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Authors	Donohue-Bergeler, Devon;Hanka, Dakota;Goulet, Callum
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Queer auf Deutsch

Positive classroom environment and LGBTQ+ inclusion through drama-based pedagogy in a collegiate beginner German course

Devon Donohue-Bergeler, Dakota Hanka & Callum Goulet

In this report, we retrospectively explore the effects of drama-based pedagogy on classroom environment and LGBTQ+ inclusion in a first-semester collegiate German course. We examined students' self-reported perceptions of their learning experience in English, as well as gendered language production in German. Our retroactive analysis suggests that pedagogical decisions and activities rooted in drama-based pedagogy contributed to creating a safe and inclusive classroom that encouraged LGBTQ+ students to express parts of their queer identities in the target language.

1 Introduction

During a semester-long introductory German course for undergraduates, both the students and Devon, a graduate student instructor at the time, noticed a distinct shift in classroom atmosphere and a heightened sense of community. Following a mid-semester full-class roleplay activity using the “teacher-in-role” technique and the introduction of inclusive vocabulary, the classroom environment became comfortable enough that several LGBTQ+ students individually came out to Devon and began purposefully integrating queer themes into class assignments. Devon had never experienced this as a German instructor, despite previously providing the same inclusive vocabulary and non-heteronormative content in this teaching context. She sensed that these changes may have been cultivated by her increased and consistent use of Dawson and Lee’s model of drama-based pedagogy (2018) as part of her dissertation study on teaching development for graduate student instructors. Without intending to, she had an additional study on her hands.

After that semester, Devon formed a team with two of the undergraduate students from this course, Dakota and Callum (Donohue-Bergeler et al., 2018). We wanted to examine how drama-based pedagogy influenced the classroom dynamic and students’ incorporation of LGBTQ+ themes in their assignments. The following questions, which we formed intuitively based on our experiences in the course, guided our inquiry:

- 1) How did drama-based pedagogy contribute to a positive and safe classroom environment?
- 2) How did the classroom environment affect if and how students expressed non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities?

2 The pedagogical approach

In this section, we introduce the drama-based pedagogy model that Devon taught to graduate student instructors and modeled while teaching her own first-semester German course. We then describe specific activities Devon facilitated to illustrate the practice before giving more general definitions and discussing relevant learning theories. We then tie this practice to literature on classroom dynamics and inclusion.

2.1 Drama-based pedagogy model

While the field of performative pedagogy in additional language learning contexts has not and may never settle on an absolute label and definition (Weber, 2014), scenario-based roleplays and character-focused activities are ubiquitous in the literature and in practice for encouraging students to produce language in a meaningful context (Koerner, 2014).

Devon viewed a broader practice of drama-based pedagogy as a good fit for first semester foreign language courses because most students begin with little prior knowledge of the target language, which could make role work and extended process drama challenging. Drama-based activities over an extended time period can work towards achieving smaller learning goals, such as applying a grammatical structure in a new way, and scaffold into more complex dramatic activities, including role work.

Growing from the “Drama for Schools” model in the general curriculum (Cawthon & Dawson, 2011; Dawson, Cawthon & Baker, 2011; Lee, Cawthon & Dawson, 2013), Dawson and Lee (2018) developed a drama-based pedagogy model to include stand-alone versions of activities that many drama practitioners consider warm-ups or cool-downs for role work (Koerner, 2014). This practice scaffolds risk both for students and teachers unfamiliar with artistic teaching practices (Dawson & Lee, 2018).

2.1.1 Exemplary activities

On the first and last days of class, Devon facilitated a Poster Dialogue activity. While upbeat music played, students walked around the classroom and completed the following four phrases written on individual posters:

The German language is...

The German/Swiss/Austrian cultures are...

Language learning is...

A concern I have about learning German is...

Students were also invited to place checkmarks next to responses with which they agreed (see Appendix C). Students returned to their seats and synthesized responses in a full class discussion using a reflection technique: Dawson and Lee's "Describe-Analyze-Relate" meaning-making routine (2018). Students described and then interpreted emerging trends, then related these to how they might approach our course and future language learning. In particular, students openly discussed their anxieties about learning a new language and strategies to ease these concerns.

Another activity Devon facilitated is the game, "Thumbs". It uses total physical response (TPR) to engage students in listening and responding through action, while the post-activity reflection in English provided an opportunity for deeper meaning-making. In German, Devon gave instructions using command forms and modal verbs, structures students had just learned. Students ended up in a circle with their left thumbs and right hands positioned in a way to begin the game. On the count of 3, students tried to grab their neighbor's thumb with their right hand. Simultaneously, they attempted to remove their left thumb from their other neighbor's grasp. After lots of laughing and several variations of the game led by individual students, the class reflected as a group through the "Describe-Analyze-Relate" technique described above. This led to a meta-discussion on multi-tasking and how it related to language learning: how someone can simultaneously attend to both fluency and accuracy while speaking in the target language, or why to prioritize one over the other.

Devon also facilitated roleplays, both as partner work and a full class process drama. One that was pivotal in our exploration is described below in our observations section.

2.1.2 Definition

As these examples demonstrate, the broader practice of drama-based pedagogy addresses shifting perspectives in creative and reflective ways, facilitates collaboration and communication skills, and is underpinned by learning theories (Lee, et. al, 2014). Dawson and Lee (2018) define drama-based pedagogy in the general curriculum for an audience of teacher-practitioners thusly:

Drama-based pedagogy (DBP) uses **active and dramatic approaches** to engage students in **academic, affective, and aesthetic learning** through **dialogic meaning-making** in all areas of the curriculum. (p. 17, emphasis in original).

