CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	'The only learning I'm going to get': Students with intellectual disabilities learning a second language through performative pedagogy
Authors	Piazzoli, Erika;Kubiak, John
Publication date	2019
Original Citation	Piazzoli, E. and Kubiak, J. (2019) ''The only learning I'm going to get': Students with intellectual disabilities learning a second language through performative pedagogy', Scenario: A Journal for Performative Teaching, Learning, Research, XIII(1), pp. 21-41. https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.13.1.2
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.33178/scenario.13.1.2
Rights	© 2019, The Author(s) - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Download date	2026-11-04 16:55:04
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/8337



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

ISSN 1649-8526
DOI https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.13.1.2
Scenario
Language • Culture • Literature
Volume 2019 · Issue 1
http://scenario.ucc.ie

'The only learning I'm going to get': Students with intellectual disabilities learning a second language through performative pedagogy [1]

Erika Piazzoli & John Kubiak

1. https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.13.1.2

Abstract

Traditionally, adults with intellectual disabilities have not been given the option of participating in and thus benefiting from higher and post-secondary education. However, over the last number of years, an increasing number of inclusive tertiary educational programmes have come into existence. This article focuses on one such programme entitled Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice delivered in the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. The aim of this study was to consider the role of embodiment in supporting the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) process of a group of students with intellectual disabilities. The paper describes a project which integrated two of the programme modules – *Italian for Beginners* and *Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern*. Findings presented support the use of a performative approach to second language learning for students with intellectual disabilities and sheds light on the connection between embodiment, language and learning in a performative key.

1 Introduction: Myths about L2 learning and intellectual disabilities

In Western and non-Western societies, people with intellectual disabilities have stereotypically been considered 'non-educable'; consequently, they did not receive an education like their peers without disabilities, were left at home, or on some occasions, abandoned (Barnes 2010). One of the main catalysts for the drive in promoting the rights of this group of individuals, particularly in relation to their learning needs, has been Article 24 of The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Article 24 states that "persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal

Copyright © 2019 the author[s]. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

basis with others" (UNCRPD 2006). Since then, accessing education and training throughout the life-span for this population is gradually becoming more widely accepted (Uditsky & Hughson 2012).

However, myths about Second Language (L2) learning and students with disabilities still persist. In many settings, it is still common practice to exempt pupils with intellectual disabilities from L2 lessons in primary and secondary schooling, and it is rare to see any student with intellectual disabilities progress to tertiary level of education. As Sparks (2016) points out, in the U.S. the deceptive notion of a 'disability for learning a foreign language' has become acceptable, leading to an increase of substitutions and waivers in schools. In the Republic of Ireland, where the current study was based, it is not uncommon to hear of students with disabilities being automatically exempted from language classes in compulsory schooling, a practice that reinforces and institutionalises the myth of 'foreign language learning disability' (Sparks 2009). For students with learning disabilities including dyspraxia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyslexia, it has been documented that the process of learning a foreign language can be a demanding and even a humiliating experience, with many learning environments lacking personnel who are versed in dealing the problems encountered by these students (Schwarz 1997). But does it really have to be like this? The anxiety generated by hostile environments is arguably detrimental to the learning process of any student – particularly one who is vulnerable to low academic efficacy. However, as contemporary research suggests (Kormos & Smith 2012; Kormos 2017), having a disability does not preclude second language acquisition. Rather, it is the affective factors associated with learning that either hinder, or facilitate, second language acquisition.

Our position aligns with Sparks, who holds that "several myths about disabilities and Foreign Language learning have become common" (2016: 255). Sparks sets out to expose and debunk these myths, one of which is the myth that students who are classified as having a learning disability will exhibit L2 learning difficulties and will fail or withdraw from an L2 course. Instead, he reviews several studies that support evidence to discredit this myth. We believe that Sparks' points are valid insofar that having a disability should not preclude a learner the opportunity to learn a second language, should he/she wish to do so. Thus, Sparks' argument is highly relevant with regard to the participants of this study – university students with learning and intellectual disabilities – who, at the time of writing, were undertaking the Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP) in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As all ASIAP students expressed a keen desire to learn the target language (Italian), this willingless motivated us to embark on the project in the first place; second, it prompted us to consider an appropriate pedagogical approach, one that focused on the role of embodiment which we felt would support the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) process of this group of students.Third, integrating two of the programme modules – *Italian for Beginners* and *Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern* – allowed us the opportunity to co-teach, and to contribute our individual subject area expertise

to the project. Whenever a student is subjected to experience L2 learning as a "humiliating experience", as Schwarz (1997) reports above, we identify the issue as a mismatch between a students' learning needs and the methodological framework underpinning the pedagogical approach. In this project we aimed to identify whether, and how, a performative approach to language learning (Schewe 2013) can support the SLA processes in adult students with intellectual disabilities by looking at the effects of embodiment on the learning process.

2 Performative pedagogy and the role of embodiment in learning

There is a scarcity of research related to *how* we as educators can identify an effective language pedagogy to support the SLA process of students with intellectual disabilities. The choice of how to teach a second language, that is, the pedagogical approach used in a given educational context, is underpinned by what an educator believes learning a language entails. We believe that learning a second language is not just a cognitive process; rather it entails experiencing a language, voicing its sounds, embodying thoughts and emotions through it.

