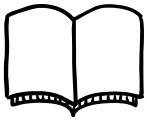
Community Through Friendship:
A Tutoring Program for Adult Refugees

Nine Guiding Principles



Allie Qiu & Tucker Grimshaw

1. **Create conditions for students' development of rhetorical agency.**

   We use Michael MacDonald's concept of refugees as emissaries of literacy: language learners who are in charge of their literacy development. The role of the tutor, then, is to help create agentive space in the tutoring session and in the relationship between tutor and student. Through their partnership, they support each other as rhetorical agents who act in care of self and other. We define empowerment as rhetorical agency, or engagement in reflective action and inquiry.

2. **Contextualize language learning in relationship, community, and social life.**

   Language proficiency not only involves speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills but also the negotiation of meanings, cultures, and identities in a variety of social situations over time. This means that both tutor and student are cultural and linguistic mediators who bring expertise to their learning together. It also means that the relationship between tutor and student is important as a community context for language learning and that this two-person community connects to other communities.

3. **Have conversations and activities that explore students' and tutors' identities.**

   Because we think of language learning as a social cultural journey, and we want to support students as they develop both functional and critical literacies, the tutoring session needs to include conversations about culture and identity. Tutor and student actively create their emerging identities. Together, they come to understand that identity is complex and always changing, and they think not only in terms of past and present identities but also future identities and social belonging.

4. **Plan sessions and interact with mindfulness toward the effects of trauma on students' learning.**

   Language learning itself involves a level of trauma, as one is required to speak, act, live, and be in a new language and culture. For refugees, this trauma is layered with experiences of violence and loss, which may manifest in physical reactions to certain environments and stressors.

   As we attend to learners who venture through trauma, we develop strategies that stem from the related experiences of those who are disabled. Disability and trauma

have both been misconstructed by ableist logic, which views trauma as a disabling affective structure. By replacing this logic with the social model of disability, we destabilize the foundations of how trauma is viewed, both by tutor and student, to allow for accessibility.

5. **Create activities that enable you to engage in multimodal learning strategies together.**

   Since our program responds to the needs of second language learners who are affected by trauma, physically, mentally, and socially, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is key. We teach tutors to use a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic strategies. Multimodality invites tutors and students to look at each other as human beings, who learn in different ways, make mistakes, and enjoy creating meaning.

6. **Critically reflect on assumptions.**

   Because the tutor is in a position of power relative to the refugee, it is important that the tutor reflects on their assumptions as they navigate the power differential and seek an equal partnership with the refugee learner.

7. **Practice intercultural understanding, listening, and communication.**

   We use Anne Ruggles Case's concept that the tutor and student should not try to close the language gap but live within the gap, which opens spaces for dialogue and relationship. Everything shifts when our central goal isn't language proficiency but relationship and communication.

8. **Create a low-stress learning environment. Develop relationships of safety and trust.**

   We will teach tutors how to implement strategies such as creating a safe physical space and activities that are fun and joyful and grounded in the body. These strategies connect with trauma-informed and multimodal pedagogies.

9. **Identify and build on students' strengths as learners and language users.**

   For example, given that many refugees are preliterate or nonliterate learners of English, tutors can build on students' strengths in oral literacy, even when that is a strength that tutors themselves do not have.

   Tutors recognize that students already have a lifetime of experience and expertise with language, and they also carry strengths that come from surviving traumatic experiences. They are creative, empathetic, resilient, and agentive learners.

♥ For a works cited & more info, you can reach out to us @ qiu.allie@gmail.com (Allie) and tuckergrimshaw@gmail.com (Tucker) ♥