

I was speaking another language, the language of the American writing assignments I mastered in middle school, and a genre my Costa Rican students did not know. I could see through the uncomprehending eyes of my tenth-grade English students that the language learning process could not be facilitated from just a textbook. The students needed the language to come alive. From that day forward, music became part of the lesson plan. To the tune of my guitar or ukulele, we sang together-- the class favorites, Jason Mraz's "I'm Yours," Train's "Hey Soul Sister," and Ed Sheeran's "A Team." We would analyze lyrics as a group to unpack how artists used syntax and structure. This, in turn, helped the students think about the logical building blocks of language. We gradually moved from this to crafting an argument. To build English vocabulary for my students, I engaged them in physical activities like dancing and acting out the lyrics so they could embody their new language. I watched a once stagnant classroom transform into a setting where students enjoyed learning English.

I learned a great deal from my students and the importance of welcoming the voices that aren't always heard. As an agent of humanitarian hospitality, I learned to emphasize the importance of opening conversations across borders and building bridges. Studying Spanish has helped me exemplify the importance of multicultural understanding and communication, whether that be as a translator or English teacher while abroad in Central America or as a Spanish teacher at Valparaiso High School, in Indiana. I wish to further share my skills in English and Spanish as an educator in the future. I aim to grow further as a language teacher, to learn from my students, and to increase in cultural sensitivity, so that wherever I may be, I will be better equipped to create hospitable classrooms and to encourage multicultural understanding in the place of unwelcoming closed-mindedness. Everyone has a story to tell, and when you take the time to listen to people, you have the opportunity to engage in a new part of humanity's shared story.