



Name der Studentin / des Studenten: Rieger, Annika
 Studiengang: Fachmodul Fremdsprachen
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Praxisportfolio Theorieportfolio Kunstportfolio

Introduction:

I have been teaching English in Years 6 and 9 at the Steiner School in Bern since August 2015. At five weekends and seven Thursdays, I attended the foreign language module at the AfaP in Dornach. Over the course of the module and my language teaching at school, I elaborated on my two most pressing questions that will be the tenor of this portfolio; namely the choice of an educational content and the issue of discipline.

The first question deals with the tools of language teaching at a Waldorf School. Being trained in a state school system, I had to find a way to approach a relatively free curriculum and to organise a school term, not based on a textbook but on the students themselves. This led to various challenges that I will reflect on in the light of cultural studies in Year 9.

The second question is maybe the most demanding matter of my teaching career. During several school placements in university, a year at a girls' school in London, two years of teacher training in Berlin and one school year in Bern, I understood that the relationship between the teacher and the pupils is the core of teaching. According to Steiner, educating others is at the same time self-education; my reflection on discipline will look at this statement in more detail.

Progress Report:

Regional and cultural studies in foreign language learning in Waldorf schools on the basis of the topic of Australia and New Zealand in Year 9

In Waldorf education two foreign languages are taught from the start, to give the child the opportunity to grow up with the language and to overcome the "foreign" aspect. Similarly to first language acquisition, when children soak up their mother tongue like a sponge, the Waldorf teacher aims to immerse the students in the spirit and sounds of a foreign language, in an exclusively oral approach for the first three years of schooling.

Regional and cultural studies are interwoven in poems, games and stories of the target language. From Year 5, foreign countries are covered more consciously and directly and the students get to know geographical, historical and cultural aspects of the target language.

This essay discusses the teacher's preparation and approach to regional and cultural studies. Does it matter that a foreign language teacher might not be able to travel and live in every country that he or she will talk about in class?

Regional and cultural studies have been highly criticized after the Second World War. Is it possible to impart isolated knowledge about a people without spreading clichés and prejudices? Robert Picht remarks that regional and cultural studies were the “Loch Ness” of foreign language teaching in the 1960s and 1970s. Which means that it was seen as too charged and therefore excluded from the curricular. Today, especially in state schools, it can be observed that cultural studies are split apart and fragmentary taught. The emphasis lies on every day conversations and banalities and thus loses sight of the holistic soul of a people. Rudolf Steiner is of the opinion that authentic and original reading covers every important aspect of a nation’s soul. Through reading one can discuss customs, habits and the spirit of a people (Denjean, 133-134).

Steiner claims that the spirit of a nation is not bound to a geographical place and thus it is not necessary to travel abroad to get to the core of a language and culture. However, this puts enormous pressure on the teacher who should live the language spirit in order to teach a foreign language. Steiner explained the language spirit with the image of a prism. Every language has its own core light that beams through a human in a certain way and touches him or her deep within. If one only speaks one language one can never fully experience the numerous quality of that core light. Thus, it is vital for the inner growth of a young child to experience the light in different facets through the prism and that is reached, among others, by foreign language learning (Denjean, 138).

What do I know as a teacher of English about the light and the soul of this particular language? Knowledge about the soul of a people can’t be acquired in a short time. With English it is even more complicated because English is used as a lingua franca and thus completely fluid and hard to grasp as one language spirit.

In the following I like to reflect on my teaching experience of Australia and New Zealand in Year 9. I only know Australia from very brief city trips and from literature, as I have spent most of my free time in the last seven years in New Zealand. Nevertheless, I wanted to cover Australia, as I already possessed teaching materials from my previous job at a state school. Having Steiner’s thoughts on the language spirit in mind, I can see now, that I was quite naive to try and tackle Australia as a subject. Not, because I have not really been there, but because the Australian spirit had not lived within me. I started with geography, wildlife and history and did not really understand why the students did not seem too interested.

