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Literatur verstehen und inszenieren

Foreign Language Literature Through Drama. A Research Project

Manfred Schewe and Trina Scott, Cork

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Foreign Language Literature Through Drama. A Research Project [1]

Manfred Schewe and Trina Scott, Cork

Based on the experience that today's students find it more difficult than students of previous decades to relate to literature and appreciate its high cultural value, this paper argues that too little is known about the actual teaching and learning processes which take place in literature courses and that, in order to ensure the survival of literary studies in German curricula, future research needs to elucidate for students, the wider public and, most importantly, educational policy makers, why the study of literature should continue to have an important place in modern language curricula. Contending that students' willingness to engage with literature will, in the future, depend to a great extent on the use of imaginative methodology on the part of the teacher, we give a detailed account of an action research project carried out at University College Cork from October to December 2002 which set out to explore the potential of a drama in education approach to the teaching and learning of foreign language literature. We give concrete examples of how this approach works in practice, situate our approach within the subject debate surrounding Drama and the Language Arts and evaluate in detail the learning processes which are typical of performance-based literature learning. Based on converging evidence from different data sources and overall very positive feedback from students, we conclude by recommending that modern language departments introduce courses which offer a hands-on experience of literature that is different from that encountered in lectures and teacher-directed seminars.

"… without research we do not have a lodestar
to show us which way to face
as we tack our way toward
more effective teaching"
(Betty Jane Wagner, 1998)

1. Challenges for Literature Teaching Today – the Need for Action

While in the past it could be indisputably claimed that literature was of high cultural value, today the situation seems to have changed. It is harder to convince today's students, who have grown up in a media-driven society, of the value of literature. In a "visualised world"

[1] This article continues a discussion in a previous contribution to this journal entitled *Literaturvermittlung auf dem Wege von gestern nach morgen* (Schewe, 2002). Please also note

literature finds it increasingly difficult to compete with the power of the image, as presented in cinema, computer games, internet and on television. Also, the fact that people today, including students, are often pressed for time does not particularly help the case of literature as reading, especially close reading, takes a lot of time.



Students of module *Literatur verstehen und inszenieren* engaged in warm-up exercise

Due to the rapid technological advances in recent decades we find ourselves exposed on a daily basis to huge quantities of information as well as acoustic and visual stimuli. We have to assume that, in order for human beings to cope with this "Reizfülle", our mode of perception has had to adapt accordingly. Lehmann (2001: 11) postulates that while in

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that *GFL* 1/2004 will be a special issue on "Drama and Theatre in the Teaching and Learning of Language, Literature and Culture".

previous decades the predominant mode of perception could be described as linear-successive, these days it has been replaced by a mode of perception which could be described as simultaneous-multiple. Such changes with regard to perceptual modes are most likely to have consequences for the way in which students learn, including literature-based learning.

Literature has traditionally been the territory of the discipline of "Literaturwissenschaft". While it has always enjoyed a privileged position within German programmes at third level and it has always been assumed that students go through a valuable learning process when studying literature, representatives of "Literaturwissenschaft" have neglected in their research to describe and evaluate the actual teaching and learning processes which take place in literature courses. Hence, to date we have hardly any empirical evidence for what constitutes good teaching and efficient learning in literature-based courses, seminars and lectures.

This contribution is based on the hypothesis that in order to ensure the survival of literary studies in German curricula, future research needs to make more transparent for students, the wider public and, most importantly, educational policy makers, why the study of literature should continue to have an important place in modern language curricula[2].

We advocate that the subject debate be shifted from a discussion of text- and author-related analyses and theories to a development and discussion of (innovative) teaching and learning practices. Teachers of literature need to become pro-active and lay open what exactly is happening in their lecture theatres and seminar rooms, in order to find answers to questions like: What is the value of literature study? What exactly does the quality of literature-related learning processes consist of? These are questions that prompted us to engage in a research project. In what follows we will give a general introduction to the project, before evaluating it in more detail in section five.

[2] In Irish secondary school curricula German literature has already become very marginalised. At university level film studies options are increasingly popular among students and have become serious competitors for literature options.

2. Origins and rationale of research project

We contend that students' willingness to engage with literature will, in the future, depend to a great extent on the use of imaginative methodology on the part of the teacher. Therefore, in what follows, we will describe a research project which we undertook at University College Cork from October to December 2002. It was sparked off by our belief that alternatives need to be developed to the traditional form of literature teaching, i.e. the 50-minute lecture. Aware of the fact that in today's world students can get information on a certain topic, author, literary period etc. instantly, we were guided by the notion that the lecturer's role must shift from being predominantly a transmitter of information to a facilitator of group processes.

In the Department of German at University College Cork literature courses form a significant part of degree programmes for students of Arts, Language and Cultural Studies, Law and German and Commerce with German. Students can choose from a variety of courses which, for the most part, are delivered using the lecture or seminar format.

