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Sharing gems

Report on the Performative approaches to language and intercultural learning (PAInt) summer school & Drama in education (DiE) days 2024

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In this contribution, we report and reflect on the 2024 edition of the PAInt summer school and DiE days providing readers with some insights into our experience as participants. The event took place in Padua, Italy, and focused on inclusive practices in performative approaches to language and (inter)cultural learning, bringing together educators, researchers, and students to explore how drama fosters language competence, inclusion, and celebrates diversity.

1 Introduction

This year's PAInt summer school, "Inclusive practices in performative approaches to language and (inter)cultural learning", gathered master's and Ph.D. students, language teachers, drama teachers, young researchers, scholars, and practitioners in the area of (second) language and (inter)cultural learning in Padua, Italy, from July 22 to 26 2024. It focused on the role of drama as a tool for developing language and (inter)cultural competence, celebrating diversity and multilingualism, and fostering inclusion. This iteration, organized by Fiona Clare Dalziel (University of Padua), Stefanie Giebert (Kempten University of Applied Sciences, Germany), and Eva Göksel (University of Zurich, Switzerland), was a collaboration between the University of Padua and the DiE days¹. The 2024 event represented the third edition of the summer school, previously held in Padua (2017) and in Grenoble, France (2019). This year the summer school offered parallel sessions in English, French, and Italian. The following report details these workshops and talks, and shares the gems acquired by two of the participants, Giordana F. Bido, a master's student in Communications at the University of Padua, and Nicolò Salmaso, a recent Ph.D. in Italian Studies from Indiana University, Bloomington, during the five-day event. The two authors attended the parallel sessions separately and the communal moments together, making this contribution a collaborative patchwork of their personal experiences. Some of the talks mentioned in this report will be described in more detail by their authors in

¹ For more information, please go to: <https://dramapaedagogik.de/en/>.

the DiE days 2024 conference proceedings. The term ‘gems’ was offered to the group by Garret Scally (Atlantic Technological University, Ireland) during his opening workshop and became common currency during the week-long event.

2 “Padova: City of arts, city of drama...”²

To me (Giordana), being a creative artist implies much more than technique; it is the ability and permission to have an artistic soul and immerse ourselves in a universe entirely ours, which, when trying to explain, sometimes even words fail. Being a creative artist demands letting go of our fears, shyness, and concerns to reach our objectives. What a lifetime in dance taught me, for instance, was to understand my body in connection with others, forgetting about the present and simply feeling, not thinking. What sensational professors and classmates taught me in my academic journey was to use creativity to express and explore my ideas. During the international summer school in Padua, we as participants, facilitators, and speakers had the opportunity to become more than spectators and to deepen our understanding of language learning and teaching through the lenses of the arts. We were the protagonists of our own learning, sharing and disseminating the gems we learned with our community of educators. From drama to language learning, from creative research to Bollywood dance, over the five days, we enthusiastically improved our set of human qualities, as well as an arsenal of technical abilities that certainly upgraded our academic and professional lives.

3 Performative language teaching and learning, diversity, and arts-based research

The summer school began with a keynote opening address by Manfred Schewe (University College Cork, Ireland), which, after having reminded the audience of the strong bond between the city of Padua and the arts³, explored the richness of linguistic diversity. By exploring what has happened since the first summer school in 2017 and focusing especially on the emergence of arts-based methodologies in research in this area, Schewe encouraged participants to consider how, as teachers, researchers, or arts practitioners who are deeply concerned about our volatile, crisis-ridden world, we believe that the arts in education can contribute to “letting the good vibes get stronger” in our respective teaching and learning communities. Afterward, Garret Scally led a “groupness” workshop where we explored the notions of friendship and

² A quote from Stefanie Giebert and Eva Göksel who came up with this opera-like line about Padua during the DiE days celebration event. From that moment on, we all started to sing it until the end of the week.

³ Cf. Lucentio’s definition of the city (“[F]air Padua, nursery of arts”) from William Shakespeare’s comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* (Act 1, Scene 1), set in Padua.

fraternity as a mode of creation and learning. This was the first moment of the week that, by actively engaging us through the metaphor of the group as a kaleidoscope, allowed us to break the ice and form new meaningful bonds between us. Before a tasty *aperitivo* in the city center, the first day ended with the launch of *Performative language learning with refugees and migrants* (Piazzoli & Dalziel, 2024) and *SORGENTE research report: The Irish case studies* (Piazzoli et al., 2023). Through the novel implementation of arts-based methodologies, the two works, both based on the SORGENTE research project⁴, examine the role of performative language pedagogy in working with refugees and migrants, exploring how drama, music, dance, and storytelling can be used to facilitate and encourage second language acquisition. The 2024 volume is more suitable for a scholarly audience, while the 2023 publication reports on the overall experience. During the launch, the authors highlighted the benefits of performative language pedagogy for refugees and migrants and the playful and ethical encounters that can emerge if we approach teaching not only as an act of service but also as an act of love.

