

## Teaching Statement

My way to a PhD in sociology was a matter both of choices I made and of circumstances beyond my control. That students must deal with such a constellation of choices and circumstances is reflected in my teaching, as is the fact that they vary in each individual case. My approach, if I was asked for an ‘elevator pitch’, can be summarized in three sentences: (1) ‘Students learn to use ideas, concepts, and methods with confidence but also not to take them at face value’, (2) ‘I help students with their needs, but do not cater to whims’, (3) ‘Students do not learn from me but they learn *with* me’.

I have been lucky in having enjoyed an interdisciplinary education, which gave me knowledge not only in sociology, but also in biology, economics, philosophy, and the studies of gender, critical race, literature, and culture. Equipped with this inter- and transdisciplinary set of tools, I have means to both empower and enable students to follow through with their ideas: I believe that students need to understand and take control of their situation (empowerment) but also to be given the capabilities to create understanding and make meaningful decisions (enablement). Only when the power to decide and the knowledge to decide wisely are both provided to students can they work towards individual success as well as social justice in their own and the lives of others.

To this effect, I create a classroom that encourages students to collaborate with one another in the creation of their own projects, but also enables critical thinking and debate: I encourage critical, argument-based discussions, and succeeded in stimulating students to engage current empirical research and to read and discuss even the most demanding theoretical literatures with enthusiasm. In my classroom, when discussing for example racism, sexual discrimination, or biomedicalization students feel safe to speak about their own experiences as victims of racism or about living with severe menstrual cramps. I encourage the sharing of experiences, but I always caution students to consider first whether they truly want others to know.

As a teacher, I often use new technologies, such as using web-sites for interactive coursework, but only where and when appropriate, and I also implement lessons from current neuro-cognitive and education research. As an noteworthy outcome of my work, several of my first year students continue the research that they began in my courses – for example, the recent generation of students have continued to conduct qualitative interviews with refugees about their experiences with medical authorities in Germany or perceptions of the *hijab* in refugee homes. I have connected several of my students with internationally renowned researchers and mentored them in writing papers, which they submitted to peer-reviewed journals.

My courses serve as conceptual-empirical laboratories for students, which means that the idea of ‘integrative interdisciplinarity’ is generally present in my teaching efforts. I enjoy teaching undergraduate students and am always happy teach introductory classes including the classic and current texts, but also including Southern/postcolonial writers.

I facilitate active learning through class projects that may take students out of their comfort zones, both in terms of geography and general familiarity, immersing them

in new environments, communities, perspectives and situations. While challenging and sometimes met with resistance given the discomfort it can produce, the outcomes of these projects have generally proven to be positive. It is never about exercises and activities being ultimately only successful. That project ideas can fail is just as important. What matters mostly is that we discuss the intended result, the actual result and potential reasons the exercise did not meet expected outcomes. In this regard, I emphasize that I offer an extensive number of office hours, which my past students have profited from. I hold that half of the work of my teaching is done in conversation with individuals or groups during office hours.

But there remains a very important aspect about my approach to teaching – perhaps the most important one: I talk about teaching with colleagues all the time. I strongly believe that teaching must be improved continually and that this can be accomplished by learning from one another’s experiences and ideas.

I attempt to convey the importance of experiential and applied learning by not overemphasizing grades. My philosophy on grades is that they should not be seen as a ‘final judgment’ but as an indicator of the work that still needs to be done towards achieving the best outcome that I believe ‘every student is capable of’.

Students have a variety of options to display their knowledge of the material. This way, I ensure that students can deploy their individual, differential learning styles. I always offer ideas of how to work with one’s different styles of learning towards achieving goals, which do not immediately seem to fit them. Understanding that students are often anxious about grades, I ensure transparency in explaining from the start and also with written materials, which criteria and questions are important to me, as I grade.

Finally, what I have told every class I ever taught in our very first session: ‘There is one rule and one rule only that is never allowed to be broken in my class-room: You are allowed to laugh.’