The impetus to design a literature module using an alternative mode of delivery came from a new scheme of awards initiated at University College Cork in 2001. The "President's Awards for Research on Innovative Forms of Teaching and Learning" were created as part of a university initiative to foster the scholarship of teaching and learning. The following extract from our initial award application outlines the rationale behind the design of our new literature module entitled "Literatur verstehen und inszenieren":

> The aim of the project is to investigate, document and evaluate the learning process that is set in motion when learners are confronted with literary texts. It is our opinion that the conventional approach to the teaching and learning of literature at University College Cork, that is the lecture format, does not lend itself to such a study, since its focus is on the result of the process, usually the production of the traditional literary essay or critical commentary, rather than on the process itself. We therefore propose to develop an alternative approach to the study of literary texts which enables the learner to engage with those texts on several different levels and provides the teacher/researcher with means of observing, documenting and evaluating the learning process.
>
> The methodology we plan to use in the development of this approach is that of drama pedagogy… In keeping with the proposed methodological approach, we envisage that the course would consist mainly of workshops, culminating in a performance consisting of a collage of scenes from German literary texts.

Following a successful award application, "Literatur verstehen und inszenieren" was offered as an optional literature module to final year students of Arts, Language and Cultural Studies and Law and German in the first term of the academic year 2002-2003. In addition to the 24 contact hours prescribed for a module with a credit weighting of 5 credits, students were informed that they would be expected to attend two one-day workshops to facilitate longer blocks of rehearsal time closer to the performance. The module was assessed by continuous assessment. This consisted of two components: a practical assignment, which included participation in workshops and preparation of the performance, and a written assignment in the form of a learner diary. The practical and the written components were allocated 50% each. The interactive nature of the module meant that the number of participants was limited and 13 students elected to take the course. Over a period of 12 weeks the two-hour workshops took place in a classroom and in the university's Granary Theatre and its studio rehearsal space. The performances took place in the Granary Theatre on 11th and 12th of December, 2002 and, with a view to strengthening the liaison between university and schools and creating an interest in German as a subject, were targeted at students of German at secondary schools in the Cork region.

By offering such an alternative we do not claim to have a recipe for the learner's lasting interest in and engagement with literature. However, we are hopeful that our model might be of interest to colleagues and become a starting and reference point for a fruitful discussion of how motivation or even enthusiasm for the study of literature can be (re)generated and sustained over the next years and decades to come.

3. Drama Pedagogy and the Language Arts

While in past centuries and decades modern language teachers might have used elements of play in their teaching, it is especially since the 1990s that the role of drama and theatre in the language arts has become part of the subject debate (for example Schewe 1993; 2002b; Schewe & Shaw 1993; Dufeu 1994; Kao & O'Neill 1998; Tselikas 1999; Schlemminger et al. 2000; Bräuer 2002; Even 2003; Huber 2003) and the discipline of drama in education has become an important reference discipline for the modern languages, leading to the

development of innovative concepts of language teaching and learning, a most recent example of which is Susanne Even's (2003) concept of "Dramagrammar", i.e. grammar teaching and learning through drama.

While such publications have paved the way for acknowledging drama's important role in modern languages methodology, this is a relatively new area and hence fertile ground for researchers with a particular interest in building bridges between the modern languages and aesthetic education.

While over the last decade researchers have focused mainly on the teaching and learning of *language* through drama, relatively little attention has been given to the teaching and learning of *literature* through drama.[3]

While in the secondary literature you might sporadically come across examples of drama-based approaches to literary texts in the classroom, there is no coherent theoretical framework as yet for such approaches. Furthermore, while there are occasional reports and articles emphasising their benefits, there is as yet little empirical evidence for learning processes in drama-based projects which set out to achieve a product, i.e. a public performance. However, in this context the perspectives of Smith (1984) and Bourke (1993) are of interest and, more recently, Moody has argued that it would be a waste of learning opportunities to focus exclusively on process-related work in the classroom, emphasising that performance-related projects be seen as an integral part of drama-based teaching and learning:

> I would agree unhesitatingly that improvisation and other process approaches are frequently very effective, and that they allow learners to interpret the world through both their bodies and voices, in order to practice the gestures, movements and utterances of the target language and culture in spontaneous and imaginative ways. However, literacy is also at the core of how human beings communicate and situate themselves in relation to one another and over time. We also have the texts of our lives, which are not only written upon our bodies in spontaneous oral communication, but additionally in our classroom assignments, creative writing pieces, and in our great works of literature. Powerful aesthetic responses can also spring forth from a preconceived text. Serious reflection is required to interpret play scripts, and within those texts are the records of a language and culture, and the memories of past sensibilities and communicative acts. In the social milieu of foreign-language theatre, teachers and students are able to portray these texts for their audiences, and to present the

[3] In this context see the chapter "Drama as Response to Literature" in Wagner (1998: 183-187)

> richness of the dramatic art form as intercultural speakers and performers. (Moody 2002: 138-139)

While Moody from his perspective as an outside investigator in two case studies offers an interesting insight into different target groups' (secondary school students'/college students') responses to process and product-oriented approaches and, on the basis of his observations, emphasises the rich potential of product-oriented approaches, he gives hardly any information regarding the theoretical framework which guided his research or indeed the different data sources his research was based on. While Moody's reflections help to consider the principal distinctions between process and product-oriented approaches, the claim that product-oriented approaches become an "inherent option for drama-based pedagogy" is already implied in the drama-pedagogical concept advocated by Schewe (1993). He attributes pedagogical value to multiple forms of drama-based teaching and learning, explicitly including product/performance-oriented projects, however emphasises that each of these forms be looked at in terms of the quality of the learning processes they can achieve. Bearing this in mind we will, in what follows, outline the steps we took in order to establish how learners responded to a product/performance-oriented form of literature teaching.