Drama-based pedagogy includes, but is also more than, roleplay around a dramatic conflict. Activities characterized as active discussion starters (like poster dialogues), theater games as metaphor (like the thumbs game), image work (like pantomime and freeze frame tableaux), and role work build on learners' expertise and encourage students to co-construct meaning through action, interpretation, and guided reflection (Dawson & Lee, 2018).

This form of drama-based pedagogy draws heavily from socioconstructivism, critical pedagogy, and findings from the field of neuroscience.

In socioconstructivism, learners co-construct meaning based on previous knowledge and social interactions with peers and instructors. Vygotsky (1978) developed the concept of the zone of proximal development to describe the level of knowledge or skill a learner can attain with assistance. Bruner (1996) discussed the role of scaffolding, i.e., specific measures that can help a learner to grow. Wilhelm sums up the learner perspective with this representative quote: "Show me, help me, let me" (2002, p. 19). Through lived experiences and guided reflection during drama-based activities, students construct knowledge and meaning within a social context.

In critical pedagogy, students are not merely vessels that instructors fill with knowledge as in a banking model of education. They are partners in creating and applying knowledge. This learning theory explores shifting power dynamics between teachers and students (Boal, 1985; Freire, 1990). Techniques from drama-based pedagogy often blur the traditional hierarchy between learners and instructors.

Neuroscience is relevant to drama-based pedagogy. Multisensory environments, emotions, and physical movement that are present in many drama-based activities aid learning and retention by elaborating information, creating flow experiences, and developing multiple pathways in the brain (Doyle & Zakrejsek, 2013; Sambanis, 2013). Meaning-making, risk-taking and failure in a safe environment, such as a scaffolded activity, can lead to growth and the ability to apply learning in non-instructional settings (Doyle & Zakrejsek, 2013; Sambanis, 2013).

2.2 Classroom dynamics and inclusion

The literature on classroom dynamics and inclusion gave additional insight as to what effects the practice of drama-based pedagogy could have. Park and Choi (2014) reinforced how

certain classroom setups can help or hinder communication and students' perception of the instructor. Drama-based techniques can encourage a variety of open classroom setups in which all students collaboratively participate without fear (Paul, 2015). The relationship between students and instructors can be augmented by creating a safe and caring space, for example, by incorporating humor (Scott, 2015). This type of caring relationship can increase student motivation (Zumbrunn, et. al, 2014).

Further, instructional practices can cause marginalized students, such as those who identify as LGBTQ+, to feel included or excluded from the classroom environment (Pryor, 2015). While the field of performative pedagogy is still grappling with how to explicitly foster queer inclusion (Weber, 2014), many activities in drama-based pedagogy were developed or inspired by Augusto Boal, whose *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) strives to include marginalized populations, question existing power structures, and make invisible intersectionality visible (Powers & Duffy, 2015).

3 Context

In this section, we briefly describe the course in which we noticed a change, the classroom context and students, and how we conducted our retroactive inquiry.

3.1 Classroom context

Devon taught the course described in the introduction at a large state university in the southwest United States. GER101 was a 15-week course meeting 5 hours per week. Multiple sections of GER101 used a standard syllabus, course materials, and assessments. The course covered four chapters of the textbook, *Sag mal* (Anton et al., 2014), and a unit featuring *Kebab Connection*, a 2005 film which included multicultural content and heteronormative characters.

Assessments included online textbook activities, chapter tests, writing tasks in German, reflective assignments in English, weekly participation grades, a film project, and a final oral exam consisting of partner roleplays that students could prepare in advance.

Students worked in groups of 4-5 students for each chapter. These groups provided accountability and a pool of familiar partners for group work and projects.

3.2 Data sources and collection

Our inquiry developed from shared informal observations about our classroom atmosphere related to instructional innovations Devon created and implemented as part of her

dissertation intervention on teaching development for graduate student instructors. To comply with institutional research ethics procedures and avoid any conflict of interest, a researcher not involved in the course explained our ad hoc inquiry to students at the end of the semester and distributed paperwork to request their informed consent¹. After submitting grades, Devon gathered and de-identified² assessments from participating students to use as potential data sources (see Appendix A for assignment prompts). These assessments were created prior to this inquiry and included four chapter tests, three structured reflections in English, and three writing tasks in German. We collected additional data, including instructional materials, personal statements, Devon's ethnographic field notes on her own teaching development as a graduate student instructor, and artifacts. Examples of artifacts include exit slips following a drama-based activity, an anonymous mid-semester course evaluation, eight posters from two poster dialogue sessions, four posters from a Role-on-the-Wall activity, more than 20 original drama-based lesson plans, and photographs from drama-based activities.

3.3 Students

20 out of 23 students agreed to participate. Their ages ranged from 18-22. Most participants had declared non-language majors located within the College of Liberal Arts (8), the College of Natural Sciences (9), the School of Business (2), and the College of Fine Arts (1). Participants consisted of 12 females, 7 males, and one non-binary student. There were 6 freshmen, 7 sophomores, 4 juniors, 2 seniors, and 1 student whose class year was unknown.

3.4 Analysis

We used a qualitative approach to analyzing our ad hoc data. We describe below the steps we took to answer our two guiding questions.

