# SEVEN LEARNING FACILITATION PRINCIPLES
LEARNING IS WHAT YOU MAKE OF IT
DR. ALI H. RADDAOUI

This blog post is about seven best practices in teaching. It is not uncommon for teaching practices to reference behaviorist, cognitive, constructivist, or connectivist theories. However, I aim to cut through the theoretical fluff and share some guiding principles. Let's call them tips that have worked beautifully, for me, at least. Don't get me wrong here. I am not at all saying that learning theory is an armchair pursuit that's useless to teachers and practitioners. Quite the contrary, I'd say that, as teachers, we all carry conceptions or theories of learning at some level of sophistication. We may not have verbalized or elaborated on the nitty-gritty of these theories. Still, it's almost certain that the learning plans we prepare mentally, on paper, on the fly, or on the screen are routes we think are the most conducive to learning. You may call them theories of practice, but they may be this and more.
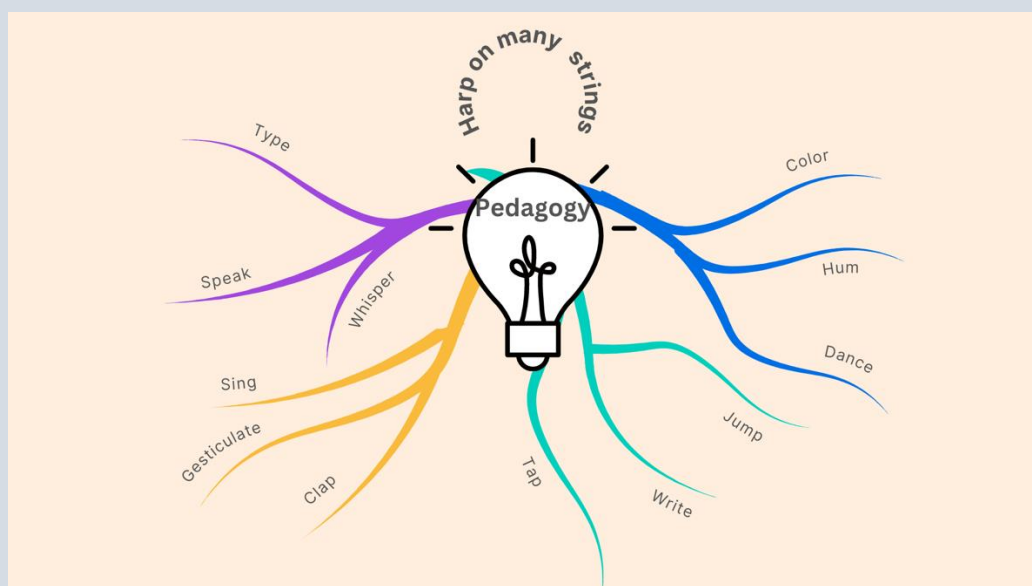
I'd like to make one more point before I go into these tips. What I'm sharing with you are broad tips that are not discipline-specific. They apply to language teaching and further afield. I have taught many courses such as teaching pedagogy, stylistics, poetry, creative writing, research methods in the social sciences, translation, linguistics, Middle East politics and current affairs, in addition, of course to English, French, and Arabic language arts, but I believe these best practices apply across a broad spectrum of disciplines.

So, what are those tips?

1.It's not about you; it's about the learners.

Keep in mind, as you design your lesson plan, that the teaching moves you build are not for you to furnish the period. As you develop your plan, put yourself in your students' shoes. In other words, don't prepare a teacher-centered lesson plan; prepare a learning

plan where students are front and center. That is to say, build on their experiences, value their knowledge, get them to learn by doing, let them collaborate, and make them enjoy the class.

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2.Partner with learners.

Each time you step into the classroom, physical or virtual, share with your students where EXACTLY you want to take them. Take time out to emphasize the learning outcomes set for this class. Share the burden of this responsibility with them so you all agree on where you are going and know when you've demonstrably gotten there.

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3.Create a safe, non-threatening environment.