4. Research Methodology

In her publication *Educational Drama and Language Arts. What Research Shows* Betty Jane Wagner (1998) gives the first systematic overview of research projects which have addressed different aspects of teaching and learning language arts through drama. While subscribing to her reservations regarding quantitative research (p. 241) which will not be recapitulated here, we note that, according to Wagner, qualitative research studies

> look closely at what teachers and students do both during and after a drama … Like the anthropologists who try to understand a culture by making sense of its rules, taboos, unstated values, and tacit knowledge, interpretive researchers approach the classroom as a specific culture; and they try to illumine how the participants make sense of their experience there. Qualitative researchers work to discern the meanings the students make of the drama experience and categorize these in ways that elucidate the enterprise. (Wagner 1998: 233-234)

Accordingly, in our research project we set out to discern how final year students of German at University College Cork responded to an innovative drama-based approach to literature which was to culminate in a public performance, and to categorise their responses in ways that elucidated some of the central characteristics of such an approach.

As our research is mainly of interest to teachers of foreign language literature, we allowed ourselves to be guided by Wagner's (1998: 241) claim that "teachers need rich descriptions, the kind that typically include long verbatim quotations of students' oral and written output", as studying specific cases has a more powerful effect on their decisions than the impersonal presentation of empirical data which is typical of quantitative studies.

Hence, as is typical of practitioners who conduct the research themselves in order to improve practice, we decided to apply an action research framework. After all, according to Cohen & Manion (1998) action research "… is concerned with innovation and change and the ways in which these may be implemented in ongoing systems" (188) and seen as a "means of injecting additional or innovatory approaches to teaching and learning" (189). However, we restrict ourselves here to the basic stages of action research projects as described by McNiff (1993: 65)[4]:

Stage 1 Discuss your concern. What are you wanting to improve?
Stage 2 Decide on a strategy for change and improvement.
Stage 3 Put the strategy into effect – act!
Stage 4 Evaluate the outcomes of your action.
Stage 5 Modify your statement of concern in the light of the evaluation.

In what follows we will adhere to these stages, but mainly focus on stages 3 and 4, in order to give readers a sense of how students reacted to this form of teaching. In order to work towards "data triangulation", we will refer to examples taken from three different sources which emphasise the learners' perspective:

- Learner diaries
- Student responses to an anonymous electronic survey
- A video transcript of a discussion with students on the last day of the course.

As part of the formal requirement of this course the students were asked to keep a learner diary and given guidelines accordingly (for details see Appendix 1). Aware of the fact that the assessment factor might possibly prevent an individual student from being as open as possible about his/her learning experience, we ensured that students were also given an opportunity to respond anonymously to their experiences in this module by filling in a questionnaire which was centrally evaluated by the Quality Promotion Unit, University College Cork.[5] Furthermore, we recorded several of our seminar sessions on video, including the final discussion with the students, which was subsequently transcribed and, together with the learner diaries and the questionnaire, will be referred to in what follows. While these became our three main data sources, we also collected photographic evidence. However, for reasons of space we have to restrict ourselves here to only a few examples which highlight the learners' perception of performance-based literature learning. Note that the learners' names have been changed.

5. Evaluation of Performance-based Literature Learning

5.1 Concerns

As already stated in sections 1 and 2, the starting point for our research project was our concern about today's students increasing lack of motivation for the study of German literature and our own dissatisfaction with the predominant forms of literature teaching, i.e. the teacher-directed traditional lecture or seminar. Therefore we set out to develop an alternative form of literature teaching and thus to improve teaching practice. Based on the premise that a more active learning methodology was required and on our experiences in the separate fields of literature teaching and drama and theatre studies, we decided on a drama-in-education approach for this course.

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[4] This specific research methodology has gained increasing respect over the last decade, for further information we can recommend McNiff (1993), McNiff et al. (1996).

[5] We used the MarkClass Software which is recommended by the Quality Promotion Unit, University College Cork, for various administrative and, particularly, teaching evaluation purposes (for further details see: www.markclass.com).

5.2 Strategy for Change and Improvement

Obviously there are differences between analysing a literary text in an essay or critical commentary and preparing it for performance. Both require a certain understanding of the text, which in both instances finds different means of expression. Performing a text necessitates the use of vocal and facial expression, gesture and movement on the part of the performer. Other considerations are set, lighting, sound, costume, props, make-up, all of which are devices that can be employed to communicate an understanding or interpretation of the text. A change in the tone of the voice, a pause, a gesture, an adjustment in lighting, the addition of music, to give just a few examples, can convey so much on stage, and decisions about such things often require just as much consideration as a written analysis. Hence, as a strategy for change and improvement, why shouldn't the interpretive tools of the theatre be used by students of literature?