3.4.1 Classroom environment

To answer our question about how drama-based pedagogy affected the classroom environment, we analyzed student perceptions through two English-language data sources that were part of the regular curriculum. These were:

1) two out of three structured reflections (SR1 and SR3) in which students analyzed "assumptions and notions about the German language," their own learning, and the classroom experience at the beginning and again at the end of the semester. We gathered 40 written reflections.

¹ IRB Study Number 2016-03-0055

² Names of all participants except for the authors' are pseudonyms.

2) bonus question responses on four chapter tests (TB1-4) in which students described an unusually profound or meaningful activity done during the previous chapter and how it affected their learning. We collected 73 usable responses.

We analyzed these data using a grounded theory approach that allowed concepts and categories to emerge from the data (Corbin & Strauss 2008). We all coded three samples from each structured reflection and test bonus question. Through vigorous discussion, we developed a codebook with which Dakota and Callum coded the remaining structured reflections and bonus question responses. We then engaged in axial coding in which we sought relationships between codes and collapsed them into overarching categories. We triangulated our findings with other data sources, such as the anonymous mid-semester course evaluations. In this optional survey, students described the classroom environment in response to open-ended prompts about what they liked and disliked about the course and instructor. Because it was an anonymous task, we could reduce potential bias in which students may respond in a way that they expect to please the instructor and seek themes that contradict our initial findings.

3.4.2 LGBTQ+ expression

To answer our question about if and how students expressed non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities, Devon gathered and de-identified usable data about students coming out and using LGBTQ+ indicators in their assignments and classroom conversations. Baseline data inadvertently came from responses to a textbook-created test question in which students described their ideal romantic partner in German, a task which uses gendered language. Additional data came from students' German-language writing tasks (WT): an interview with a classmate (WT2) and a letter written from the perspective of a film character (WT3). Another source was Devon's field notes concerning personal interactions with students during and outside of class, although we chose not to use some data for privacy reasons. To preserve their student perspective, Dakota and Callum wrote personal statements about their own queer experiences within the context of this class immediately after the semester ended and before engaging in our analysis.

4 Observations and discussion

In this section, we present and discuss our observations.

4.1 Classroom environment

Our data tell a story of how drama-based pedagogy affected the classroom environment during the course.

4.1.1 Codebook

In Table 1, we present the codebook that emerged from the data and served as a lens to explore our questions.

Code #	Code name	Working definition
1	we orientation	participant writes in terms of the whole class, doesn't need to be explicit - coder determines whether working together or just referring to the class
2	fun	socially shared enjoyment, social can be assumed for most in-class activities with interactive component
3	comfort	informal, low-anxiety, no judgment
4	challenge --> growth	a specific task or activity was difficult or uncomfortable, but it led to growth
5	ok to fail	failure means you took a risk and that's good for learning
6	social relationships	statement of social engagement with classmates or group members
7	flattened hierarchy	du/Sie, student/teacher, student/student
8	positive group dynamic	holistic, often "triggered" by fun, comfort, and social relationships
9	physical engagement	there was some physical aspect of an activity that you wouldn't normally do in a classroom; like moving around the classroom for scavenger hunts

10	used language in a social context / conversation	application of language as a tool beyond knowledge of language, ability to speak spontaneously
11	connection to real life	topic relevant to college students, individuals, family situation, etc.
12	choice	student agency to make choices and affect their own education/learning experiences
13	embodied	taking on a role with your body, i.e. standard roleplay or freeze frame

Table 1: Codebook

4.1.2 Overarching categories

After the first pass of coding, we collapsed most codes into two overarching categories: social engagement, and comfort. The two codes, “positive group dynamic” and “used language in a social context”, overlapped to fit into both categories. Other codes that fit the social engagement category were “we orientation” and “social relationships”. Codes that fit the comfort category were “fun”, “comfort”, “ok to fail”, and “flattened hierarchy”. We did not combine the following codes into any overarching category: “challenge leading to growth”, “physical engagement”, “connection to real life”, “choice”, and “embodied.” While these codes showed positive associations with drama-based pedagogy, they either did not contribute meaningfully to answering our questions, or they were mentioned infrequently. We confirmed the two overarching categories of social engagement and comfort by returning to and comparing with randomly selected data.

4.1.3 Narrative of observations

Data from the first and last structured reflections (SR1 and SR3) revealed a shift in the students’ mindsets. At the start of the semester, many students wrote about vague connections to German in their everyday experience. In the final reflection, they had moved toward a more specific focus on relationships with classmates and how the classroom was a fun, engaging environment in which they used German with peers. Across the semester, the

number of responses which included aspects of the overarching code, social engagement, more than tripled, from 6 in the first to 20 in the last structured reflections. Similarly, the number of responses which alluded to the overarching code, comfort, quadrupled, from 9 to 36. The following representative example from late in the course illustrates the positive views of classroom social dynamics:

“[An] integral part of the process [was] working with familiar faces and seeing different perspectives... This entire class was a learning experience. Not only in German, and how to approach a language, but also in social interaction, in English and in German. How dialogue translates into learning through roleplaying and how attitude really is everything” (SR3, Herb).

Many students also reflected on their new understanding that risk-taking is necessary for learning, and that it was okay to make mistakes in the classroom. Both of these sentiments were echoed individually through the anonymous mid-semester course evaluation, in which six participants referred to how the relaxed, open atmosphere decreased their anxiety about making mistakes; and collectively through the poster dialogue reflection sequence on the last day of class. Here, students shared their dread of difficult grammatical concepts (see Appendix C), but recognized that they could make errors and still successfully communicate.

