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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

To learn a language is to learn how to engage with difference and translatability. Each class about learning a language is a class about how to communicate in the classroom: as a teacher, I direct my efforts toward giving my students space to find new ways of expressing themselves through contact with others, and of exploring how language relates to culture, politics, and social life.

Language classes confront language as a means of power. To avoid authoritarian dynamics, I guide my students to improve their verbal skills through reacting to one another in continuously regrouping teamwork. I take all students' contributions equally seriously, and I immediately respond to mistakes, encouraging my students to work through their mistakes rather than shying away from them. My goal is to assist each student in building their unique relationship to the German language, and I attempt to understand their individual learning strategies and obstacles deeply.

My teaching embodies a practice of language intended to activate dry grammar: it is through detailed memorization and repetition that students cultivate the ability to create and think critically. For instance, in Elementary German, when learning the grammatical cases, I put my students in challenging role play situations and allow them to take pleasure in experimenting with the manifold ways to express relationality, as they play with different characters and subject positions. In their written and video work, I ask my students to engage with the newly learned structures in connection with their personal interests and opinions.

While my Intermediate German students are learning about history and politics, I open their minds to various ways of thinking. For example, when they are learning about the German education system and comparing it to the systems in their home countries, I challenge my students to reflect on the values of their own cultures, as well as their habits of understanding. To familiarize students with the transformability of language, I alert them to how historical shifts in grammar and vocabulary are entwined with socio-historical processes. To practice language as a means of difference and translatability, I facilitate conversations in which students discuss their essays on German history and culture. When students from different cultural backgrounds take opposing positions on political and moral concepts, I support them in acknowledging these tensions. As a student's brilliant intellectual level is often constricted by a basic language level, such discussions frequently resort to stereotypes, a tendency I thoughtfully promote, since the articulation of stereotypes is a first step in analyzing and deconstructing them.

Given our wide range of international students, language courses involve a discrepancy between students who are fluent in several languages and those who are learning a foreign language for the first time. To foster each student's confidence in their ability to learn German, I use my weekly contact hours to engage them in active speaking and listening. My pedagogical reach extends beyond the classroom: besides writing letters of recommendation, I support my students in projects, such as planning a visit to Germany, reading Nietzsche and Marx, and preparing a film on Leni Riefenstahl's camerawork.