

Teaching statement

My personal approach to teaching EFL and applied linguistics merges problem-solving approaches, research-based teaching as well as a constant bridging of theory and practice. It has developed throughout a decade of full-time English teaching in schools as well as more than 10 years of teaching EFL and applied linguistics at tertiary institutions in Germany, Ireland, and Austria. Concerning proficiency levels, my teaching has covered all levels of foreign and second language learners, from A1 (basic user) to C2 (proficient user). Furthermore, a substantial variety of classes, topics, and approaches has given me invaluable insights into the possibilities and limits of instructed foreign language teaching.

I strongly believe in research-based teaching and bridging theory and practice, because a teacher's didactical, methodological, and curricular decisions should always be based on a sound and thorough understanding of the underlying linguistic and psycholinguistic concepts. Not only are those concepts worthwhile and enriching objects of inquiry in their own right, but they provide the necessary craftsmanship to meet everyday problems and practical challenges systematically and professionally. Therefore, bringing theory and its relevance for practical application to life is a prime objective in my teaching. This in turn shapes my understanding of the instructor's role at tertiary level. In my own studies, I have met several instructors who gladly adopted the role of a priest, sporting an advanced and superior knowledge of the subject matter, leading students to catechistically regurgitate content and familiar examples. This, in turn, practically discouraged both an in-depth understanding and meaningful application by the student in real life contexts. In contrast, I have always tried to pull back the curtain and provide opportunities to understand and appreciate theoretical concepts, models, and scientific evidence as an obligatory step towards practical implementation. On the one hand, such an approach helps demystify the often-dreaded world of academia and science; applied linguistics and language acquisition are anything but mysterious scientific truths. On the other hand, I thereby emphasise that all the concepts and ideas under scrutiny relate to, and, in fact, build upon prior knowledge, expertise, and skills. Thus, what is taught at present will serve as the basis for future endeavours. Neither theories nor models arise in a vacuum, and the importance of understanding the cumulative nature of the study of applied linguistics and language acquisition cannot be overstated.

I strongly believe in the problem-solving approach in teaching languages and applied linguistics. Teaching should not be restricted to dishing out recipes and arming students with a chest of magical, ready-made one-size-fits-all materials. Those materials will be exhausted at some point, and then students wouldn't know how to refill it. Instead, teaching should provide opportunities for honing problem-solving skills, for creativity, and divergent thinking. At all levels of linguistic inquiry, the key to solving problems creatively is to recast them as something for which we can find appropriate approaches, methods, routines, and – eventually – meaningful applications in the pertinent fields of work. Exposing students to such problems and problem-solving routines ultimately produces practitioners with a robust skill set, since, in their profession as teachers, they must be able to use these skills in their respective environments in order to both perform in the classroom and further develop their own expertise.

In sum, what I aim to accomplish in my tertiary teaching is to help students reach an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question, appreciate the scientific work behind these phenomena, and, finally, make them realise that this understanding is a necessary prerequisite for their prospective careers. Many years of experience have proven that this is an intriguingly ambitious endeavour, but I feel compelled to try to achieve these ends.