Interestingly, Devon taught the same course and curriculum in the previous semester, but did not notice such a shift with that course. The main differences between courses were related to drama-based pedagogy: for the previous class, she developed and facilitated four drama-based activities; for the semester of study, she produced and implemented more than twenty drama-based activities that included more scaffolded risk-taking.

Also, Devon used the formal “Sie” and “Frau Donohue-Bergeler” through about three quarters of the previous semester before switching to the informal “du” and first name. In her previous experience as a graduate student instructor, she presented this switch as an authentic cultural phenomenon that can occur as people get to know each other. In the course at the center of our inquiry, she initiated that switch on the second day of class, a practice she observed in a university course with drama-based methods in Bielefeld, Germany, and explained the choice as specifically conducive to drama-based pedagogy. One of our participants discussed this in their final structured reflection: “The decision to address you [the instructor] in the [informal] ‘du’ form had a large impact on the atmosphere, and I have felt more comfortable sharing experiences or asking questions during class as a result” (SR3, Bea).

Evidence from the structured reflections points to drama-based pedagogy as a catalyst for an exceptional group dynamic, but this connection was only sometimes explicit. To triangulate our findings, we looked to test bonus responses in which students discussed a meaningful

activity. Across all four tests, an average of 70% of students chose drama-based activities. Furthermore, 77% of these responses explicitly reported that the drama-based activity had a positive effect on their learning. Data from the second test provided the strongest evidence connecting the positive classroom environment to drama-based pedagogy, as 15 out of 18 respondents (83%) chose the same drama-based lesson plan, described below.

The lesson began with a benign review of regular and irregular verb conjugations using two verbs that had not been covered in class before: *kiffen* and *saufen*. Students then discovered the meanings of the verbs through two German songs: *Wir kiffen*, by comedian Stefan Raab, and *Saufen* by the punk band, Die Ärzte. Through group discussion using evidence from the song texts, musical delivery, and videos, students worked out that *kiffen* means to smoke cannabis, and *saufen* means to drink heavily. These songs served as preparatory texts for a linguistically simple process drama (O'Neill, 1995; Piazzoli, 2012) about taboo topics that Devon designed to get students talking and distract from any potential performance anxiety.

Students used a handout to prepare characters and motivations for a roleplay in which they applied the following grammar concepts in a communicative task: verb conjugations, negation, and question words. The scenario had students consider university study abroad programs and their policies on drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis. Half of the students took on roles as resident assistants, who were to ask questions and have various stances on program rules. The other half of the class played study abroad students, who may or may not engage in drinking or smoking, and may or may not lie about it. Devon encouraged students to play a character unlike themselves in order to reduce risk that they may feel from embodying characters who discuss illicit activities. Students took props as appropriate for their characters: a drink koozie to indicate someone who drinks heavily, and a zippered plastic bag to signal a cannabis smoker. In this full-class roleplay, Devon took on a role as a study abroad student using the “teacher-in-role” technique with the intention of reducing the power dynamic between students and instructor, and to instigate conflict. Her character modeled language and initiated conversations by half-denying illicit activities while carrying the prop that marked her character as a smoker. This both surprised students and gave them implicit permission to be similarly goofy within the frame of the roleplay. In the structured chaos, students engaged in unscripted target language discussion and much laughter. The class then collectively came out of roll to reflect in English on spontaneous language use and content. At the end of class, students filled out anonymous exit slips to informally assess and further reflect on learning outcomes.

18 of the 23 exit slips (75%) reflected an explicitly positive stance on the activity. Similarly, across test bonus responses which discussed the *kiffen/saufen* exercise, 72% of responses explicitly reported that the activity had a positive effect. These students found the activity

memorable and often associated the taboo topics with a new ability to put themselves out there and use the language. Mary wrote:

“I thought the role play where we were playing characters who smoked or drank was interesting. Since it wasn’t something we’d usually do in a class, I will remember it. It helped because it forced us to make casual conversation on the spot with words we were relatively unfamiliar with. I realized I could understand what others said more than I thought!” (TB 2, Mary).

Mary reflected on the lesson again two months later: “The *kiffen* exercise helped me begin to use aspects of the German language in a new informally conversational way” (SR3, Mary). Another student responded:

“Probably most people found this unusual as well, but the review yesterday that related to hip-hop, rock, smoking, and drinking was pretty unusual. I’m not used to talking about these things in an educational context, so it was a little shocking. It affected my learning by lowering my German speaking anxiety by making the subject fun. It felt like if I messed up, it was okay; so I got to attempt to speak more than usual because of the casual environment” (TB 2, Stephanie).

We looked to the anonymous mid-semester course evaluation for negative cases regarding the classroom environment, as this is the only data source that explicitly elicited critical feedback about the course and Devon’s teaching style (see Appendix B). While positive responses could be grouped into categories, negative responses were diffused and focused on non-related logistics like the textbook or departmental policies. Only five negative comments could be related to drama-based pedagogy out of 130 total comments. Two of these comments described roleplays as too many and awkward, but did not distinguish between the final exam pair work roleplays or the process drama. We would need more context to understand how these two students felt about how roleplays affected their experience of the classroom environment.

On the whole, our analysis suggests that students associated drama-based activities and the course as a whole with community-building and authentic social interaction (matching with the social engagement code) in a safe environment that encouraged risk-taking for learning (fitting to the comfort code). This aligns with what drama-based pedagogy literature reports on positive classroom environment and inclusion (Dawson, Cawthon & Baker, 2011; Paul, 2015). In their evaluation of teacher professional development in the “Drama for Schools” program, Dawson, Cawthon and Baker reported that

“instructional strategies shifted in distinct ways, often reflecting the critical pedagogical nature of the drama-based strategies. Furthermore, teachers

reported that strategies facilitated risk-taking by all members of the classroom. As a result, the roles of teacher and learner in the classroom became more fluid during drama-based instruction.” (2011, p. 313).