5.3 Theatre Making as a Model – Action and Evaluation of Action

Within the theatre-making teaching model, the student of literature becomes the actor/performer who enters the rehearsal process in the knowledge that when it is over he/she will perform before a live audience. This prospect immediately lends the learning process a dimension of urgency and anticipation. In their learner diaries some students describe the effect that simply working in a theatre space had on them:

> Today we were in the Granary Theatre, which I absolutely love because it is so atmospheric. I think that working here helps us to perform to a higher potential. (Rachel, November 22nd, 2002)

> An atmosphere of anticipation prevailed. We were all delighted our group was allocated the Granary. It is an inspiring space to work in. Even though the chairs were empty, I immediately became more focused on the needs of an audience. (Ciara, November 11th, 2002)

The prospect of a performance means that the motivation to participate and learn is immediately very high as the student/actor has even more of a vested interest in performing well. Whatever they feel about privately receiving a low mark in a written piece of work, no one wishes to suffer the humiliation of failure in public. Working together towards a performance created a work ethic in the class group and instilled in the students a sense of

ownership, responsibility, commitment and teamwork. There are several references to that effect in the students' learner diaries. For example:

> Unfortunately, I had to unexpectedly go to Limerick today and so I missed the class. I was really disappointed, as I had successfully managed not to miss any up until now. The worst thing was that not only was I letting people down, but I would miss out on a lot of work too ... It was not until this stage that I comprehended how much ground we covered in one class. (Rachel, 4th December 2002)

> Never before have I put so much into anything outside sport, especially where college is concerned. (Jean, 12th December 2002)

> The last thing I wanted to do was mess things up, as I would feel like I'd left everyone down. (Denise, 9th December 2002)

> I am convinced that the performance around Christmas provides a real focal point for the class and influences us to settle down to work faster in each class and to work hard on producing something by the end of each session. (Joe, 25th October 2002)

> We exceeded the number of sessions prescribed for this course almost two-fold, we were required to attend a total of 24 sessions, but instead we partook in 42 sessions. The 18 extra hour-long sessions were completed by us of our own free will and surely indicate the enthusiasm of those who took part in the course . . . Those who partook in the course did so with an enthusiasm that I have not witnessed in any other course during my four years at university. (Gary, Introduction to Learner Diary)

> I didn't see "LiteraTOUR" as an assessment while I was on stage. I was there for myself, and the group, and it meant a lot to me that it went well. (Lisa, 13th December 2002)

Taking the theatre-making process as our model necessitated using the methods of theatre work. Therefore, workshop sessions always began with warm-up exercises normally used in the drama classroom to generate energy, free the body and the voice and focus the mind on the work at hand. Having divided the group to work on different texts, each teacher would then engage in text-specific exercises with his/her group, mostly in different rooms. In the limited time available each group then worked on preparing a text, or sometimes two texts, for performance before the other half of the class. The performances were followed by a feedback session in which students commented on the performance of the other group and on their own experience of the session. A concrete example of a workshop facilitated by Trina Scott on 18th October 2002 is outlined below and will serve to highlight certain aspects of our research project. While this session gives an impression of the way in which we worked, other sessions were conducted very differently.

Sample Workshop Session

This session was the third of the course and focused on a poem by Peter Otto Chotjewitz entitled "Reisen".[6] The text is printed below.

Reisen
ich
bin mit dem Zug nach Ulm gefahren
ich bin
mit dem Zug nach Ulm gefahren
ich bin mit
dem Zug nach Ulm gefahren
ich bin mit dem
Zug nach Ulm gefahren
ich bin mit dem Zug
nach Ulm gefahren
ich bin mit dem Zug nach Ulm
gefahren
ich bin mit dem Zug nach Ulm gefahren

nun bin ich in Ulm:
was soll ich hier?

The text has two parts. The first part, lines 1-13, consists of the repetition of one sentence. Each time the sentence occurs, it is spread over two lines. As text goes on, for the most part, one more word of the sentence is placed in the first line of each pair until, in line 13, the complete sentence is in one line. A line break then proceeds the final two lines of the text. The students were not presented with the text at the beginning of the workshop session. However, the following exercises were chosen specifically to prepare the students for subsequent work on the text.

[6] For a list of literary texts which were used as a basis for the performance see Appendix 4.



Vocal warm-up

Before working with words, the group did some physical stretching exercises for the neck, shoulders, face, mouth and jaw. The voice was warmed up with a humming exercise and the repetition of the vowel sounds “ah-ay-ee-oh-oo”. Some work on articulation brought the students’ attention to the organs of speech which would need to be exercised to ensure good diction while on stage. As the students were going to have to learn to use their voices effectively in order to perform well, they needed to be sensitised to the vocal possibilities of words spoken aloud. Because “Reisen” is linguistically simplistic, yet experiments with language, it seemed to be an ideal text with which to explore the potential of the voice.