In the last decades, performative pedagogy has emerged as a paradigm in second/foreign language education (Schewe 1993; Schewe 2013; Even & Schewe 2016; Mentz & Fleiner 2018). A performative approach to language education is, for Schewe (2013), one where forms of teaching derive from the arts, most centrally theatre and drama. Performative pedagogy is connected to the notion of (aesthetic) form, as well as to the 'formative' function of education. The term 'performative' can be contextualised within a variety of frameworks: including linguistics, anthropology and performance studies. Recently, Crutchfield (2018) synthetises effectivelly the various influences of performative teaching, and draws the following conclusion:

> By performance, we simply mean *embodied action* executed for and in the presence of one or more witnesses. Thus a particular action can be called performative when it is embodied and executed for and in. (2018: 51, our emphasis)

The concept of 'embodied action' is key to performative language learning. For Perry and Medina (2011:63) embodiment in performative pedagogies is defined as "teaching and learning in acknowledgement of our bodies as whole experiential beings in motion" As Stolz suggests, embodied learning allows learners to experience learning as "a holistic and synthesised acting, feeling, thinking and being-in-the-world, rather than as separate physical and mental qualities that bear no relation to each other" (2015: 485). In this light, learners are encouraged to experience a language not exclusively through the cognitive domain, but also through the sensory, kinaesthetic, affective and aesthetic domains.

Embodiment studies, or gesture studies (McCafferty 2008) is a branch of SLA research that studies how the body mediates learning. This field of inquiry was inspired by the work of psycholinguist McNeill (2000) who claimed, with Vygotsky (1987), that speech and gesture develop interdependently in speech. In essence, McNeill holds that inner speech is not only verbal, but also has a gestural aspect. This sparked a body of studies looking into how L2 learners mediate abstract meaning through gesturing and posture. Haught and McCafferty's (2008) research on embodiment focusses on gesturing as a form of self-regulation to mediate SLA in drama-based language classes. These authors found that performative approaches like improvisation, drama games and the re-enactment of scripts allowed their participants (L2 learners) to self-regulate their learning by engaging in physical, cognitive and affective activity.

While Haught and McCafferty's participants were non-disabled learners, we were interested in the role of embodiment in learners with intellectual disabilities. However, we found little research on performative pedagogy and students with intellectual disabilities in a second language context. What we did find was a range of studies to document the effects of drama on people with a range of disabilities, including autism, exposed to drama in their first language (L1) (see Kempe & Tissot, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2015). For example, in a longitudinal project that spanned almost two decades, O'Sullivan found that the use of drama can be highly beneficial to improve social skills and self-esteem in children and young adults with Asperger syndrome. Kempe and Tissot (2012) report similar findings working with students on the autistic spectrum. Both studies were conducted in the participants' L1 and drew on process drama, described by O'Neill (1995) as a thematic exploration, rather than isolated drama scenes where the outcome is not predetermined, but discovered in process.

As Fleming (2018: 14) notes, "there has been a long tradition of using exercises, games and role-play in the language classroom but these often did not exploit the full potential of the art form to provide rich contexts for language use". He differentiates the value of performative approaches to learning as 'surface reasons' and 'deeper reasons'. Surface reasons relate to the arts instilling enjoyment and motivation in learning; deeper reasons relate to "concepts of meaning and embodiment, where the learning is more active, dialogic and integrated" (ibid. 17). At the onset of this project, we wondered: what would the pedagogical value of embodiment be in our unique context, where adult students with intellectual disabilities take part in an Italian (L2) course, taught through a performative approach? To unearth possible answers, we embedded a variety of performative pedagogical practices into the arts syllabus of the TCPID, within a tertiary programme designed for adult students with intellectual disabilities.

3 Towards inclusive tertiary education: The Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice programme

The Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP) programme is a two-year course, offered by the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities, which aims to promote full citizenship for its students (adults with intellectual disabilities) through the development of learning networks and opportunities for work placement and employment (Kubiak, et al. 2019). The ASIAP is now acknowledged as a programme which fosters high academic expectations from its students regarding the level of learning achieved and the workload undertaken. Lecturers adopt a holistic approach towards the delivery of the ASIAP curriculum, using interdisciplinary methods to examine topics, and facilitate both collaborative and independent learning. Furthermore, in collaboration with a number of business partners, students participate in and complete research projects on personal and professional development, consequently developing a broad range of skills that can be transferred to the employment market. The ASIAP certificate is made up of 22 modules which are divided into six interdisciplinary themes: 1) advanced learning theories and self-development; 2) applied research theories and practice; 3) applied science, technology and maths; 4) business and marketing; 5) advocacy, rights and culture; 6) fine arts and languages (Table 1).

In 2017 we saw the possibility of integrating the curricula of two separate ASIAP elective modules: *Italian for Beginners* and *Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern*. This decision came about because in the second term of their first year, our students could choose between these two modules. Given that the students manifested equal interest in both subjects, we decided to combine the syllabi of the two modules, piloting an inter-disciplinary module that integrated both. It was decided that the *Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern* curriculum would create the contextual background for the language course. The integration of these two modules allowed for Italian language vocabulary to be built around key developments and artists in Western art between 1600 to the present day. This aligns with a context-based approach to L2 learning, whereby the language is anchored to a specific context (in this case artwork and artists studied as part of the arts syllabus), rather than language being presented in a vacuum.