In our case, Devon integrated humorous drama-based activities that encouraged creative risk-taking (Scott, 2015). Devon also linguistically established a closer connection to students through an early switch from the formal “Sie” to the informal “du” form of address, a practice consistent with critical performative pedagogy (Newton, 2014) that helped establish a motivating, caring teacher-student relationships (Kim & Schallert, 2011; Zumbrunn, et. al, 2014). Finally, she flattened the teacher-student hierarchy through teacher-in-role activities.

4.2 LGBTQ+ identities

The safe, non-judgmental classroom environment seemed to play a large role in queer students’ comfort in coming out and expressing their LGBTQ+ identities.

4.2.1 Openly queer

A few days after the process drama lesson about smoking cannabis and drinking, Devon introduced family vocabulary using characters from the television series, *Modern Family*. This show features a same-sex couple and their adopted daughter (see Figure 1), as well as multi-racial family members. She also included queer vocabulary not available in the textbook to give students the ability to convey LGBTQ+ identity-markers in German and normalize the topic (see Figure 2). She had used these instructional materials in the previous semester without student responses or subsequent use of the terms.



Figure 1: LGBTQ+ inclusion in family tree

more adjectives to describe family

"Typische Familie"

verrückt - crazy
blöd - dumb
lustig - funny (haha)
komisch - funny (weird)
glücklich - happy
unglücklich - unhappy
langweilig - boring
unheimlich - creepy
liebervoll - loving
süß - cute, sweet
gemein - mean
arschig - mean (literally "assy", i.e. like an ass)

Sexual orientation and identity

lesbisch - lesbian
schwul - gay
bisexuell - bisexual (pronounced /bee*sex*oo*elle/)
transgender - transgender (pronounced like in English)
queer - queer (pronounced like in English)
heterosexuell - heterosexual

Figure 2: LGBTQ+ vocabulary

In the semester of our inquiry, (future) co-authors, Callum and Dakota, responded immediately. Callum called out “yeah, inclusiveness!” upon seeing the vocabulary. Dakota and Devon spontaneously ate lunch together after class that day, and he came out in casual conversation about gay culture in Berlin. Notably, Devon hadn’t previously had after-class meals with students in this teaching context, but did so several times in the following months.

Both Callum and Dakota began integrating queer vocabulary into their written assignments. Dakota described himself as “*schwul und faul*” (gay and lazy) in a spoken interview with another classmate for the second writing task (WT2, April). Callum, writing a letter in role as a pregnant film character, wrote about seeking a new partner in the third writing task:

„Ich brauche Liebe und Rückhalt und du kannst mir das nicht geben. Kein Problem. Ich kann einen guten Freund finden. Er muss ein großzügiger und netter Mann sein. Oder vielleicht kann ich eine süße Freundin finden. Sie gibt mir Liebe und Respekt.“ [translation: I need love and support, and you can’t give that to me. No problem. I can find a good boyfriend. He must be a generous and nice man. Or maybe I can find a sweet girlfriend. She gives me love and respect.] (WT3, Callum)

Class content had already dealt with taboo topics that relate to typical US college experiences, namely, cannabis use and drinking. Therefore, it felt low-risk for these students to integrate queerness in course assignments. Also, beginning language classes tend to focus on the interpersonal, and students often talk about themselves and their experiences. Thus, instructional practices and content explicitly promoted LGBTQ+ inclusion (Pryor, 2015).

Dakota and Callum wrote the following personal statements immediately after the semester to preserve their positionality before creating our writing team, as we knew this would further shift our relationships.

Callum's personal statement. Devon's beginner German class was a unique experience for me in comparison to language courses I've taken in the past. Devon fostered a relaxed and inviting academic environment by taking detours off the path of a traditional textbook-based curriculum through signature learning activities meant to break the ice and allow students to get more involved in their learning. These activities encouraged me to trust in my classmates instead of harboring insecurities, such as, 'is everyone going to laugh at me if I say something wrong?' Devon made a point to connect with our class on a more level playing field instead of holding the typical rigid and hierarchical persona of an instructor. I feel decisions, such as encouraging students to use the informal "du" in conversation with her, promoted a laid-back and supportive learning environment.

When we moved to the 'family vocabulary' section of our course, a set of 'queer vocabulary' words were introduced, and this gave me a deep sense of inclusion, being a part of the queer community myself. It was the first time I had ever experienced a language course make a point to be inclusive of queer students. This feeling of acceptance encouraged me to be my authentic self and not hide in my shell in class. This subsequently allowed me to feel comfortable being visibly 'out' in the classroom instead attempting to stay ambiguous about my queer identity. Sometime mid-semester, Devon and I had lunch together and I ended up 'coming out' to her personally about my queer identity (which she was very supportive about) and we discussed why/what aspects about her class had such a big impact on me. I feel this special type of bond between student and instructor allowed me to dive deep into what I was learning since I felt I had specific language/vocabulary that I could relate to. Throughout the course, I felt a strong support system amongst me, my classmates, and my instructor.

