The clock rolls over to nine and students begin to look around the circle of chairs in earnest, their voices shifting from personal conversation to class business. No one is watching me and I can’t help smiling. Three weeks ago these students had never met. I remember the nervous silence before class began on the first day. Each small noise highlighted the emptiness from the lack of voices.

Many students hid in their phones, waiting for the clock to strike nine and shift the focus and responsibility in the room to me. By now, though, they know that’s not going to happen. Even better, they know they don’t need it to happen. As they begin small group discussions, I move about, reflecting their thoughts back to them when

It seems helpful, occasionally asking for more on how their thoughts connect to coding, how coding connects to other aspects of class or to their experiential learning work.

All my questions are sincere. They recognize this, too; I don’t ask for what I already know. From day one, I position myself as a coach and a co-learner in a community made up of me, my students, and the world around us. As we address coding questions, I encourage honesty, working with the students to connect ideas to the current topic. I draw from personal experiences, modeling how to apply philosophy to our world.

We evaluate arguments and ask genuinely interesting questions, which pushes all of us, including myself, to inquire further. I encourage students to engage with questions when they are unsure of answers, and to value their own lives and experiences as a means to understanding and engaging with coding. I find that when my students engage in these ways, I am able to learn from them, and I see students learning from each other as well. The community-oriented values and authenticity curated in my classroom develops strengths, knowledge, and experience beyond what I could offer on my own.