In parallel, the syllabus of the *Italian for Beginners* module aimed at introducing the language at beginner level, in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and covered approximately one third of the A1 Level. Language covered included greetings, expressing identity, expressing basic needs, describing shapes and colours in relation to art work and expressing likes and dislikes related to the art work. To avoid any potential ethical pitfalls, it was decided that the language learning component of the module would not be formally assessed; the required assessment for ASIAP accreditation would solely focus on the module *Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern*. In this way, we hoped to avoid running the risk of students feeling they needed to comply with the performative approach to language learning just to

Table 1: ASIAP interdisciplinary themes and related modules

Theme	Modules
Advanced Learning Theory and Self-Development	• Learning Theory and Practice • Occupational Therapy: Personal and Self-Development • Occupational Therapy: Preparing for Transition
Applied Research Theories	• Research: Theories and Concepts • Research: Practice and Application
Applied Science, Technology and Maths	• Applied Health Science: Body Systems and Functions • Applied Health Science: Health Promotion and Intellectual Disabilities • Application of Numbers • Emergency and Disaster Management • STEM and Society
Business and Employment	• Entrepreneurship and Disability • Marketing, Disability and Society • Work Placement Practicum
Rights and Advocacy	• Human Rights • Self-Managing Services • Disability Rights Practicum
Fine Arts and Languages	• Expressive Arts • Language and Society • *Italian for Beginners* • *Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern* • Film Analysis • Poetry

fulfil the assessment. They were free not to participate in the Italian component of the classes, and knew that it was not going to be assessed.

4 The research study and participants

The participants consisted of a group of six Irish students – three male and three female – aged between twenty and thirty-five. The spectrum of disabilities of the participants included Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), dyspraxia, Down Syndrome as well as learning disabilities like dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dyslexia. The students – identified in this paper using pseudonyms – were absolute beginners of Italian (pre-A1 level). They were familiar with drama and improvisation as they had just completed the ASIAP *Expressive Arts* module in Term 1, through which they took a performative approach to storytelling, in English. Indeed, this prior exposure to performative pedagogy proved vital to the quality of their engagement with an embodied approach to L2 learning.

We designed the module with a range of embodied activities suitable for language beginners, including: L2 drama warm up games; a voice routine inspired by Kristin Linklater's (2006) voice training, and Total Physical Response

(TPR), a method developed by Asher (1977) that draws on sensory-motor skills to connect speech and action. A complementary, gradual build-up of these strategies enabled the students to engage in two short process drama sessions. Each class included a warm up of about 10-15 minutes in Italian, drawing on Linklater's voice work, conducted by the first author in the target language. A second phase followed, whereby TPR was pivotal to review previous language and introduce new language structures. Games, or process drama would follow. The main part of the class would be conducted in English by the second author and focused on the *Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern*. In the final part of the class, a game in the target language would close the session.

In their own different ways, these strategies (Linklater-inspired routine, TPR, games, process drama) imply embodiment; however, the question posed itself as to how the different approaches to embodied action would be received by this group of learners. The overall research question underpinning the study was: *What effects does embodiment have on the language learning process of a group of adult students with an intellectual disability?* To attempt addressing this question, we sought students' reflections through three focus groups, respectively at the beginning, middle and at the end of the project, which were filmed and transcribed for analysis. We also filmed a number of classroom activities and took some photographs to document the work. Throughout the project, spanning twelve weeks and with a total of 16 contact hours, we recorded our observations in our reflective practitioner's journals. A synthesis of the findings is reported below.

5 Discussion

This section presents the discussion related to the effects of embodiment on L2 learning when using a performative approach, working with a group of adult students who have an intellectual disability. We review three very different practices, all sequentially building on one another and all embodying language in action (Piazzoli 2018) in distinct ways: a Linklater-inspired voice routine, a TPR language activity and a short process drama session. These are illustrated in the context of the arts syllabus, namely: a voice warm up embedded in Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*, a L2 language practice grounded in Bruegel's paintings *The Peasants' Wedding* and *The Flemish Proverbs*, and a process drama set within Bruegel's *The Peasants' Dance* dramatic world. We present the data thematically supported by our own reflection notes, students' interviews in the focus groups, and an analysis of the video recordings. The argument is organised under four themes: a) motivation and enjoyment; b) sensory stimulation and mnemonic retention; c) imagery and meaning-making; d) self-regulation through play.

5.1 Embodiment, motivation and enjoyment

We believe that learning a second language is inextricably connected to a sense of motivation, self and identity (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2009). As Dörnyei argues, "a foreign language is more than a mere communication code that can be learnt similarly to other academic subjects" (ibid. 9), with issues related to self, identity and imagination being of paramount importance. For adults with intellectual disabilities this discourse assumes a critical role, as an individual's self-perception as a 'disabled' language learner (inferred by societal stereotypes) can cause real barriers to learning. We also believe, with Van Lier (1996), that to create the conditions for second language acquisition students need to become receptive, that is, to open to the experience of learning, as opposed to remaining defensive or resistant.

In reviewing the data, we noted that one of the effects of the warm up voice routine in the target language that opened each session was to create a relaxed atmosphere, coupled with a receptive, open attitude towards *being* a language learner – by creating a full-immersion environment in the target language, while shifting the focus on the arts curriculum. To better illustrate what this entailed in a performative classroom, where the arts syllabus was integrated with voice training activities, we paint a vignette of practice and share some students' comments about the experience.

In one particular session, the voice routine was inspired by Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* (Figure 1), an art work introduced in the previous class as part of Surrealism.