Continuing to work from a research standpoint, the second day saw participants engaging with arts-based methodologies from a more practical perspective during a roundtable discussion led by Erika Piazzoli (Trinity College Dublin) and Rachael Jacobs (Western Sydney University, Australia). Stressing the importance of ethics when approaching such research methodologies, the two facilitators highlighted how we can use the arts and our artistic sensibilities, without necessarily being artists ourselves, to offer new and unprecedented readings of the world we live in, while encouraging diversity and fostering inclusion at the same time. On the same line, Harald Pittel (University of Leipzig, Germany) addressed the topic of the dis/abilities of education during his keynote address on day four. In the light of selected theoretical approaches, Pittel looked at text/language in the post-dramatic theater works of French dancer and choreographer Jérôme Bel at multiple levels, both conditioning and realizing action/performance, by ultimately proving that dis/abled theater is radically enabling for both actors and spectators.

4 Workshops

Since its first edition, one of the strengths of the summer school has been to combine theory and research with practical explorations of how performative approaches in the area of (second) language and (inter)cultural learning can be implemented in the classroom. This year too, this mission was realized through a series of three-hour workshops in which scholars and practitioners shared their practical experience in the field.

⁴ <https://erikapiazzoli.com/sorgente/>.

On the second day, participants were able to immerse themselves in two historical-cultural paths that allowed them to familiarize themselves with scenario planning techniques and methods for teaching literature and history through drama. Filippo Fonio and Lauriane Mastrocicco-Longe (Université Grenoble Alpes, France) provided a series of useful tools to recount the experience of Italian emigration using the masks and techniques of the *commedia dell'arte*. Through storytelling and performance, this historical period was perceived by participants as a lived and embodied experience, and not as something distant. Furthermore, it was immediate for them to make meaningful connections with the current situation around the world. Sharka Dohanlova (Masaryk University, Czech Republic) allowed participants to dive into the life of Charles IV, king of Bohemia from 1346 to 1378, through the lenses of theater activities in her workshop titled “The arranged marriage”. By speed-dating historical characters and then envisioning the life of a 5-year-old, 10-year-old, and 15-year-old boy and girl in the 13th century, Dohanlova creatively explored a historical topic while letting participants actively engage in collaborative experiences. In addition, Dohanlova’s assistants, dressed in costumes beautifully made by one of them, enhanced the workshop with a presentation on the fashion and archeology of the 13th century.

The third day saw the group dealing with various aspects of performative teaching, always having diversity and inclusion as the main focus. Jean-Rémi Lapaire (Université Bordeaux Montaigne, France) guided participants to build on authentic gestural forms to internalize grammatical structures and release their emotional power while getting a grasp on the socio-cognitive mechanisms at stake. In a parallel session, Eva Göksel gifted the participants with a workshop that highlighted the importance of vulnerability, presence, and respect through physical and emotional connection⁵. Stefanie Giebert considered if – and how – drama can be inclusive for heterogeneous groups. Drawing on personal experiences with secondary school students, as well as students at technical universities in Germany, she suggested approaches suitable for shy students, groups with different language levels, and groups with varying degrees of interest in the arts. Rachael Jacobs’ workshop approached intercultural education through drama and South Asian dance, using performative pedagogies as a positive antidote to the darkness of prejudice. Céline Healy (Maynooth University, Ireland) used fairy tales to demonstrate how process drama activities can support language learning at multiple levels, while promoting equity and inclusion in the modern language classroom. Finally, Modesto Corderi Novoa (EOI Official Language School in A Coruña, Spain), using excerpts from Chinese writer Sanmao’s memoir *Stories of the Sahara*, guided us through a teaching approach that

⁵ A detailed description of this workshop is available in the Winter 2024 edition of the *English Teachers Association Switzerland (ETAS) Journal*.

transcends conventional language and culture education, inviting learners to embody and enact cultural narratives, thus enhancing empathy and understanding.

On the fourth day, we reflected on rhythm in teacher training and intercultural diversity. Philipp Nawka (University of Leipzig, Germany) encouraged participants to reflect on the challenges, daring, and failure in the classroom by creating a playful space full of rhythm, voice, and movement. Erika Piazzoli looked at the relationship between drama and intercultural diversity, based on “Eric”, a short story by Australian artist, writer, and filmmaker Shaun Tan. We worked with the short story through soundscapes, movement, mixed media, and improvisation to reflect on the affordances that drama, dance, and sound bring to the intercultural classroom. The day concluded with a delicious social dinner at a local pizzeria, which culminated with some Bollywood dancing led by Rachael Jacobs, who, in addition to her academic endeavors, is also an excellent dance instructor (more on this below).