Dakota's personal statement. Despite initial anxiety after entering a new language learning class, Devon's decision to mainly utilize the more informal 'du' form of address with her students, as well as her effective incorporation of the principles of drama-based pedagogy throughout different activities, cultivated an atmosphere of comfort and community in the classroom. By breaking down barriers and encouraging discussion surrounding normally taboo

subjects, the classroom environment was one of open dialogue where students felt that they would not be judged. Providing additional vocabulary that most introductory language classes lack, such as the respective terms for 'gay' (*schwul*) and 'lesbian' (*lesbisch*), made me feel comfortable sharing more about myself with my peers. As a queer student, these factors made the subject of my sexuality a real and tangible thing which felt like a normal part of life and I was encouraged to converse more personally with my friends in the class both in German and in English.

4.2.2 Selective queer expression

Dakota and Callum made their queer identities visible to classmates. Two other students, Bea and Herb, were more private about their possible LGBTQ+ identities. One month after the introduction of queer vocabulary, a test question prompted students to describe their ideal romantic partner, which incidentally elicits gendered language in German. There was no prompt to write in role, and no students marked their answer as being written in role. Two students, Bea and Herb, both named same-sex partners in a way that we deemed to be intentional, as opposed to a minor linguistic error.

Bea wrote, "*Meine idealen Partnerin ist süße, lustige, und intelligenter.*" [translation: My ideal (female) partner is sweet/cute, funny, and intelligent.] While there are grammatical errors concerning adjective endings (underlined), the use of the "in" ending of *Partnerin* clearly marks a female person, as does the "e" ending in "*Meine*". Herb wrote the grammatically correct statement, "*Mein Partner ist sehr nett und hat blonde Haare.*" [translation: My (male) partner is very nice and has blonde hair.] This statement has two markers of male gender: the lack of ending in "*mein*," and the word "*Partner*" without the "in" ending marking a female.

In contrast, Fred, a male student who often talked about his girlfriend, did not use the term, *Partnerin*. He could possibly be bisexual or have a non-binary partner, but based on past performance, the person's name, and Fred's later use of the feminine pronoun, *sie*, we find it likely that using the male term *Partner* instead of the female term *Partnerin* was one of several minor linguistic errors (underlined). Fred wrote, "*Meine Partner ist [female name]. [Female name] hat blond_ hare, blüre Augen. Sie ist net, intelligent, und schöne."* [translation: My (male) partner is (female name). (Female name) has blonde hair, blue eyes. She is nice, intelligent and pretty.]

We found the possibility of coming out in a written test question especially interesting in Herb's case, because in many of his assessments, he did not speak from his own perspective. He often took on the persona of Jimmy Buffet, a famous singer with a female life partner, in quizzes, roleplays, and other tasks. In these instances, he indicated that he was in role by signing the musician's name. When Herb did speak from his own perspective, such as in the

interview assignment shortly after the introduction of LGBTQ+ vocabulary, he did not object to his partner's heteronormative assumption that he may one day have a girlfriend, although he had the target language competence to do so.

"Mike: *Hast du eine Freundin?*" [translation: Do you have a girlfriend?]

"Herb: *Habe ich kein_ Freundin.*" [translation: Have I no girlfriend.]

(WT2 interview, Mike).

In his writeup, Mike elaborates: „*Jetzt_ sofort, Herb hast keine Freundin. Herb sagt vielleicht später.*“ [translation: Right now, Herb has no girlfriend. Herb says maybe later.] Note that any linguistic errors here are Mike's, as this was his assignment (WT2 writeup, Mike).

Because Bea and Herb did not come out to all co-authors directly, and because we did not have the capacity for further data collection, we did not elicit personal statements or interviews from Bea and Herb. Like other educators and researchers, we are grappling with how to explicitly facilitate and study queer inclusion without being intrusive (Weber, 2014).

5 Conclusion

In this section, we describe the limitations of the analysis, implications for practice, ideas for future inquiry, and conclude our report.

5.1 Limitations

For this study, we gathered pre-existing data from a convenience sample of an intact language class in a pre-pandemic, face-to-face context. In authentic educational settings, it is difficult to conduct "clean" studies as expected in the natural sciences. In our case, we additionally did not enter the study site with the explicit intention to conduct research and compare with previous iterations of the course. The idea for our inquiry emerged during the semester in a way that made it impossible to design data collection measures in advance, so we instead requested permission to use mostly instructional materials as data. Thus, we must be cautious about causality and generalizing our findings. Furthermore, there were many pedagogical considerations and decisions that could have led to the positive outcomes we describe.

The most descriptive data sources, the student structured reflections and Devon's field notes, were not specifically designed with our questions in mind. However, these data gave a thorough view of student and instructor perceptions during their journey in this class.

Though test bonus questions were more successful in eliciting discussion of drama-based activities, answers were short and too often did not contain much substance by which to

assess a respondent's mindset or feelings. Instead, they were used as proxy for student interest and engagement in particular activities.

Finally, the chapter 3 test prompt in which students described their ideal partner used gendered language that is binary, eliciting only male or female partners. Our use of these data and interpretations may thus be seen as homonormative, i.e. excluding the possibility of non-binary, fluid gender expressions and non-binary sexualities. However, these considerations were beyond the scope of our inquiry and available data. It is also unclear if students were possibly writing in role instead of as themselves.

5.2 Implications for practice

While this study cannot claim generalizability, it supports the idea that the consistent use of drama-based pedagogy can create a risk-tolerant, inclusive classroom environment and can give students a safe space to express their queer identities in the target language if they choose to. Teachers need to be able to “read the room,” though, to know if these techniques fit for their students and teaching contexts.