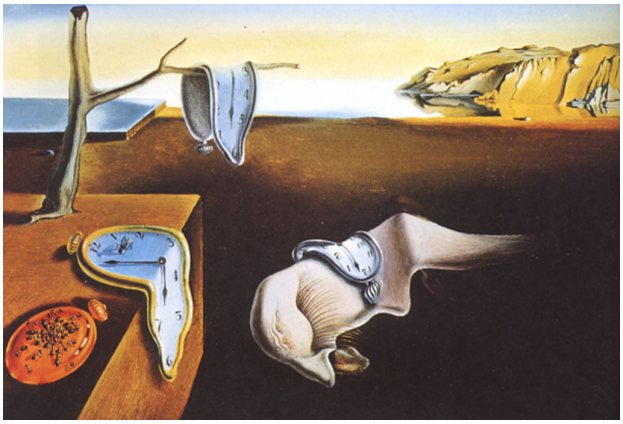


Figure 1: Dali's The Persistence of Memory

To begin with, in the voice warm up we counted the melting clocks and described the colours in Dali's painting. The routine was inspired by Linklater techniques, a voice training method based on ideokinesis – the use of visual imagery to stimulate body movement. The aim of the exercises was to relax the body, to explore sounds in the foreign language and to work on vocal resonance. This phase was conducted entirely in Italian as students were familiar with numbers, colours and the present tense. We breathed in counting

to four, we held for seven, and breathed out counting to eight. We then focussed the visualisation on Dali's imagery in front of us. In line with the ideokinesis principles, we imagined we were the clocks in the painting – tensing and relaxing our bodies. We followed with guided breathing exercises that included rolling the spine, sighing tensing and relaxing, gathering and releasing vibrations, again taking inspiration from the imagery– comparing vibrations to the ants crawling on the melting clock (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Dali's The Persistence of Memory. Detail

This initial phase provided a focused relaxation, undertaken in a full-immersion Italian setting, which encouraged students to relax into the sound of the language and to enter an alert state while being immersed in the target language. As noted in the reflective practitioner's journal, a very simple drama strategy followed:

> I ask them to describe Dali's painting; Dylan replies (in English): "Weird". I repeat this term in Italian, and we launch into a free association leading us from *strano* [weird] to *razionale* [rational] and *irrazionale* [irrational], thus connecting back to Surrealism. We move on to a very simple drama strategy, embodying the imagery in a tableau. Through mime, we physically represent *razionale* and *irrazionale* [rational; irrational] first as one whole group, then in smaller groups. In teams, students choose one of the adjectives, create a tableau, and get the others to call out which one they are embodying. Following their suggestions, we also add *serio* [serious] and *bellissimo* [beautiful] (p. 12: 8-13).

Thus, we went from a guided voice relaxation exercise in the target language, to a response to the art work, to a drama strategy connected to the art work, to eliciting production in the L2. That is, we were inspired by spontaneous responses to the arts curriculum for the voice routine, the drama, as well as for the language practice. The activity had a threefold function: first, it was a warm up for the voice and the body, preparing the students for what was to come. Second, it afforded practicing colours, numbers, the present tense and new adjectives, in context. Third, it was a way to practice showing emotions through facial expression – particularly relevant for some of the students who tended to struggle expressing their emotions using their facial muscles.

The observed effects of this embodied activity relate to creating a sense of motivation and enjoyment, infusing a sense of 'fun' into the learning

atmosphere. At the completion of this sequence, it was noted: "As soon as we return to our seats Amy sits down and sighs: 'Ah... that was fun!' Everyone bursts into a spontaneous, releasing, felt laughter. An intense moment there." (Author 1's Reflections, p. 9: 14-15). Amy's open attitude towards learning was perhaps the most notable. As recorded in Week 3: "Amy continues to repeat every single Italian word – it seems like she loves repeating the words" (Author 1, p. 7: 51). In the focus group, what we identified as "openness" is described by Amy and Margaret as 'a sense of fun' in learning:

Amy: I see that it's very interesting in doing all the acting and speaking Italian because it allows you to learn how dramatic the Italian language is. I like doing something rather than sitting in our chairs all day.

The notion of "putting fun into learning" mentioned by Margaret in the focus group was essential to create the conditions to develop a receptive attitude towards L2 learning, removing feelings associated with shame and inability, and promoting self-efficacy in a positive learning environment. As Fisher (2009: 5) argues, "people talk as if learning occurs in the brain, leaving out the ways that the body contributes to learning, as well as the roles that a person's environment plays in shaping learning and providing information". For this group of students creating a relaxing, enjoyable learning environment was particularly important to reduce their levels of anxiety and increase motivation to learn.

5.2 Embodied sensory stimulation and mnemonic retention

> Author 1: What's it like to study Italian in this way?
>
> Rick: Excellent
>
> Author 1: Why? [...]
>
> Rick: It's the only learning I'm going to get.
>
> Author 1: A very interesting answer - in Italian or in general?
>
> Rick: In general.

[Focus Group 1, Week 5]

This short extract from a longer focus group is enlightening. At the time, Rick was suffering from severe drowsiness, displaying narcoleptic behaviour. In essence, Rick found it difficult to remain awake in class and would fall asleep at regular intervals. In saying "It's the only learning I'm going to get", Rick is clearly not referring to the content, but rather to the mode of learning, to the pedagogy. This is central to our argument: as we stated above, we believe that it is the mismatch between students' learning needs and the pedagogical approach that feeds the misleading myth of a 'foreign language learning disability' (Sparks 2006, 2009).

