talk about other subjects like our interests, our family and friends. I tried to understand and gave advice for any problems he spoke to me about, and he appreciated it very much. For my part, I was happy knowing that I had done something good. The course ended in September and I said goodbye to Linh and his family. Ms Van gave me a little envelope and a thank-you card from Linh. A sudden feeling of joy and pride ran through my body as I received my rewards. I went home and opened the envelope to see the money, the very money I had myself earned. It was a tiny note that to me it looked brighter and more wonderful than any other notes I had had before. I knew it wasn't much, but it meant much, for it bore my own work, effort and devotion.

I would always remember my first employment as the most influential experience of my life. So much was learned out of it. I discovered an ability to understand people, which I never

thought I ever possessed. I learned to respect my teachers so much more knowing that they not only possess intellectual skills, but also a character of incredible patience. I also learned to appreciate the precious value of money that I myself earned, thus I was more spendthrift and economical. I have been holding on to the image of myself standing in front of my room's balcony, clutching the postcard and the envelope in my hands. As looked up to the starry sky, I realized that a big world of hardships and challenges were waiting for me out there. But my summer work had brought me a great deal of experience that would help me to face up to those difficulties with much more confidence. The experience was a big change, a truly big change for me.