First students were asked to have a dialogue with a partner using only the words “you” and “me”. Over time they were also permitted to use the words “yes”, “no” and “maybe”. With the limited vocabulary at their disposal, the students attempted to communicate with their partners and naturally began to experiment with the way in which they spoke the words. The restriction placed on the words they could use was to prepare them for the similarly

limited vocabulary of "Reisen". Next, standing in a circle, students were asked to experiment vocally with their own names by stressing the vowels first and then the consonants. This exercise was repeated using some words from the text of "Reisen". With eyes closed they listened to their own voices and those of their classmates.

At this point students were given a copy of "Reisen" and had to "pass" the text around the circle by speaking one word each. This required concentration and cooperation as they tried to pass the text seamlessly from one to the other, speaking as a single voice. They were then asked to speak the text and experiment with volume, pitch, pace, tone and facial expression. One student comments on this part of the session as follows:

> Again we had a time limitation today, but nevertheless we started with a few exercises to help with our vocal abilities, such as saying our names in various ways. We also played a game where we repeated the words "you", "me" and eventually added in other words such as "maybe", "yes" and "no" in groups of two. I really enjoyed this game as it proved that one could do a lot with just a few words and also the fact that the same words can be interpreted in so many different ways, depending on the intonation used. (Leonard, 18th October 2002)

Dramatisation of the text

Betty Jane Wagner (1998: 183), referring to Benton , describes the reader as follows:

> Benton (1979) has characterized a reader not just as an interpreter but as a performer who builds a mental stage and fills it with people, scenes and events from the text. Students who respond to literature by creating a drama transform the classroom into this mental stage.

This is exactly the process our students engaged in when, after the above exercises, they were asked to consider how the text could be dramatised using visual images. The image of a train was suggested by one student and this then sparked further ideas. A student describes the process in his learner diary:

> When I read "Reisen" it seemed to be quite a monotonous poem. I could not have imagined that it could be performed entertainingly ... However, using the new-found possibilities for our voices, we quickly developed a scenario for the poem, whereby six of the group were passengers on a train with Leonard as its driver. Using the full range of our voices and imaginations we were able to conjure up different moods for each person involved in the performance, I was flamboyant, Siobhán was exhausted and so on. By realising the possibilities of our voices we were able to give life to what seemed to be quite a monotonous poem. We were also able to experiment with different concepts of how we would stage the piece. Trina did not dictate what we were supposed to do, but instead acted as a guide, keeping the momentum in the session, contributing her own ideas but also remaining open to the ones which we contributed. (Gary, 18th October 2002)

While working on the dramatisation of "Reisen", the students made discoveries about the text in a natural and spontaneous way. They decided to allow the up-down motion of the train that they physically formed to dictate the rhythm in which the poem was spoken and they coordinated speech and movement accordingly. They adhered to the structure of the poem by dividing up the lines of the text among different speakers. Through the creation of characters who spoke their lines in different tones of voice, with varying facial expressions, gestures and movements, the students tried to convey the moods of the different people who might be travelling on a train to Ulm. Based on the break in the text, they decided to add a train driver who would speak the poem's final two lines – he, they thought, was the only one with no real reason for going to Ulm – other than having to drive everyone else there! Gary continues his description of the session as follows:

> The resulting performance of "Reisen" was thus like a tapestry that had been woven from the imagination of everyone involved in the piece. It belonged to all of us, it was something that we had not just done because we were told to do it, we were not merely following instructions. This I believe led to the pride that developed within the group as a whole; because the final performance was to be a reflection of ourselves, we wanted to make each piece as perfect as possible. It was this perfectionism and pride that was also the motivating force in the extra sessions and work that we completed. (Gary, 18th October 2002)

This extract highlights an important aspect of the course which is considered in the next section.

Roles of the learner and the teacher

Gary's description of the learning process which he experienced in the particular session outlined above is frequently echoed in the data sources. In her diary entry following the course's final meeting, which took place after the performances, Lisa reflects as follows:

> This course is very different to any course I've ever taken at college before, and the learning experiences that come of it are worth more than other courses I've taken ... It was a broad learning experience, where I developed talents and had to challenge myself in ways that I had not done before. It was a great improvisational class, it was a real open scenario. Every class we had was an experiment and a process of exploration, and all of us had a hand in being part of that experiment, whose results came out positive. We were like a team with two leaders, our two lecturers, but instead of the lecturers playing traditional roles, they played much more active roles in the classroom, communicating directly with us, the students. The role of the learner was really important in this course, the emphasis at all time was on us, the students. The course required us, the learners, to be adaptable, creative, inventive and independent. (Lisa, 13th December 2002)

In the anonymous electronic survey (see Appendix 2) the students were asked the following question: "How does your role as a learner in this module differ from your role in other literature modules?" Recurring words and phrases with reference to the learner's role in this module include: "more active", "necessity for participation", "more involvement", "more interaction", "input". All of this is seen by the students as having the following results: "more confidence", "fun", "enthusiasm", "motivated", "part of a team". To quote one anonymous response in more detail:

> Rather than sitting back spending an hour trying to absorb what a lecturer has to say on a particular piece of literature, in this module I am free to express my opinions and play an active role in making literature "come to life". I also felt that instead of just learning for myself, what I learned was also of benefit to my classmates because we were all working towards the same goal.