The analysis of Rick's verbal and non-verbal contributions during class suggests that an embodied approach to L2 learning created a conducive

environment for him to remember targeted vocabulary and that this learning was mediated by, and anchored in, targeted gestures:

> I draw the example of *sú* (up) and *giú* (down). Rick suddenly looks awake and I am very surprised when he looks directly at me and smiles, saying *sú* and *giú* along with moving his flat hand to indicate the meaning. (p. 3: 26-28)

Here Rick was resuming vocabulary connected to an exercise that was introduced in a TPR sequence. A typical TPR routine included:

- In a circle, responding to the vocal prompt *sú* [up] and g*iú* [down], by standing up and squatting down – alternating at various intervals;
- Rolling *spalle* [shoulders] and *caviglie* [ankles], shaking and stretching;
- Miming the action of 'running' while shouting *corri* [run], responding to the prompt with the action, or to the action with the vocal prompt;
- Miming the action of 'walking' while whispering *cammina* [walk];
- Breaking the circle formation to move around the large space. Responding to the directions for *corri* [run], *cammina* [walk] as well as other locomotive verbs – culminating with stillness in *dormi* [sleep];
- Adding adverbs to the locomotion: cammina *piano* [walk slowly]; cammina *pianissimo* [very slowly]; *veloce* [fast], etc;
- Adding numbers, in Italian, from one to ten, to pace the various actions (walking, stomping, running, etc).
- Assigning individual actions to single students, alternating the prompts to obtain contrasting speed: *corri pianissimo* [run very slowly]; cammina *velocissimo* [walk very fast] etc.

These active movement-based sequences proved effective for Rick to remain awake, instead of falling asleep at regular intervals, in line with his narcoleptic condition. Obviously, Rick benefitted from having to stand up and move about. However, not only did he manage to stay awake, he succeeded in retaining new lexicon and anchored that in the gestures (one example being *sú/giú* with palms up/down; other examples include verbs such as *corri* [run], *cammina* [walk] *dormi* [sleep] with the related actions). The effects of the TRP embodied routines on language learning seems to be connected to sensory stimulation and mnemonic retention.

However, while a TPR routine may be useful to introduce new language, this kind of embodied sequence is not sufficient, by itself, to generate any purposeful meaning-making. Students were 'performing' the language at a surface level but generating little meaning. As Fleming (2018) argues, the

value of performative approaches to language learning rangesfrom 'surface' to 'deep' reasons: "Surface reasons have to do with increased enjoyment and motivation for the participants. These are not unimportant but only represent a first stage in recognising the value of performative approaches. Deeper reasons relate to concepts of meaning and embodiment" (2018: 17). In this particular context, working with students with disabilities, a physical approach to learning proved essential to trigger sensory stimulation and mnemonic retention. While not unimportant, the TPR sessions alone were not enough to generate purposeful meaning-making. In order to tap into the full potential of performative pedagogy, the TPR sequences needed to be followed by a deeper exploration of meaning.

5.3 Embodied imagery and meaning-making

The analysis of the data revealed that students' language learning was mediated not only by engaging in TPR sequences, but by channelling embodied imagery into meaning-making.

The following example may illuminate this point. In the second week of the intervention, Dutch and Flemish Renaissance paintings were introduced. When viewing Bruegel's *The Peasant Wedding* (Figure 3), a focal point evoked by the second author was the location of the bride in the painting.



Figure 3: Bruegel's The Peasant Wedding

That was a favourable moment to situate the notion of gender agreement, in context. While students were trying to guess where Bruegel had positioned the bride, gender agreement in male/female subject pronouns was introduced, by calling out and pointing *lui* [he] and *lei* [she], as well as *questo* [this one – male form] and *questa* [this one – female form]. Addressing the question: *Chi é la sposa nel quadro?* [Who is the bride in the painting?], students were encouraged to stand up, walk to the painting and point to the bride, stating *é lei?* [Is it her?] as well as to the groom, stating: *é questo?* [Is it him?]

These questions were not rhetorical questions; they were part of a genuine discussion about who the bride was, as her identity represents one of the debated points in this oeuvre. Students were making their own meaning, using the

(newly introduced) male/female forms to express their opinion. Introducing gender agreement in this way is an example of connecting a morphological feature of the language with the use of imagery (a detail in the art work) to express meaning. Embodiment here takes on a different stance: the physical act of having to stand up, walking to the painting, pointing to the various figures in the painting, making a connection with male/female forms when uttering *questo* and *questa* [this one (male and female forms)] served as a springboard to grasp a morphological feature of the language in action. This was particularly useful for this group of learners, as gender agreement is a concept that does not exist in English, and that may have been difficult to capture, due to its abstract nature, for students with intellectual disabilities. Here embodiment as making-meaning through body and imagery (the art work) mediated the understanding of gender agreement. Following these activities, it was noted:

> Today it seemed like we were actually stringing Italian words together into sentences. Very simple structures, including *questo/a è* [this is] with various adjectives. It seemed like they are slowly and naturally starting to formulate sentences. I also very naturally introduce more Italian language into the description of the paintings – and no one seemed to show signs of not understanding, or seeking clarifications. It seemed very natural. (p. 12: 23-24)

These "natural" responses manifested through an embodied pedagogy, connecting the body, imagery and meaning with specific language structures.