5 DiE days talks

As stated previously, this year’s summer school was organized in collaboration with the DiE days, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2024. A celebration event was hosted by Stefanie Giebert and Eva Göksel on the second day. After some words of support from leading scholars in the field, the two organizers retraced the decade-long history of the Drama in education days through pop quizzes, performance exercises, and improvised songs. This was then followed by two concurrent sets of show-and-tell sessions by teachers and practitioners of drama in education. Miriam Stewart presented a project titled *Learning Out Loud!* (LOL⁶) on how humor and comedy play a role in language learning. She discussed how humor can motivate and engage learners at the same time as it reduces stress and builds a strong sense of connection in the classroom. During his talk, Michał Gostyński (Ankara University, Turkey) emphasized the idea that every gesture, pause, and movement gives meaning to a text. He also performed poetry making it a total gift for the attentive participants. Barbora Müller Dočkalová (Charles University, Czech Republic) enchanted the participants with her project on creating an only English-speaking town in a regular school in Prague. Her students were encouraged to actively participate in the town’s activities (i.e., getting a stamp from a doctor, issuing an ID document at the police station, etc.) in order to put their English skills into practice. Nicolò Salmaso presented a teaching experience that he had the opportunity to carry out during his Ph.D. in the United States. He discussed the creative final project (a 25-minute short film crafted by his students) for a class that he co-created and co-taught with a colleague, which ultimately allowed for better and more multifaceted language learning and fostered a

⁶ <https://lolearningoutloud.com/>.

deeper understanding of Italian culture. Elizabeth Vergeiner (Universität Klagenfurt, Austria) touched on a summer school that focuses on the multilingualism of the Alps-Adriatic region, in which students coming from seven universities in Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria experience multilingualism not only in traditional language classes but also in workshops on improvisational theater. Finally, Sinéad Ní Ghuidhir (University of Galway, Ireland) shared some gems on the advantages of using selected drama strategies as a teaching methodology for subjects across the curriculum and also as an aid to teacher presence in the classroom.

The DiE days talks continued on the fourth day, embracing topics such as multidisciplinary, dance, song, and music. Jane Magan (French as a foreign language teacher and ballet dancer, Ireland) brought to the meeting room the elegance she has on stage by using dance vocabulary to engage, motivate, and connect with the participants. Sarah Dyble (music teacher, United Kingdom) inspired the participants to embody the lyrics of “Rolling in the Deep” by Adele as a story and offered ideas on how to use music as inspiration for art, composition, creative writing, drama, dance, and more. Ivona Randjelović (EFL teacher, Serbia) left the participants fascinated with her work as a language instructor with young language learners and music. Intending to learn about the four seasons, Randjelović used Vivaldi’s composition as the inspiration for teaching English vocabulary through music and plenty of role-playing. Georgia Pieri (EFL teacher, Cyprus) explored the benefits of storytelling in the second language classroom. After narrating two tales aimed at learners from 11 to 13 years old, she presented simple activities that can change mindsets, create emotional connections, and raise awareness about everyday topics. Lastly, Anna Santucci (University College Cork, Ireland) highlighted key elements characterizing her current international practice and research in transformative embodied learning for educational development, integrating drama-informed techniques into professional development for teaching and learning in higher education.

6 The absolute joy of performance

Throughout the week, there were also opportunities to relax and unwind, especially during the fourth day. Susanne Leutenegger (Ireland), a Feldenkrais instructor, gave a smattering of the method to the participants, focusing above all on movement sequences with which we have been familiar since our first year of life. Rachel Jacobs gifted the participants with a Bollywood dance session that brought them inside the industry’s most recent movies. By creating still images and learning dance steps, participants had a great deal of fun while having the chance to decompress from the summer school’s intense schedule.

7 Conclusion: “Looking forward, looking back”

The fifth and final day of the summer school opened with “Looking forward, looking back”, a reflective workshop led by Eva Göksel, which applied some of the methods that we encountered during the week to discuss and reflect on the overall experience and the future directions in the field. As a language instructor, I (Nicolò) found myself thinking back to the teaching experience that accompanied my Ph.D. journey. When I was still a master's student in Padua, back in 2017, I attended the first edition of the summer school after joining Fiona's theater workshop in English. I would never have imagined that one day I would be teaching my native language to American college students. While listening to Eva's words at the end of her workshop, I realized how much the experience of the first summer school positively influenced my choices when it came to applying for graduate studies in the United States. I also reflected on how I tried to implement some of the performative approaches that I learned from experts and practitioners in 2017 from my first day of teaching. Of course, there were many challenges, but there were also many, many satisfactions. I have seen my students quickly move away from their initial shyness and immerse themselves in the Italian language and culture, following their interests and inclinations. Seven years later, attending this third edition of the summer school was like coming home but with a completely different awareness. The overall experience renewed my passion for teaching languages and, despite the constant challenges of our “crisis-ridden” world, gave me a lot of motivation to question myself positively to possibly improve my daily teaching practice.

The 2024 PAInt Summer School and DiE days successfully fostered a vibrant exchange of ideas, methodologies, and practices in performative approaches to language and (inter)cultural learning. By bringing together a diverse group of participants and offering multilingual sessions, it celebrated the power of drama to promote inclusion, diversity, and creativity. The “gems” gathered throughout the week only emphasized the transformative potential of performative pedagogy in fostering meaningful connections in and outside the classroom.

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