On [pages](#) you can see the introduction to Australia with a mind-map of the student’s prior knowledge, expanded by “Aussie facts”, followed by a discussion on the most surprising aspects, and finally a piece of research for homework: Compare Australia and Switzerland. This is a classical textbook approach and is based on English G21 by Cornelsen.

Next, I introduced the history of James Cook, the first settlers and the Gold Rush. With the help of the reading strategies of scanning and skimming the students worked on different aspects with their partners. For oral work, the pupils presented Australia’s most significant animals and practiced taking notes on each other’s talks ([page](#)).

For a school performance I eventually looked up the poem “My Country” ([page](#)) and listened to a recording of the poem by the author Dorothea Mackellar. Suddenly, I got an idea of the heat and vastness of Australia and could hear the author’s homesickness, being stuck in England in the 1910s. The poem and thus the country came to life for me and the students’ performance in front of the parents went really well.

At this point I realised that I had *lost* the class. They did all the exercises and grammar and vocabulary tests but their heart was not in it. Australia had become a school subject without any emotions. Work on the poem “My Country” enlivened the lessons a little but I realised I needed a more personal approach on the topics already taught.

So I came up with a task that was not in the textbook:

“Imagine you are one of the first settlers in Australia, write a letter to your parents in the UK and tell them about the journey on the boat. How did you feel, what did you see, how did it smell? What have you experienced in Australia so far? What are your wishes for the future?”

This personal approach that also considered senses, worked very well ([page](#)).

In order to prepare the novel "Rabbit-Proof Fence", the students studied the Aboriginal People of Australia and their Art (page). Here, I realised that my personal interest in Art enlivened the lessons.

The project that worked best in state school in Berlin was a poster presentation on an imaginary class trip. Interestingly enough, state school students were much more capable of fictitious work, whereas Steiner students struggled with the task. They could not see the point of planning a journey that might never take place. Nevertheless, in groups of three they were supposed to go to a travel agent and get information on their designated city or nature spot in Australia. In class they produced a poster with their authentic travel plan and practiced a presentation. My underlying soft skill training of researching travel times and activities on the internet went moderately well. This is a task for extremely independent learners and it was easy to take advantage of in our media room (page).

When we covered the book "Rabbit-Proof Fence" and the students wrote a summary, a characterisation, a picture description and a dialogue of the protagonists, we could talk about the injustice through an emotional approach of the historic theme of the Stolen Generation of Aborigines. Interest was much more provoked than in any intellectually focused presentation on wildlife or the Great Barrier Reef. I used the writing task for grammar revision (tenses) and the different register in writing. The students handed in a portfolio with a self-evaluation sheet that can be seen on pages. Here, it got very apparent that not everybody can yet deal with deadlines and is reliable. For others the "to-do list" approach of handing in four texts in a given timeframe worked extremely well. I did not pursue the missing texts from students because the different ability levels were extraordinary visible at this point. Thus, one well-written text from a weaker student counted as much as four very good texts from A-level candidates.

Overall, it can be said that the topic of Australia grew on me through the teaching process and that literary work was most effective in order to teach the language genius. The copybooks show an active students' engagement with the teaching content (Anhang).

The topic of New Zealand is already close to my heart, as I have family there. I spend time in NZ almost every other year and after my home country Germany it would be the land I am most attached to. It starts with arriving in Auckland after a long haul flight and one breathes in the sweet and spicy air that is very distinct to New Zealand. I was lucky enough to study English and the Art of the Pacific at Victoria University in Wellington and had the pleasure to visit a Maori (natives) *marae* (meeting grounds) and attend *hakas* (war dances). I saw the treaty grounds in Waitangi and the first capital of New Zealand, Russell. Here, the *pakeha* (white men) signed the treaty to live a peaceful coexistence with the Maori. That kind of agreement never happened in Australia and even in New Zealand has been never fully recognised but still serves as discussion ground between the *pakeha* and the *Maori*. These contrasts of the two countries would be an important study point from which to discuss the discrimination of natives in many English-speaking countries.

