Teaching Statement

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A great teacher—in my view—is measured by his or her detailed knowledge of the route a student traverses towards an objective. Like many capable teachers, I aim to provide students with core knowledge necessary for their work, train them with critical thinking skills applicable outside the classroom, and challenge them to articulate what they know and how they know it. But these qualities are all *ends*, not *means* to those ends. The skills for navigating a diverse set of students with varied experiences and interests toward a learning goal are more unique.

My teaching philosophy is strongly coupled to my work in semantic representation and learning, expressed as the refinement of structured knowledge. I view teaching as revision of a student's structured representations instead of an additive accumulation. This revision process helps explain why students misunderstand or garden-path when new lesson plans seemed straightforward, and I pay particular attention to these garden-path errors as clues to the precise revisions needed to advance towards the next target. Sometimes this approach requires an indirect route.

Like finding a safe mountain pass, the learner's shortest path from A to B may not be a straight line.
A teacher's detailed map of surrounding pitfalls is necessary to plotting the best route across difficult terrain.

My emphasis on path-finding to an educational goal is also supported in current research[1] and popular press (*Why Teachers Need to Know the Wrong Answers*[2]). In my classes, a brief opening dialogue at the beginning of new topics provides an opportunity for students to report their own knowledge and (often for the first time) formalize their reasoning (a strategy I learned long ago from a very effective physics teacher). This exercise primes students for lecture by explicitly activating the relational links between concepts that I intend to modify, making existing representations more susceptible to change, a phenomenon known in memory as retrieval-induced reconsolidation.

Failure also provides students and teachers with rich feedback, but learners need opportunities to safely fail. My research in semantic learning has illustrated the dangers of repeatedly exposing students to archetypal illustrations for highly nuanced concepts (e.g., memorizing a list of translations for concrete nouns). Diversity of input is central to robust learning, tapping into the graded confidence that even native-speakers have about particular examples of a known category. Students who have opportunities to confront—and fail against—new naming challenges make the greater strides in language learning, and likewise, a classroom environment can foster risk-taking and cultivate positive accountability when the outcomes are framed as teacher and students' cooperative effectiveness.

Finally, any set of claims about teaching methods must be held against some measure of effectiveness. My student evaluations of teacher effectiveness (SRTEs) are summarized below. I often tell students, "I believe you already know the answer to your own question. Why don't you try to guess what I'm going to say, and then I'll only add anything if I need to?" This response typically elicits a momentary (and educational) discomfort for the student, but I always wait patiently to work through the process with them. After solving an especially frustrating problem while I merely looked on, one student exclaimed, "You knew I had the answer… You're like Master Yoda!" I can imagine no higher praise for a teacher.

Semester	Course Name	Course #	Role	Instructor Rating
Spring 2017	Language & Brain	BCS 265	Course Instructor	6.02 / 7 (conv. 4.3 / 5)
Spring 2014	Research Methods	PSYCH 301W	Lab Instructor	6.30 / 7
Fall 2013	Psych of Language	PSYCH/LING 457	Course Instructor	6.50 / 7
Summer 2013	Statistics	PSYCH 200	Course Instructor	6.38 / 7
Fall 2010	Research Methods	PSYCH 301W Sec 2&3	Lab Instructor	5.94 / 7 & 6.40 / 7

Additional courses I could teach right away:

- Second language acquisition / bilingualism
- Cognitive neuroscience of language
- Neuroimaging principles and methods
- Scientific computing / programming

1 http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae_spring2016sadler-and-sonnert.pdf
2 http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/04/16/473273571/why-teachers-need-to-know-the-wrong-answers