If the role of the student undergoes such a dramatic change, then the role of the teacher must do likewise. In the data sources the teacher is often referred to as a "guide", rather than being regarded as an all-knowing authority. An example from the video transcript and one from a learner diary:

> Gary: It was more like having someone with you. Just sitting there, just listening, the group really participating with the lecturers, you were more like guides than dictators. You go into a class, and they say things and you take them down, and you might question things, but at the end of the day your lecturer knows what's right, but here it was more like everyone making something together. It was cool.

> Since this module began, I haven't looked on either Trina or Manfred as "lecturers" in the traditional sense. I feel the role they play in this class is more that of guidance than instruction, in the sense that instead of telling how a text should be performed, they assist us in working through our own ideas and interpretations ... in their capacity as guides rather than lecturers, they allow for a large creative input from the students; a factor that is generally overlooked in traditional literature courses. (Denise, 1st November and 13th December 2002)

Thus, taking the theatre-making process as a teaching model succeeds in shifting the focus of teaching and learning away from the teacher and on to the student, a move that is certainly perceived by the students as something positive.

Student reactions to drama-based literature learning

As is evident from the workshop session described above, this model also provides both teacher and learner with different mechanisms with which to approach a literary text. On

the video of the module's final discussion session, two students describe the drama-based approach used as follows:

> Ciara: For me, I always liked literature, but I often have found it hard to visualise a text. I might read it and often wonder about vocabulary and all that, and this course helped me to actually imaginatively understand a text better.

> Gary: I read "Reisen" and I thought, what a load of crap, and it seemed like the most boring text that I had ever seen – "Ich bin mit dem Zug nach Ulm gefahren" – come on, and then the most important things we did for all the texts was to make them very visual and very un-texty.

This reaction is echoed strongly in the anonymous electronic survey (see Appendix 2). In Question 1, using a scale from 1 to 10 (1 = strongly disagree; 10 = agree completely), students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "In this module I have experienced new ways into literary texts". 69.2% of students indicated their complete agreement, while the remaining respondents circled either 8 or 9. In response to the question "Has this course introduced you to new dimensions of learning?", all of the participants answered "yes" and two went on to comment as follows:

> This course has definitely introduced me to new dimensions of learning. Before, I found myself thinking of literature as merely words on a page. Now I approach texts with eagerness, as I now like to envisage the scenes as if they were playing out in front of me. I find this to be a helpful learning technique as I feel I can connect to the text in some way.

> Performance of texts allows a deeper understanding of the contents. It heightens one's sensitivity to the language of the text and imprints the contents on one's memory.

One of our aims in developing this module was to offer an alternative approach to the teaching and learning of literature that engages the learner on several different levels. We introduced our students to Howard Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences so that they could reflect on their own learning from this perspective. In the anonymous electronic survey (see Appendix 2) they were asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 how frequently they thought they used their various intelligences during the module workshops. The responses indicate frequent use of linguistic intelligence, as one might expect from a literature course, but also of spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences.

Other learning

It is evident in the data sources that, in the course of the module, the students were aware of engaging in learning that was not solely of a literary nature. As they prepared the texts for performance, their appreciation and knowledge of theatre as an aesthetic medium increased. Watching the other half of the group perform in each workshop session made them more aware of the needs of an audience. As the workshops gradually became proper rehearsals, including technical and dress rehearsals, the students increasingly referred in their diaries to the effects of lighting and sound, as well as the importance of cues, timing, pace, pause, fluidity of entrances and exits, movement, and use of space. Because the performance consisted of a collage of texts, it was necessary that it have an opening and an ending, as well as links between the various texts. The students therefore had the additional challenge of staging the performance in such a way as to make it a coherent whole. In addition to performing, each student was a member of a working group responsible for preparing a particular aspect of the performance e.g. costume and props, programme, posters, tickets and post-show discussion. This process prompted one student to comment in her diary: "There is a lot more to theatre than one thinks". Another reflects on her experience as follows:

> I have learnt a lot from this course but what I think is the most important lesson in relation to performing is that the more you hold back, the worse it looks on stage. The stage, I feel, is like a massive magnifying glass where all movement and expression is scrutinised and interpreted instantly by the audience. (Jean, 15th November 2002)

Students also mention that participating in "Literatur verstehen und inszenieren" helped their self-confidence, improved their organisational, communication and time management skills and convinced them of the value of dedication, motivation and teamwork. One student summarises the experience by saying: "This has given me something other than a mark towards my degree, which is important and sometimes people forget this" (Ann, 13th December 2002). Two other diary entries elaborate this thought further:

> To conclude, if this module has taught me nothing else, it is to think more positively about daunting projects. But I have learned far more than that. I understand now that it is impossible to know your limits when you haven't even exerted yourself to your potential and so it is always a worthwhile exercise to push yourself to see those limits and to see what your capabilities are ... I have come to realise the importance of quality preparation work through our warm-up exercises, which also taught me invaluable skills that include, but also stretch

> beyond the realms of drama and theatre work. Skills such as voice projection, building confidence, energising one's self, trust and many more besides. My creative abilities were also utilised and although they are far from extensive, at least I now know they are there and that they can be used for everything from writing an essay, to acting out a poem, to understanding literature. (Rose, 12th December 2002)

> What did we learn from it all? The first thing that I learned was that literature isn't just words on paper. Literature is more like baking soda. In its dry powder form it isn't very exciting, but if we add water it starts to fizz and bubble. You could look at a thousand books, you could even read them, but without imagination they are just fossils of life that once lived. Literature needs to be lifted from its pages and brought to life. This is something that I learned to do as part of this course.