I started with a mind-map of prior knowledge and was lucky that one of my students visited NZ a couple of years ago. In combination with the text "Barefoot in life" (source) which gives an overview of the kiwi (people of NZ) lifestyle, the students got a first taste of the subject. We watched the famous *haka* that is still performed by the NZ national rugby team "The All Blacks" before every match. Here, we have a remarkable crossover of history, tradition, sport and nowadays Kiwi lifestyle. The people of New Zealand are so interwoven with their ancestors that even in 2016, Maori heritage is visible at all times (pages).

Students heard about the Maori half-God Maui and how he fished the North and South Islands out of the sea (page), they studied the precious green stone carvings that are worn by New Zealanders until the present day and explored the *moko* which are traditional tattoos sometimes covering the whole face and parts of the body.

Having looked at Maori history and customs, we watched the film "Boy" (2010) that deals with the topics of Maori identity, growing up, family, guilt and everything quintessential New Zealand. I hesitated, as the film depicts the poor, rural Maori with a lot of swearing and drug consumption.

However, the movie is so light-hearted and funny that my 15-years old students were able to distinguish between the director's take, being Maori himself, and the reality of a 12-year old who tries to find meaning in life. In order to foster an unbiased understanding the students wrote a film recommendation that had to state what you find out about Maori and what is not covered (page).

I was lucky enough to find a short story that feeds in right with the theme of the film. It is called "Yellow Brick Road" and is written by Witi Ihimaera, the first Maori writer to publish a novel in English. After all the written work, I refrained from more writing tasks and concentrated on reading and on a character net (page). The topic was rounded off with the discussion on reasons to move. In the short story the Maori family moves away from the poor village to the capital Wellington to start a new life. So many people are on the move today in order to find a better life, among others, in Europe/ Switzerland (page). It was great to hear that some students are in touch with young people from Syria and thus, open themselves up to other languages and cultural backgrounds, as advocated in the Waldorf foreign language classroom.

I will end the school year with two inner images, one from the Australian poem "My Country" which depicts the land as "sunburnt" and the other from the NZ short story which characterises the land of the long white cloud (*Aotearoa*) as "liquid sunshine". Two, as I find, fitting images of the genius of the people of Australia and New Zealand.



To conclude, I had to reconsider that a foreign language teacher should only cover the countries he or she has been to. More importantly, than having every day knowledge of a people through travelling, one has to explore the spirit of a language and its people through a deep involvement with the sound of a language and the atmosphere and vigour in any given text and artwork. However, I argue that a foreign language teacher cannot convey the language spirit thoroughly if he or she never spends time in the target language's countries. In the case of English as a lingua franca, I am of the opinion that Great Britain and the United States of America are only extracts from a vast English-speaking culture, and countries like e.g. South Africa and India should also find their place in regional and cultural studies. For a teacher of English this has the consequence of a lifelong relationship with the language spirit.

Sources:

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Exemplary Students' work:

Das Arbeitsbeispiel ist wesentlicher Bestandteil des Portfolios. Zum einen liefert es die Grundlage für eine vertiefende Auseinandersetzung mit einem Thema innerhalb des Portfolios und zum anderen dient es als Leistungsnachweis, aus welchem die Fähigkeiten des Studierenden direkt ersichtlich werden. Wichtig ist, dass das Arbeitsbeispiel in einer angemessenen Form kommentiert ist, so dass ein direkter Bezug zu den Inhalten des Portfolios hergestellt werden kann und ersichtlich wird, was anhand des jeweiligen Arbeitsbeispiels dokumentiert werden soll. Ausführliche Arbeitsbeispiele können dem Portfolio auch als Anhang beigefügt werden.

Kopien folgen

Self-reflection and Evaluation:

Regional and cultural studies in Year 9

The difference between teaching Australia and New Zealand is how the two countries live inside of me. I was grateful that I could fall back on Australian materials from a textbook. I would still refer to these worksheets in the future but not exclusively. In my first year of teaching it gave me the reassurance that I cover enough content, vocabulary and grammar. For some of my Year 9 students this was their last year of schooling and thus, I needed a frame and a guideline for an A2/B1 level of English. That was the obligation; the free and creative programme was the reward. I recognised that the class came to life, when I was really interested as well (creative writing tasks, poems, songs, literature).