This has implications for teacher professional development. Devon discussed that successful use of drama-based pedagogy requires instructor efficacy, buy-in, and support as well as adequate time and the ability to scaffolded risk (Donohue-Bergeler, 2018). Minimally, instructors need initial training to determine the feasibility and desirability of implementing drama-based pedagogy in their context, as student engagement and some level of risk tolerance is required (Donohue-Bergeler, in press).

5.3 Future inquiry

We gathered data from the same sources at the same site over two additional semesters for a potential replication study. Our current observations could be expanded into a longitudinal investigation to further explore the effects of drama-based pedagogy on classroom environment and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Researchers in other teaching contexts could design measures that more thoroughly examine student perceptions of drama-based activities and their capacity to affect social connections and comfort in the classroom. In particular, it would be interesting to explore the feelings of students who dislike drama-based activities, like our two participants who commented that the roleplays were too many and awkward. Researchers could also discern the effects of other factors that may contribute to the classroom atmosphere, such as how beginners are often “in the same boat” in their language learning journey. Perhaps outcomes would be different at intermediate and advanced language levels. In addition, researchers could ask queer

students about how they present in other classes, what factors affect their choice to come out or be out, and if so, how and to whom.

Researchers and educators could also include vocabulary for other minoritized populations or assign students to seek personalized vocabulary to see if the social and safe classroom atmosphere fostered by the use of drama-based pedagogy enables them to express these other identities in the target language.

5.4 Curtain call

In conclusion, this “students as partners” collaboration was conceived in reaction to a shift in classroom environment that both the instructor and students of a collegiate beginner German course perceived. Many elements in this class could have promoted a positive social dynamic and high level of student comfort that allowed multiple students to express queer identities in the classroom environment when given the tools in the target language. We posit that the cohesive use of drama-based pedagogy was one of them that additionally allowed for the emergence of the collaboration that produced this report.

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6 Appendices

6.1 Appendix A: Assignment instructions

6.1.1 Structured reflection 1 (SR1)

Prompt #1: Learning German

This is a writing exercise in which you use the mode of *reflection* to think about your experiences and what they mean to you. We call this *structured* reflection, because the idea is to focus carefully on a couple of specific aspects of your experience, with the goal of learning from them.

The Task:

Please write two paragraphs (one paragraph per question, below) based upon your personal experience.

Question 1: The German Language

Before you joined this class, what assumptions or notions about the German language did you have? Where and how did these ideas develop?

Question 2: Personal Language Learning Goals

What do you hope to learn and do with the German language by taking this course? What do you envision the learning process looking like for you? Do you have strategies that you think could help you in learning German? Do you have questions that you would like to pursue?

6.1.2 Structured reflection 3 (SR3)

Prompt #3: Evaluation of Your Learning Process

The Task:

Over the course of the semester, you've had the opportunity to reflect on a number of interrelated aspects in learning German, including:

- your assumptions and notions about the German language
- your personal language learning goals and expectations of the learning process
- connections between your coursework and experiences outside of your German class

In this last reflection, your task is to *evaluate* your learning over the course of the semester in light of these themes. What has your learning looked like? How would you assess your participation over the course of the semester? And have you experienced any “aha” moments in the course about the German language, its culture(s), the process of learning a foreign language (particularly in college), or even yourself as a language learner? This evaluation is not simply about assessing your strengths and weaknesses (though you are welcome to bring this information in), but rather asks you to consider your own unique learning path in learning German this semester and, importantly, evaluate the source of your commitment.

6.1.3 Text bonus question (TB 1-4)

Thinking about your learning. Pick an in-class activity we did (from chapter x) that you found a little unusual. What was the topic, how was the activity unusual, and how did it affect your learning? (2 pts.)

6.1.4 Exit slip for taboo topic process drama

Thanks for playing along. Please think about what we did today and fill out this self-evaluation of your learning experience. This will help you to consolidate your learning, and it will help me to evaluate the activities we did.

What grammar/vocab did we cover?	
What communication skills did we practice?	
What culture did we discuss?	
What was your overall impression of this activity?	
How might this format affect your understanding, memory, and/or motivation regarding the topics?	

6.1.5 Chapter 3 test question

„Beschreiben Sie Ihren idealen Partner oder Ihre ideale Partnerin! Wie ist er oder sie?“

[“Describe your ideal partner (gender markers - male or female). How is he or she?”]

6.1.6 Writing task 2: Interview and profile

Schreibaufgabe (Writing Task) #2: Ein Interview und Steckbrief

The Task:

This second writing task asks you to write a *Steckbrief* (profile) about another student in the class. In order to write up an introduction for one of your fellow classmates, you will first need to interview him/her. Thus, this task will involve you writing and handing in two separate texts: (1) the interview dialogue, i.e., a set of questions and responses from the interview that will serve as an outline for your *Steckbrief*, and (2) a text of introduction, in which you summarize the information about your classmate from the interview. You'll also want to create a title for the *Steckbrief*, such as a quote from the interview.

Content Focus of the Interview and Steckbrief:

In your interview and follow-up *Steckbrief*, be sure to address the following points:

- Basic information about the person (e.g., name, hometown, age, major/minor, etc.)
- How the person describes him-/herself
- The person's hobbies and interests
- Information about family members and friends

You are welcome to include any additional information that you feel would help complete the picture of your fellow classmate.

