

In one of my first courses at my local community college, my professor insisted that we call him by his first name only, because “we are a community of scholars.” At the time, I smiled to myself, amused by this bit of idealistic poetry. Now, I find that I agree with him wholeheartedly.

As a teacher of English to speakers of other languages, my overarching goal is to guide learners to a better understanding and more fluent use of my native language. They do not, however, enter my classroom as empty vessels waiting for me to pour knowledge into their heads, but as active participants on a journey in which I act as guide. I prefer to facilitate learner agency and autonomy. I cannot, after all, actually give them *English*, as though it is a kitchen appliance that they must just plug in and turn on. In my experience, the most successful learners are those who are interested in their own learning. I want them to provide me with texts that are relevant to their interests, be they novels, the materials for a citizenship test, or the lyrics to the latest pop single. I believe that learners must collaborate in their own success and that the simplest way to achieve that is to privilege their own reasons for learning.

Teaching is a communicative art. As such, it behooves me to foster communication with and among my students. I favor a variety of pair and group work activities. In addition to encouraging real world language in the telling of their own stories, I believe that this promotes the sharing of knowledge at a peer level: learners helping learners. Language cannot help but be personal and dialogic; the ways that we teach it should reflect this.

We must, of course, lay the bricks of standard grammar rules as a foundation in addition to more entertaining linguistic subjects; it does not follow that form focused tasks must be tedious. I use humor and variety to engage learner interest. For example, I adapted the popular LOLcats meme as an error correction exercise. My favorite moments standing in front of a class have been those when everyone is laughing, even the quiet student in the back who does not prefer to talk.

I could have chosen to teach any number of subjects. I choose language because it is an indispensable skill that also weaves people together, creating communities such as the community of scholars to which my professor introduced me so long ago.