Teaching New Zealand was completely detached from any textbook. Preparing the lessons was already rewarding, as I read articles and stories that appealed to me. I chose texts, a story and a film that I personally liked and could introduce each lesson with a personal anecdote. However, I also experience disappointment when the class did not respond to a lesson the way I hoped for. Teaching from a textbook is much safer in this respect, as I do not share any personal experience with teenagers who are principally bored and slightly disinterested with everything a grown-up presents to them. If you see the slightest enthusiasm in their eyes you can clap yourself on the back. If it does not come, it does not necessarily mean that they did not feel it, but that they were too pubescent to show it.

I asked the students if they have noticed any differences in my lessons and here are the results:

Auswertung Fragebogen

Discipline

„You will not be a good teacher if you focus only on what you do and not upon who you are.“
Steiner

Being in a classroom with students is already an encounter in one way or another. There does not need to be a subject matter, or a question or a problem. It is enough that several individuals are in one room and try to establish a functional group (Steiner 1924, 60). Being a teacher means first and foremost to initiate communication. Mr. Wirz argues that the key to an outward union is the ability to be extremely flexible on the inside. Teachers need inspiration for every new lesson in regard of the content but more importantly for the capability to meet the students again in a fresh light. It is wise to start every teaching day as if it were the first. One never knows which direction a class is taking. One aims to be free from tight expectations and thus has a chance to glimpse the moments when an unexpected thought, or an unplanned discussion lights up the lesson. A teacher who takes past quarrels and conflicts into a new lesson has to fail (Wirz 2004, 103).

In theory these guidelines sound very helpful and straightforward, but in every day teaching, letting go of disappointment and dissatisfaction for the next school day is one of the hardest aspects of my job. Children can be very different in this aspect. In a stressful art lesson, I once reached my absolute limit and really screamed at an outraged boy that I do not care about his unfinished picture and his accusations of my inadequate lesson. Due to his disrespectful tone he was dismissed. I assumed that he would never talk to me again. However, the next day he skipped in my classroom and hurled a friendly greeting my way and behaved like a completely different person. I could not believe it, yesterday's conflict was forgotten, a new day, a new lesson, a new chance has begun. In this respect, I have learnt most in the last eleven months. Not about my subject, or giving feedback but about forgiveness and moving on one day at a time.

Waldorf teaching aims at enabling the student to get along in this world, and beyond that to get

on when life becomes difficult. Failing is part of our life but how people react to it and deal with it depends on education and upbringing. Here, Waldorf pedagogy's principle gets apparent: Education for freedom (Wirz 2004, 71).

In this seemingly plain sailing maxim lies all the creativity and all the hardship of everyday teaching. The aim of Waldorf education among others is *viability*, students get enabled to explore who they are and what they are meant to achieve in this world and for this world. In this context, school is a realm of experiences and children sense themselves through a creative curriculum. However, the line between "sensing themselves" and disregarding others is very thin. At the core of the discipline issue lies the balancing act of encouraging independent thought and healthy self-consciousness in the students on the one hand, and on the other hand to set bounds to *unacceptable* behaviour. For me unacceptable behaviour is hard to define and even harder to punish. I can be tolerant to shouting one day and the other day I sanction it with expelling the offender. This obviously has led to countless discussions with students and numerous rules that get set up and broken again. Having strict rules was against my belief of a lively, communicative language lesson. Punishing students with leaving the room is also hard for me, because of the lesson content that I do not want to be missed. Asking colleagues for advice can be equally confusing as everyone sanctions the breach of rules in a different way; From using humour to expulsion from school - I heard it all.