6.1.7 Writing task 3: Writing in role

Schreibaufgabe #3: Ein Brief zum Film *Kebab Connection!* (2005)

Aufgabe (Task)

Titzi liebt Ibo, und Ibo liebt Titzi. Aber sie haben Probleme in der Kommunikation. Manchmal können Briefe helfen. In dieser letzten Schreibaufgabe übernehmen Sie die Rolle von Titzi oder von Ibo, und Sie schreiben einen Brief an die andere Person (Ibo oder Titzi). Der Brief kann an irgendeinem Punkt im Film kommen (d.h. am Anfang, in der Mitte, oder am Ende).

Vergessen Sie nicht die Begrüßung (z.B. *Liebe Titzi! Lieber Ibo!*) und den Gruß zum Abschied (z.B. *Dein(e), ...*)!

Inhalt (Content)

Benutzen (*use*) Sie viel Kreativität, aber der Inhalt muss logischerweise mit der Handlung (*plot*) und dem Verhalten (*actions/behavior*) von den Filmfiguren übereinstimmen (*correspond to*).

Fragen zum Nachdenken (*questions to ponder*):

- Warum schreiben Sie den Brief? Ist es ein Liebesbrief? Haben Sie einen anderen Grund (*reason*), warum Sie an Ibo/Titzi schreiben?
- Was möchten Sie Ibo/Titzi sagen? Was muss er/sie wissen, verstehen oder lernen?
- Haben Sie bestimmte (*particular*) Fragen für ihn/sie?
- Wie sieht die Zukunft (*future*) aus? Was hoffen Sie für ihn/sie? Möchten Sie in Kontakt mit ihr/ihm bleiben?

Wichtig! Ihr Brief soll zeigen (*show*), dass Sie die Hauptereignisse (*main events*) im Film und die persönlichen Beziehungen (*relationships*) gut verstehen. Integrieren Sie viele Wörter und Phrasen aus dem Film in Ihren Text!

6.2 Appendix B: Anonymous mid-semester course evaluation

<i>Item: What do you like about your German class and the German language program?</i>	
Theme	Number of Responses (47 total)
relaxed, open atmosphere, no anxiety about mistakes	vi – 6
engaging, interacting with language and peers/group work	v – 5
fun	v – 5
good class size	iiii – 4
Fotoroman	iiii – 4
like the teacher	iii
culture	iii
unorthodox activities, field trips	iii
4-days a week distributed practice	ii
funny words: kiffen	ii
many grades	i
extra credit opportunities	i
movies	i
easy	i
small time commitment	i
learn a lot	i
physical activities: language acquisition, team building, comradery	i
role plays	i
additional materials	i

variety	i
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* most of the high frequency positives refer to group dynamic

<i>Item: What do you NOT like about your German class and the German language program?</i>	
Theme	Number of Responses (26 total)
online homework: fill in the names	iii
online homework: listening activities	ii
online homework: difficulty	ii
online homework: volume	ii
not enough emphasis on vocab	ii
not enough test preparation: time and similar activities	ii
too easy and slow	i
hard to keep up	i
not enough written work	i
not enough grammar practice	i
quizzes	i
textbook: poorly structured	i
textbook: bad grammar explanations	i
DBP machines not helpful	i
too many activities	i
too much paper	i
getting off topic detracts from lesson	i
4-days a week is too often	i
Canvas online discussions	i

* negatives were more diffused, only common theme was the online homework; LPD is working to convince the publisher to scaffold the names with a list, otherwise part of set curriculum to prepare for 2nd semester

<i>Item: What do you like about your German teacher and the teaching approach of the German language program?</i>	
Theme	Number of Responses (42 total)
teacher: enthusiasm, positive	ix – 9
relaxed, open atmosphere	vii – 7
teacher: supportive and approachable	vi – 6
teacher: engaging, fun	vi – 6
fun activities, interaction	v – 5
teacher: knowledgeable	iiii – 4
content related to student life/real life	ii
tests	i
video project	i
extracurriculars	i

* many of the high frequency positives refer to atmosphere, teacher attitude and group dynamic

<i>Item: What do you NOT like about your German teacher and the teaching approach of the German language program?</i>	
Theme	Number of Responses (15 total)
DAR*	ii
listening on online homework and tests	ii
role plays**: too many, awkward	ii
strict program rules***	i

slow pace	i
textbook	i
cultural material	i
not enough writing	i
getting off track****	i
too many activities detract from content (vocab & grammar)*****	i
wants paper test reviews	i
power points suck*****	i

* DAR (describe-analyze-relate meaning making routine) comes from drama-based pedagogy, which was developed for K-12/K-6. Some other instructors also dislike it. I'll drop the explicit DAR, but still fall back on it for some intercultural learning if appropriate.

** Roleplays are part of the curriculum to practice communication, and I wish we could actually do more of them and in larger groups! (i.e. the kiffen/saufen free-for-all)

*** The rules are strict for the purpose of providing coherence across multiple sections, and also to protect grad student instructors from the extra work of making tons of exceptions.

**** Let's all be more selective about asking/answering questions and sharing anecdotes.

***** If we do an activity that's not from the book, it's usually designed for the reception (listening/reading) or production (speaking/writing) of specific vocab or grammar structures in context. For example, the activity where we grabbed each others' thumbs was to practice listening to and responding to imperative verb forms within the frame of a game. In addition, we used that as a metaphor for language learning.

***** I used the power points this semester in response to feedback requesting more explicit grammar instruction. Now I'm toying with the idea of a flipped classroom in which students read the grammar explanations and do the online homework before class. During class, students can then ask questions, get help with challenging parts of the homework, and use the grammar in a more communicative context. What do you think?