In a further example of practice, students were introduced to the various scenes in Bruegel's *The Flemish's Proverbs* (Figure 4). Students volunteered to create tableaux from the various scenes in the painting. To begin with, they identified, using the Italian language, the scenes they liked or disliked using *mi piace* [I like it] and *non mi piace* [I don't like it], locating them within the painting through prepositions like *in alto* [at the top], *in basso* [on the bottom], *al centro* [in the middle], a *destra/sinistra* [to the right/left]. They also counted figures and described colours, and the various landscapes related to the scenarios they liked. Again, this had a dual effect on the language and arts curriculum: it encouraged them to appreciate the unique nature of this painting, while practicing language in context, including verbs, adverbs and prepositions that were previously introduced through the TPR routine. Thus, the TPR routine was essential in terms of scaffolding the language – though, in itself it was not enough, as it was the contextual imagery and the meaning-making that enriched the experience.

Next, the students were asked to recreate their favourite scene. In one instance, the chosen scene was the one featured in the right bottom corner of the painting (Figure 5), a man collapsed on a make-shift table.

Ross, a student with Down Syndrome, volunteered to take the role of the man collapsed on the table; Rick (who was asleep moments before, due to his narcolepsy) jumped in to play the figure behind the collapsed man. He stood up, with his fists closed, and facial expression exaggerated, looking upward to signify a heightened state (Video 2, 3:25'). Consequently, he propelled his



Figure 4: Bruegel's The Flemish's Proverbs



Figure 5: Bruegel's The Flemish's Proverbs. Detail

hands forward and looked up, nodding and pointing upwards (Video 2, 3.31'). Here he was embodying his own interpretation of the painting. He was also responding to the Italian vocal prompts.

However, an analysis of this activity still reveals a limited use of performative practices, whereby tableaux are used essentially, to reproduce an image or situation. Limiting an embodied activity such as still image to simulation would fall into what Fleming calls "the mistake of assuming that the goal [of drama] is to replicate reality as closely as possible" with the goal of reaching "a type of television verisimilitude" (2018: 15). Instead, the kind of embodiment afforded by performative pedagogy can build on still images to allow the students not to replicate, but to explore new possibilities through the manipulation of aesthetic form. As Schewe (2018) argues in his analysis of still images, by manipulating aesthetic form students were able to shift from embodied action as simulation, to embodied action as playful expression. The final section in the discussion

explores this point.

5.4 Self-Regulation through play

Harnessing performative pedagogy to its fullest potential generated a kind of embodiment that allowed students to self-regulate their expression through play. Self-regulation is defined, in Vygotskyan terms, as being the agent of one's actions (Van Lier 2008). Extending this concept to performative learning, agency as self-regulation refers to an active, playful engagement in managing the formal elements of drama. Self-regulation can also be related to L2 motivation theory, with Dörnyei (2009) describing it as self-mechanisms linking the self with action.

A final example of practice aims to elucidate this point. While discussing *The Peasant Dance* by Bruegel (Figure 6), Ross spontaneously stood up and, in a playful contribution, called out loud to watch out for an 'assassin' in the main tower within the painting – supposedly aiming to attack the dancing peasants. As this action unfolded, it was noted:

> Ross points to a very small window in the church, in the background of the painting and reckons there is an assassin in there – he is very keen, captivated by this story: he stands up and tells the story of this assassin, hired by the Church to kill everyone. I'm blown away by Ross's ability to create dramatic meaning. (p. 5: 1-3)



Figure 6: Bruegel's The Peasant Dance

In that instance, it was not possible to follow up on Ross's dramatic lead – as the lesson was ending. However, in a session that followed, we reconnected to Ross's idea and created a process drama experience.

In the process drama tradition, the dramatic action starts from a pre-text (O'Neill 1995) that activates students' imagination. In this case, it was Ross's suggestion of the assassin which started the dramatic exploration. The video recording of that session shows Ross's excited reactions, as we resume his dramatic offering and invite him and his classmates to extend the story.

Divided into two teams, the students selected appropriate music, thought of a motif that could justify the presence of an assassin (contextualised to a 16th Century peasant village), and portrayed their narratives through a sequence of movements, still images and role plays. They effectively 'entered' the world of the painting, self-regulating their bodies towards a shared vision to create dramatic meaning. Note that here the still images were not reproductions of the painting, but fruits of the students' imagination – whereby they connected movement and language through a playful exploration of the elements of drama (Haseman & O'Toole 2017). One group chose to manipulate time and re-create flashbacks of the assassin's childhood, exploring what caused him to crave revenge as an adult. This theme also connected, for some students, to the idea of the underdog seeking revenge, an issue which some students seemed to feel a strong emotional connection with. The importance of personal connection in process drama can be a potent activator for learning, and also featured in the second process drama experienced by this group, analysed elsewhere (Piazzoli 2018).