In the end, I realised instead of solely looking at the students and their wrongdoings I have to look at myself. Being a teacher not only means to teach a subject, it also means to give guidance and guidelines. I had to frame "punishment" in a new light. *Timeout* does not necessary have to be seen as negative, but could also be a gift to a student who cannot follow the lesson anymore, no matter what. Getting time outside the classroom to copy a text gives a student with concentration issues the chance to get away from too much stimuli and he or she does not have to act up in front of peers anymore.

Here, I experienced that it is vital to meet the student, who crushed a lesson, like you meet him or her for the very first time the next day. These children look at you very closely the next day and try to establish if you bear any grudges, in which case they will very likely play up again. However, if you meet them in a neutral way, neither with a forced smile nor with an angry face, they realise that you have moved on and treat them with respect – which is all they cry out for. After all, I am the grown-up and I am able to distinguish boiled-up emotions from wits and reason (at least most of the time). How do I let go of negativity? I just do.

See me beautiful
Look for the best in me
It's what I really am
And all I want to be
It may take some time
It may be hard to find
But see me beautiful

See me beautiful
Each and every day
Could you take a chance
Could you find a way
To see me shining through
In everything I do
And see me beautiful

by Kathy and Red Grammar in Gewaltfreie Kommunikation

Students want teachers to be fully present, attentive and respectful. They will test every weakness and will try to find a loophole in any given set of rules. Being aware of that and knowing that they test me in my role as a teacher and not me as a private person, has helped me in many difficult

situations. In one very late lesson on a Friday afternoon I had planned to read but the class could not concentrate in the slightest. Instead of getting frustrated with my preparation efforts, I looked at the students more closely and had the presence of mind to overthrow my lesson plan and discussed the upcoming European football championship, regarding the issue of racism, surrounding the German national team on "Kinderschokolade". It was one of the best discussions I ever had in a classroom.

Furthermore, my decisive intent to understand the other has helped me. The student, who triggers me most, has the most challenging life of all. At a class outing we lagged behind and he finally opened up. Talking about dinner in his family, he told me that he only eats with his mother, since his dad lives in Germany and tubes feed his severely disabled brother. I try to treat him as if he was any other student, but when he overreacts in class, I know that he gives his very best and needs equilibrium, for too much responsibility at such a young age.

Personal interest could interrupt teaching, but for me it is the pillar of education for life. After all, Steiner Schools aim at enabling their students to be fit for life, to have courage and a zest for life, no matter the circumstances. Students will look at these qualities in their teachers and test their authenticity in what they say and what they demand. I experienced that if you love your life and you do not completely live for school and for lesson preparation but have the zest for life yourself, see the world and live the language you are teaching, students will begin to respect you for what you do and what you are good at.



Hokusai Says

Hokusai says Look carefully.

He says pay attention, notice.

He says keep looking, stay curious.

He says there is no end to seeing.

He says Look Forward to getting old.

He says keep changing,

you just get more who you really are.

He says get stuck, accept it, repeat yourself
as long as it's interesting.
He says keep doing what you love.
He says keep praying.
He says every one of us is a child,
every one of us is ancient,
every one of us has a body.
He says every one of us is frightened.
He says every one of us has to find a way to live with fear.
He says everything is alive –
shells, buildings, people, fish, mountains, trees.
Wood is alive.
Water is alive.
Everything has its own life.
Everything lives inside us.
He says live with the world inside you.
He says it doesn't matter if you draw, or write books.
It doesn't matter if you saw wood, or catch fish.
It doesn't matter if you sit at home
and stare at the ants on your verandah or the shadows of the trees
and grasses in your garden.
It matters that you care.
It matters that you feel.
It matters that you notice.
It matters that life lives through you.
Contentment is life living through you.
Joy is life living through you.
Satisfaction and strength
are life living through you.
Peace is life living through you.
He says don't be afraid.
Don't be afraid.
Look, feel, let life take you by the hand.
Let life live through you.
by Roger Keyes

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Name der Studentin / des Studenten:	Annika Rieger
Fachmodul:	Fachmodul Fremdsprachen
Ort:	Dornach
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Im Kompetenznachweis sollen Fach-, Methoden-, Sozial- und Selbstkompetenzen erfasst werden, die Bestandteil des im Portfolio dokumentierten Gesamtrahmens waren. Der Nachweis der Kompetenzen erfolgt nach Möglichkeit direkt anhand des Portfolios.