The whole classroom ethos is also something you, as a learning facilitator, imagine, design, build, and nurture, day in, day out. Leave no room for bullying, cornering, putting on the spot, fault finding, ignoring, or marginalizing. Let your students treat your classes are a sandbox where they can try anything without fear of humiliation, marginalization, or mockery, blatant or oblique. Recognize that each student brings to the class different fortes, and each question or answer tells you where they are in their understanding. Thus, all questions are helpful, and all responses are at least partly correct.

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4. Give learners a safe environment to practice on their own and with each other.

As a student, I remember times when I did not want to lose face. I was so concerned with coming up with the correct answer, so when I wasn't sure of the answer, I would just stay quiet. I can't tell if this is a function of my personality or the teacher's towering ego. Now, as I teach my class, I realize some students may want a safe space to think, write, speak, and express themselves without me necessarily being there, observing, monitoring, correcting, or opinionating. Fine! Let students say the answer to themselves. Let them work in groups where you're not present all the time. Nor should your presence intimidate them. Let them feel safe. You're not there to issue judgments or show you have a monopoly on the truth. You're there to support only.

5. Tackle the content difficulty myth.

Do you remember your apprehension about approaching certain kinds of content? Some of us will readily recognize our inability to tackle certain classes, assuming that our

understanding of them is nothing or nothing. It's like these classes were cut for geniuses, but not for me. For example, any students in the humanities abhor math classes and will grin with glee when the math, physics, or engineering teacher calls sick. Some science students will proudly declare that philosophy is good for nothing. They'd rather see it dropped off the curriculum because it's a sheer waste of time. The very first move with any class is to destroy this myth. I do this by drawing into the students' prior knowledge, putting a value on that knowledge, and explaining that they are not approaching content with zero background. I intimate that the content to be studied is not complex and will not pose a significant challenge to their intelligence. Knowing they are in familiar or partly familiar territory offers them a degree of ease and confidence that they're not starting from scratch. They will build on prior knowledge and slowly connect with new knowledge.

6. Take the boredom out of learning.

Unless you're super-disciplined and have been reared into a culture where formal education is to be revered and taken extra-seriously, chances are you're going to think of classroom learning as following a dull pedagogic regimen of being a one-way delivery process. But whoever said education must be a somber, austere, monotonous, and insipid pursuit! *Learning is what YOU make of it*. Take matters into your hand. It is up to you to foster a feeling of joy and fulfillment where you and your students join the useful with the agreeable, live it up, and have fun. Harp on different pedagogical strings. Write, type, draw, write backward, color, speak, grimace, lip-read, whisper, sing, sing in a choir, hum, jump, tap, dance, clap, gesticulate, emulate, pantomime, and what have you.

7. Create a community.

I must admit I registered a fair amount of my lifelong learning through personal, individual, and independent endeavors. I like sitting on my own to get things done. Over and beyond what I have learned on my own, I must admit that I owe much of my learning gains to the communities where I belonged. As a teacher, I encourage students to learn independently, at home, on the way home, at the library, or wherever. This, however, is up to them and not for me to monitor. My job as a teacher, though, is to foster an unfailing community spirit. My students and I learn together, again, safely. To be sure, there are fields I know more about than they do, but there are fields where different members of this community know more than I or other learners. So, we freely and unconditionally tap into each other's knowledge. The principle governing my class activities is that learners collaborate on projects, and each one gets to do a piece to work, so they feel they are members in good standing of this community.

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Well, I could add a few more tips. For now, I want to stress that when we choose to be educators, knowledge mediators, or coaches, teaching is NOT about us. The community is a lot larger than the teacher or their ego. The interests of the community prime at all times. Teaching is about engaging, scaffolding, facilitating, partnering, interacting, celebrating, and more.

Bio

Ali Raddaoui holds a Ph.D. from Indiana University Bloomington. He is a former associate professor of applied linguistics and Arabic Program Director at the University of Wyoming, where he currently serves as Arabic and Middle East Studies Program Project GO lead instructor. Ali has an active research agenda and extensive experience teaching English, Arabic, and French to speakers of other languages. His research interests include best practices in language learning and teaching, learning theory, the interface of learning and technology, and program design. For him, teaching is synergizing theory, pedagogy, and technology to create communicative, collaborative, engaging, and eye-opening learner experiences. Email: araddaou@uwyo.edu