> Did we learn anything else? When I was a boy my mother would tell me "Stick to the books because you're no good with your hands". I only discovered lately that my mother was wrong. I think that a lot of us discovered hidden talents, that we weren't just "good at the books", that we could be creative. I never knew that I could play the role of the clown or the street performer. I never knew that Ciara could sing so beautifully or that Denise could play the flute. I never knew Jean could sound like a washerwoman or that Joe could sit alone in front of an audience under a spotlight and read aloud. I never knew any of these things before and maybe they didn't know them either. I didn't know that there was another way to teach. I didn't know that there was another way to learn. I never knew learning could be fun, that reading poems and plays didn't have to be a chore. I never knew that I could do so much work and not complain about it once! During the course we learned a lot about literature, about each other and ourselves. (Gary, 12th December 2002)

Many of the students use the words "pride", "satisfaction" and "sense of achievement" with reference to the performance, which they regarded as the very concrete result of their coursework and an essential element of the module, as is evident from the following exchange in the final session:

> Manfred: ... Staying with the performance, and staying with the more overall context of the course and imagining this kind of module would happen again next year. Do you think the performance element is a good element to keep or could the course happen without the performance?

> Leonard: No, I think it's good, because then they have to reach a level of perfection, which they possibly wouldn't bother if ...

> Denise: It's much more satisfying to see something actually come out of your work. Something you can be proud of and something that you can see after three months of work. It's nice.

Presenting their work in this public way appealed greatly to the students, as did the opportunity it afforded to receive feedback on it from people other than their teachers. To quote one example:

> There was a fantastic atmosphere among the cast afterwards. We were all excited, the adrenalin was buzzing and we felt good about ourselves because of what we had achieved ... the appreciation of the audience when it's finished. This kind of direct and immediate response to what you have completed is an overwhelming experience. In life in general, there aren't many times where you experience this. (Ann, 11th December 2002)

6. Conclusions and New Concerns

In light of the converging evidence from different data sources, only a fraction of which could be dealt with here and the overall very positive feedback from students,[7] we can claim with some conviction that moving the site of teaching and learning from the classroom to the theatre opens up many exciting possibilities for teacher and learner. The new roles that both must play in this creative arena are challenging but rewarding. Interactive and collaborative learning is fostered in a way that allows a valuable encounter with literary texts, fellow learners, teachers and, perhaps most importantly, oneself.

While this method of working might not appeal to every teacher of literature, we nevertheless are of the opinion that modern language departments which in the past have put special emphasis on literature and intend to do so in the future, should take the learner's perspective seriously. Admittedly, some of the learners' critical feedback might appear to be a bit too black and white and therefore undifferentiated, but it nevertheless conveys a sense of how learners feel about different approaches to literary study.[8]

This project is our first attempt to look at the learner's perspective on literature study in a more systematic fashion. However, given the narrow time scale and the pressures we as practitioners who conducted their own research were under, we had to abandon our original

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[7] In response to question 9 in the electronic survey, which asked students to indicate their level of satisfaction with this module using a scale from 1-10 (1 = very unsatisfactory; 10 = very satisfactory), five students indicated a rating of 8, four of 9 and 4 of 10.

[8] In this context see, for example, the table in Appendix 2.1.

plans to also look in more detail at the teacher's perspective, the issue of assessment, language learning, etc. Based on teacher diaries and other data sources, it would be necessary to establish further how students perceive team teaching, how a teacher selects text material that is suitable for a performance, plans a workshop, develops specific skills and so on.

For us this action research project has given rise to a number of questions and has led us to consider modifications to last year's module. For example, as a result of discussions with the students, we have changed the weighting for the two course components. Instead of a 50:50 distribution, now the weighting for the practical assignment[9] has increased (60%) and, accordingly, the weighting for the learner diary been decreased (40%), reflecting a more realistic assessment of the time and effort the students have to invest into each of these components.

Questions which have arisen for us and which need further attention include, for example:

- How could a course such as this, which emphasises aesthetic practice, be fruitfully complemented by a literature course which focuses on theory and looks at issues of theatre history and different conventions within the dramatic genre?
- What kind of research tasks can be assigned to students to ensure that they read and engage with a wide range of literary texts?
- What drama pedagogical teaching techniques are available to the teacher and how can these be applied in order to achieve specific learning objectives with regard to literary study?