Fachkompetenz:

After five years at university and two years of teacher training, I assumed I have a fair deal of professional knowledge. However, starting at a Steiner School, I initially thought I never had any training at all. There were no textbooks, no exam schedules, no grade deadlines but 42 students on 42 different levels of English. It did not help that my French colleague quit after three days because he stated it cannot be done. It scared me and at the same time gave me courage. After all, I thought I could never teach an A-level class at a Gymnasium in Berlin, being a Steiner student myself – but I did it.

So I did one day at a time, failed with a lesson, tried again, often failed again and eventually listened to my students to get inspiration for a lesson. My Year 9 is underwhelmed with school in general and thus choosing a medium (e.g. film) that they could relate to with a topic (finding meaning in life) that they comprehended, worked very well. However, fragmented textbook texts without any emotions were hard to promote.

Methodenkompetenz:

Organising group work shared some responsibility with the students as they are, to a large extent, in charge of their own learning progress. As I started to relax and give some control back to the students (research topics, individual reading) the lessons became easier. State school students never obviously complained about lesson content, as they depend on a good mark. Steiner students on the other hand riot if they cannot comprehend the teaching structure. So, in a way, I was thrown back two years ago, to the beginning of my training, when I had no idea what I was doing. Back then; I had no notion of how a textbook is organised and how to work towards a state exam. Now, I am confronted with incredibly self-assured students who let me know when an exercise does not make sense to them. The foreign language module in Dornach helped a lot to trust in my skills again and choose lesson subjects that I like.

Sozialkompetenz:

Year 9 consists of ten boys and eight girls. The development of one boy in particular can show his and my social growth. That boy is lonely in the class and was introduced to me as a guest in the English classroom because he does not work towards a school diploma. Unfortunately, I had to ignore him in the beginning, as Steiner teaching was new to me and I had 17 other demanding students who claimed my full attention. Nevertheless, he came to every lesson and spoke the title of a poem at a parents' performance, something he apparently has never done before. He was involved but not in an obvious way. Finishing the topic of Australia and introducing New Zealand, my attention during the lessons shifted from content to students. I saw him sitting there, quiet as usual, but fully concentrated on the task: "What do you know about NZ?" He drew a beautiful kiwi bird in his exercise book. I could not believe my eyes. The rest of the class was half asleep but this boy drew a mind-map of NZ. I could use his drawings as a discussion basis with the rest of the class and his eyes lit up. So, I finally gave him his very own copybook and I caught him with a vocabulary list. (He had looked up words he wanted to know!)

This boy was a complete riddle to me, but now that he was involved in the lesson with presenting his drawings and beautifully decorated book entries, the class took notice and finally asked him for a spare glue stick or an eraser which he nervously passed around.

He watched the film "Boy" with us and said he enjoyed it very much and understood a bit. During the film I could watch the students closely and this boy sat there and listened to 90 minutes of kiwi English and did not once look away from the screen. His copybook is the most artful one I have ever seen (Anhang) and I had the feeling that he bonded more with school and his class in the last few weeks.

Selbstkompetenz:

Personal development is at the core of teaching for me. Education is always self-education as Steiner pointed out. I chose a profession that in its essence is constant self-reflection. If I am not sure and steadfast in my lessons, my students immediately mirror any insecurity with challenging behaviour. If I am firm and transparent in a lesson and with my set of rules, it is more likely to create a respectful learning environment. Discipline was and is the biggest challenge to me but during the course of one teaching year I have already made a lot of progress and aim to gain even more in the years to come.

Teaching cultural studies in Year 9 gave me the chance to broaden my horizon while looking at Australia and the issue of the "Stolen Generation" which I have never previously studied myself and to share my passion for New Zealand. Sharing something you are passionate about is risky but at the same time made Aotearoa so much more precious to me.

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Unterschrift