As this was their first process drama, a combination of English and Italian was used: English was used for the instructions, while the target language was used for dramatic conventions associated with the tableaux (like voice over and captions) and role plays. Though the vocabulary was at an elementary level, it was supplemented by music and movement within the story. Formal elements like dramatic tension, focus, role, narrative, time and movement were playfully manipulated to create various degrees of engagement – exploiting the full potential of embodied learning in a performative approach. This generated a kind of self-regulation through play that gave the students a sense of ownership, in this case particularly evident, as the original idea for the pre-text came from a student, and not from the teacher. Quoting a participant's words at the end of the module:

> So now that I know a bit of Italian I might be able to translate into English for my parents. Because I'm learning Italian so it's interesting to know so when I go to Italy I can understand what people are saying. Or what's written on something; I can translate it into English for my mum and dad. (Dylan, Focus Group 5, 6.50')

As Dörnyei notes, motivation can be seen as "the desire to reduce the discrepancy between one's actual self and the projected behavioural standards of the ideal/ought self" (2009: 18). The student's words above suggest that, for Dylan at least, the overall language learning course was perceived as a positive experience, one that tapped into his sense of L2 motivation and self-efficacy, creating a projected behavioural standard (being able to understand what people are saying in Italy; translate for his parents) and providing a vision towards an 'ideal self'.

Going back to our Research Question, we argue that embodiment took different forms and had different effects, creating initial motivation and enjoyment, sensory stimulation and mnemonic retention, meaning-making,

and self-regulation through play – looping back into L2 motivation, and so forth.

The performative approach was conducive to these students' language learning – particularly when this engaged not only the body at a physical level, but also when it related the language to meaning-making, and when it allowed students to be playful with their expression, through the formal elements of drama. It is this rich combination of the 'performing' body, within an arts-based context, that we found particularly beneficial for engaging learners with intellectual disabilities, as a means to view our participants as subjects who *enabled* the learning.

6 Limitations

While this study has highlighted the benefits of L2 learning for people with intellectual disabilities, the following limitations are noted. First, even though all students from the first year of the ASIAP programme participated, the small sample size limits the generalisability of results. Second, even though the participating students' accounts of the research are articulated, the teachers' voices may be amplified in the current findings, particularly under the comments in the reflections. Third, as a group project working within a limited time-frame, it was difficult to gauge in detail 1): how individual language growth and development progressed in students over a single semester (3 months), and 2) how singular developments could dispel some myths about L2 language learning and people with intellectual disabilities (i.e. exhibiting weaker language learning ability and skills; discrepancies between IQ and academic achievement for L2 learning). Finally, future longitudinal research could aim to extend the use of performative pedagogy with other modular arts curricula and collect data over a longer period in order to measure the outcomes throughout the two years with the programme.

7 Conclusion

As a consequence of Article 24 of the UNCRPD, those people who were once considered 'non-educable' have gradually become more active participants within education and over the last number of years, both nationally and internationally, this level of accommodation has extended to tertiary education (see Hart Grigal, Sax, Martinez & Will 2006). Consequently many countries – for example the US (Hart et al. 2006), Ireland (Kubiak, Spassiani, Shevlin, & O'Keeffe 2019; O'Connor, Kubiak, Espiner & O'Brien 2012), Canada (Uditsky & Hughson 2012), Iceland (Stefánsdóttir & Björnsdóttir 2016); Finland (Saloviita 2000) and Spain (Izuzquiza Garset & Herrero 2016) – have made admission to tertiary education a reality for adult learners with intellectual disabilities. The benefits of such inclusive practices and normative pathways of inclusion have been researched (Uditsky & Hughson 2012), and findings clearly indicate what

the benefits are for the individual (Hughson, Moodie & Uditsky 2006; Kubiak, et al. 2019), for the college community as well as the wider society (O'Connor et al. 2012).

Furthering an understanding of embodiment and performative pedagogy in L2 education, specifically in relation to university students with intellectual disabilities, has the capacity to impact on an entire cohort of students and graduates whose motivation to learn a second language may be undertaken for a number of reasons, such as personal and cultural growth, or more pragmatic reasons, such as to increase work opportunities.

Traditionally, for learners with a learning or an intellectual disability, the impact of being exposed to sedentary, textbook-focused L2 approaches has resulted in experiences of stress and failure. In the reflections of the second Author:

> What stood out for me most was the *willingness of students to take risks* with the embodiment exercises. These experience based exercises really engaged learners and I realise how teaching and learning could be an active celebration of self and content that connects experience with ideas. (p. 1: 19-22)

Students with disabilities are willing to take risks, if put in a learning environment that enables them to do so. The findings of this research support a performative approach to language learning for adult students with intellectual disabilities, one in which the use of voice relaxation, movement, imagery and meaning-making can provide such an enabling effect. Crucially, the value of a performative pedagogy does not lie in embodied action as superficial movement sequences, disconnected from context, but is achieved when embodying imagery, meaning-making and playful expressiveness in a meaningful context. We understand that further research needs to be taken in this direction and look forward to a more inclusive vision of opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to learn a second language.

Acknowledgements — The authors wish to acknowledge the ASIAP students whose participation made this study possible.

