

Teaching portfolio

Teaching philosophy

My overall teaching philosophy is that students will learn only by doing. Therefore, I aim to create participatory frameworks for learning in accordance with SDU's Faculty of Humanities' active learning and activating teaching philosophy. That is, successful teaching/learning, I find, is a collaborative process between the students and the teacher. In practical terms, this means that I never merely lecture but always seek to inspire active participation. This is done through creating a positive classroom atmosphere and by employing participatory methods.

Below I offer some examples of how I work with participatory teaching and learning.

Positive low-anxiety classroom atmosphere

In my view fostering a positive classroom atmosphere is vital. A positive classroom atmosphere is one in which students feel empowered and willing to participate. One key to creating such an atmosphere is to make expectations specific to students from the very first lesson both in terms of what is expected of them but also what they can expect from me as a teacher regarding course content, management and methods. I make a point of introducing these points in the first lesson and reiterate them when necessary throughout the course. Knowing exactly what to expect creates a safe atmosphere and thus leaves room for exploration and learning, and not least, in my experience, enhances active participation through, amongst other things, taking on responsibility for one's own learning. This also entails evaluating the course continuously throughout the semester, making sure that methods are aligned with goals and learning outcomes.

I also think that energy, enthusiasm and, when appropriate, humor are fruitful elements in creating a positive classroom atmosphere. I believe that by creating an informal atmosphere, naturally within the bounds of academic professionalism, the teacher's role and person become more accessible to the students making for a more collaborative and safe learning environment.

Participatory methods

Throughout the semester, I introduce topics (and readings) of the specific course through participatory lectures. I generally base my introductory talk mostly on supplementary readings and relate these to the assigned readings. This makes for participatory lectures and critical reflections given that students also have to relate the talks to their readings and are invited to ask questions and make comments as part of the lecture. If assigned readings are particularly complex, I provide questions and points for guided reading with the readings and go through the material in a more detailed manner in class. I also do flipped learning where I introduce the subject matter through recorded walk throughs. Each week, students are free to ask questions before class via a Q and A on the electronic learning platform. Such questions can be related to the topic from the previous week or the topic for the week in question. Such questions can be asked anonymously and thus also invite anxious students to participate. Depending on type of course and content, I also regularly have students present readings or other types of content. Naturally, in my planning I also take the students' educational level into consideration (i.e., BA or MA level). Moreover, we (the students and I) review the general learning goals at the beginning of each lesson. If possible, I also provide online videos to supplement, or explicate, the readings. Lectures never merely stand alone but are always supplemented by activities where students get to use and reflect on the topic of the class.

I use a variety of activities to create active participation, such as, small group dialogues, group work, case work, class discussions, quizzes, polls, presentations, etc. The type of activity depends on educational level and type of course and content. I also simultaneously incorporate different types of materials and activities seeing that learners represent a variety of learning styles and motivations. Whereas I do not consider it my task to be entertaining, I find that giving the learning material real- life relevance, however theoretical the material might be, is essential to help motivate the students to engage and participate.

Below I provide concrete examples of some of the activities and teaching methods that I employ.

Electronic platforms as a means to enhance active participation

For group work I often use electronic platforms, such as Padlet, as discussion fora. I share the online electronic page through the projector and students create comments, questions, etc. for all to see. Often students will be working from different locations but judging by participation on Padlet, they are engaged and committed. Being an interactive tool, Padlet is a dynamic media enabling collaborative learning processes where points can constantly be discussed, challenged and negotiated. The anonymous nature of the Padlet contributions furthermore enhances active participation in that such contributions are relatively 'cost free'.

Case work for meaningful engagement

I often use case work in my teaching. For example, after having built substantial theoretical knowledge in relation to, for example, interpersonal business communication or language acquisition, students are given a problematic case where they have to act as consulting parties to a fictive third party (e.g., a business or municipality) based on theoretical knowledge. After having worked on the case at home or on their own on campus, students present their solutions or suggestions to each other and, acting as third parties, provide peer feedback. Students generally find this type of case work educational and meaningful.

Easing students into presenting

I find it particularly vital that students get positive learning experiences at an early stage for empowering them in their future identities as successful students. Often students are anxious about speaking in front of others, especially at the early bachelor level. In teaching oral communication to bachelor level students, I focus on creating a safe environment where initially students are only asked to speak in front of a small group and then eventually, with practice, will be expected to speak in front of the whole class. Based on feedback, it seems that such practice works well. Additionally, I employ a practice where initial classroom presentations are on "safe" topics the students feel comfortable with, such as, commenting on linguistic details of their own choice, for example, new vocabulary from other courses, etc. This practice serves well for differentiated teaching in that some students give short presentations whereas others give more elaborate presentations. All students clearly become increasingly comfortable presenting during the semester. These presentations also serve as a way of facilitating focus on language in general, which is also a point made by the students.

Peer reviewing student writing

For classes where the exam form is an open written home assignment, we work with exam papers of topical relevance to the course, written by previous students of the class. Rather than merely going through the exam requirements (e.g., methodological versus theoretical papers), I incorporate peer reviewing into the process. In practical terms, this means I have the students read an exemplary and a less exemplary paper before class. This hands on exercise on exam requirements usually proves very illuminating for students. For instance, realizing that you are unable to understand how findings were procured in an empirical paper provides a very practical picture of the requirements of a good paper from the point of view of the reader.

Course development

I benefit greatly from didactical and pedagogical discussions with colleagues. Moreover, at the end of the semester, I write down notes on positive and negative aspects of teaching the course for future reference, development and inspiration. I also use websites and YouTube videos inspirational for course development through lectures and ideas made available by fellow researchers and teachers.

At my previous employment at The Aarhus School of Business (Aarhus University), I was engaged with course development of Grammar and Translation courses. At SDU I've developed an elective on language learning in the digital age, at English studies. It's exciting to present students with the latest cutting-edge research on language learning with a distinct focus on technology. The course focuses both on formal as well as informal learning. Given that many of these students are prospective high school teachers, as part of the course, the students observe English lessons at local high schools, reflecting on their observations guided by SLA theories. As my own research on language learning focuses on informal, incidental learning in the wild, the students will also be presented with a variety of English-language activities outside the walls of the university to observe, engage and discuss the affordances of these activities, again informed by SLA theories. Students are also asked to prepare lesson plans based on observations and theory. The course thus entails a holistic approach (and thus deep learning) where students think, act and reflect as students, teachers and as users of English-language activities.

I have also been successfully involved in virtual exchange with a colleague at a community college in New York. In 2021, we had students from the US and Denmark work on linguistic projects through online platforms, which resulted in joint online presentations on various exciting topics. Other than providing great learning opportunities, cross-cultural communication and meaningfulness, such teaching makes for internationalization at home, an increasingly important aspect of internationalization strategies. Not least, the increasing number of students in most classes demands re-thinking of pedagogies and methods, making technological affordances in particularly interesting and viable.

Teaching development and projects

A key focus in my development as a teacher is to work to a much greater extent with teaching through technology. In that respect Covid-19 has been an excellent teacher. Another focal point for future development is trying to involve students, to the extent possible, more in the planning phase of teaching different topics. That is, I wish to draw on their own expertise as learners to inform the way topics are taught. When evaluating the online exchange project, students had a wealth of great ideas for improving the project, reminding me that they are great sources to draw on for learning about their learning.