Bibliography

Asher, James J. (1977): Learning another language through actions. The complete teachers' guide book. Los Gatos, California: Sky Oaks Publications

Barnes, Colin (2010): A brief history of discrimination and disabled people. In: Davis, Lennard J. (ed.): *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge

Crutchfield, John (2015): Fear and trembling: The Role of 'Negative' Emotions in a Performative Pedagogy. In: *Scenario* IX/2, 101-114

Dewey, John (1934): *Art as experience*. Rahway, NJ: The Barnes Foundation Press

Dörnyei, Zoltàn & Ushioda, Ema (eds.) (2009): *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters

Even, Susanne & Schewe, Manfred (eds.) (2016): Performative teaching, learning, research – Performatives Lehren, Lernen, Forschen. Berlin: Schibri Verlag

Fleming, Michael (2018): Performativity, learning and aesthetic education. In: Mentz, Oliver & Fleiner, Micha (eds.): *The arts in language teaching. International perspectives: Performative, aesthetic, transversal*. Vienna: Lit Verlag, 6-20

Hart, Debra; Grigal, Meg; Sax, Caren; Martinez, Donna & Will, Madeleine (2006): Postsecondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. In: *Research to Practice* 45: 1-5

Haught, John R. & McCafferty, Stephen G. (2008): Embodied language performance: Drama and second language teaching. In: Lantolf, James P. & Poehner, Matthew, E. (eds.): *Sociocultural theory and the teaching of languages*. Oakville, CT: Equinox Press, 139-162

Haseman, Brad & O'Toole, John (2017): *Dramawise reimagined*. Sydney: Currency Press

Hughson, Anne; Moodie, Sheena & Uditsky, Bruce (2006): *The story of inclusive postsecondary education in Alberta: A research report*. Edmonton, Canada: Alberta Association for Community Living

Izuzquiza Garset, Dolores & Herrero, Pablo R. (2016). *Inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in university*. Results of the Promentor Program (UAM-PRODIS). Siglo Coro. Revista Española sobre Discapacidal Intelectual

Kempe, Andy & Tissot, Cathy (2012): The use of drama to teach social skills in a special school setting for students with autism. In: *Support for Learning* 27/3, 97-102

Kormos, Judit (2017): The second language learning processes of students with specific learning difficulties. New York and London: Taylor and Francis

Kormos, Judit & Smith, Anne M. (2012): *Teaching languages to students with specific learning differences*. Clevedon: Multilingual matters

Kubiak, John; Spassiani, Natasha; Shevlin, Michael & O'Keefe, Molly (2019): Developing post-secondary university education programmes for people with intellectual disabilities in Trinity College, The University of Dublin, Ireland. In Slee, Roger (ed.): *People with Intellectual Disability Experiencing University Life: Theoretical underpinnings, evidence and lived experience*. Leiden and Boston: Sense Publications, 141-153

Linklater, Kristin (2006): *Freeing the natural voice*. Hollywood, CA: Drama Publishers

McCafferty, Stan G. (2008): Material foundations for second language acquisition: Gesture, metaphor, and internalization. In: McCafferty, Steven G. & Stam, Gale (eds.): *Gesture: Second language acquisition and classroom research*. London: Routledge, 3-24

McNeill, David (2000): *Language and gesture*. New York: Cambridge University Press

O'Connor, Barry, Kubiak, John, Espiner, Deborah & O'Brien, Patricia (2012): Lecturer responses to the inclusion of students with intellectually disabilities auditing undergraduate classes. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities,* 9/4, 247–256

O'Neill, Cecily (1995): *Drama Worlds: A Framework For Process Drama*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

O'Sullivan, Carmel (2015): The Day that Shrek was almost rescued: Doing Process Drama with Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. In: Duffy, Peter (ed.): *What Was I Thinking: A Reflective Practitioner's Guide to (Mis)Adventures in Drama Education*. New York: Peter Lang, 219-242

Piazzoli, Erika (2018): Embodying Language in Action: The Artistry of Process Drama for Second Language Education. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan / Springer Nature

Saloviita, Timo (2000): An inclusive adult education program for students with mild to severe developmental disabilities: Experiences from a pilot project in Finland. In: *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin* 28, 27-39

Schewe, Manfred (2018): Performative foreign language didactics in process: About Still Images and the teachers as 'Formmeister' (Form Master). In: Mentz, Oliver & Fleiner, Micha (eds.): *The arts in language teaching. International perspectives: Performative, aesthetic, transversal*. Vienna: Lit Verlag, 6-20

Schewe, Manfred (2013): Taking stock and looking ahead: Drama pedagogy as a gateway to a performative teaching and learning culture. In: *Scenario* VII/1, 5-27

Schewe, Manfred (1993): *Fremdsprache inszenieren: Zur Fundierung einer Dramapädagogisken Lehr- und Lernpraxis*. Oldenburg: Zentrum für pädagogische Berufspraxis, Universität Oldenburg

Schwarz, Robin L. (1997): Learning Disabilities and Foreign Language Learning. http://www.ldonline.org/article/6065/ [last accessed May 16, 2018]

Sparks, Richard L. (2016): Myths About Foreign Language Learning and Learning Disabilities. In: *Foreign Language Annals* 49/2, 252-270

Sparks, Richard L. (2009): If you don't know where you're going, you'll wind up somewhere else: The case of "foreign language learning disability" In: *Foreign Language Annals* 42, 7-26

Sparks, Richard L. (2006): Is there a "disability" for learning a foreign language? In: *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 39, 544-557

Stefánsdóttir, Guðrún V. & Björnsdóttir, Kristín (2016): 'I am a college student' postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities. In: *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 18/4, 328-342

Stolz, Stephen A. (2015): Embodied learning. In: *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47/5, 474-487

Uditsky, Bruce & Hughson, Elisabeth (2012): Inclusive Postsecondary Education – An Evidence-based Moral Imperative. In: *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* 9/4, 298-302

United Nations (2006): Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html [last accessed November 2, 2018]

Van Lier, Leo (2008): Agency in the classroom. In: Lantolf James P. & Poehner Matthew E. (eds.): *Sociocultural theory and the teaching of second languages*. London: Equinox, 163-186