Based on the data we collected and evaluated, we recommend that modern language departments introduce courses which offer a hands-on experience of literature that is different from that encountered in lectures and teacher-directed seminars. Like the farmer who varies the crops he/she sows to keep the land at its most fertile, we propose that departments advocate a variety of teaching methods in the teaching of literature. We wish to conclude by repeating our conviction that while the survival of literary studies in modern

[9] For a list of assessment criteria regarding the practical assignment see Appendix 3.

language curricula will also depend on a number of other factors, it will, to a considerable extent, depend on how teachers use imaginative methodologies, including drama in education, in order to create a genuine interest in literature:

> … we did a good bit of literature last year, and I didn't read a single book to be honest. I got by, without reading the books. I researched the essays, found a few books in the library, there you go, there's your exam. Didn't need to read the books. There you go, but there was a genuine interest through this medium. (Denise, video-recorded final discussion)

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Appendices

1. Course Record Assignment / Learner Diary

Module: GE 3118 Literatur verstehen und inszenieren

Course Record Assignment (Learner Diary) = 50% of total mark

After each seminar during teaching period 1 (Fridays, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.) you are expected to reflect upon your own learning, i.e. to reflect on aspects dealt with in a particular seminar session. These reflections should be written down and entered into your "learning diary". This "learning diary" should, for example, focus on:

- a short reconstruction of each seminar/workshop session;
- your initial understanding of "literature" and how this understanding undergoes changes;
- how the methods used in this course relate to methods used in other literature courses you have attended in previous years in school and university;
- how the work in this course challenges you: how does it affect you personally? Which of your intelligences were especially tapped in a particular seminar/workshop session?
- an appreciation of different drama strategies used in the study of literary texts;
- new experiences/understandings with regard to German literature;
- new experiences/understandings with regard to the art form of theatre;
- the progress and problems of your own learning (if something has not become clear during the seminar session write down what it is that caused problems for you, which questions remain open etc.);
- the expression of feelings and mood states about your own learning (including a reflection on what might have caused these feelings/mood states);
- questions which are raised/remain for you after a seminar/workshop session.

In order to be able to keep a "learning diary", you are advised to attend classes on a regular basis. It is expected that you write about two A 4 pages per week. As your "learning diary" is a part of the formal assessment in this course, you are asked to have it edited, typed and completed by December 20th, 2002.

Should you encounter problems with the keeping of your "learning diary", contact (one of) your lecturers as soon as you become aware of these problems.

2. Anonymous Electronic Survey

GE 3118: Literatur verstehen und inszenieren

1. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Please use a scale from 1 to 10.
1 = strongly disagree
10 = agree completely

1) In this module I have experienced new ways into literary texts.
2) The work in this module has heightened my sensitivity to literary/poetic language.
3) This module has increased my confidence in dealing with literary texts.
4) This module allows me to learn autonomously.
5) I will be able to apply what I have learnt in this module to my study of other literary texts.
6) Participating in this module has made me more aware of the potential of collaborative learning.
7) In this module I engage with literary texts at a deeper level than in other literature modules.

2. Try to find comparisons that describe your study of literature in more traditional modules and this module.

Use this format:
Studying literature in this module is like ..., studying literature in more traditional modules is like ...
(Examples: like playing cards, like riding a bicycle, like doing a jig-saw puzzle, like playing chess)

3. Based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, indicate to what extent you used each of the intelligences in this module.

Use a scale from 1 to 10
1 = not used at all
10 = used very frequently

1) Linguistic intelligence
2) Logical-mathematical intelligence
3) Musical intelligence
4) Spatial intelligence
5) Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence

6) Intrapersonal intelligence
7) Interpersonal intelligence
8) Naturalist intelligence
9) Existential intelligence

4. Outline the differences between approaching literary texts on your own and in a group. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches? Please comment in as much detail as possible.

5. How does your role as a learner in this module differ from your role in other literature modules? Please comment in as much detail as possible.

6. Has this course introduced you to new dimensions of learning? If so, briefly outline them and their effects on you as a learner. Please comment in as much detail as possible.

7. Have you learnt anything new about German literature or literature in general? Please comment in as much detail as possible.

8. Please indicate to what extent you valued German literature in the past and how your value ratings have changed since you have started this module.

Please use a scale from 1 to 10.
1 = no value
10 = very high value

9. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with this module.

Use a scale from 1 to 10.
1 = very unsatisfactory
10 = very satisfactory

10. Do you have any suggestions for improvements?

11. Final comments!

Should you wish to add any further general comments or more specific comments with regard any of the questions above please feel free to do so in the box below.
You may also make suggestions for questions which are not covered in this questionnaire but could be important for the evaluation of this new module.

2.1 Students' answers to question 2 of questionnaire

Question 2:
Try to find comparisons that describe your study of literature in more traditional modules and this module. Use this format:
Studying literature in this module is like ..., studying literature in more traditional modules is like ...
(Examples: like playing cards, like riding a bicycle, like doing a jig-saw puzzle, like playing chess)

Studying Literature in more traditional module is like …	**Studying literature in this module is like …**

Going to mass and listening to a boring sermon	Playing the piano - practice makes perfect
-- no entry --	Doing a jig-saw puzzle
Scientific process of dissection	Getting inside the work and bringing it to life
Can feel more like a chore such as washing the dishes or doing laundry	Doing things I enjoy: going swimming or doing one of my favorite hobbies
Looking from the outside in at another world	Being involved in the world of the extract and not just being a spectator
Listening to a story	Putting words into reality
-- no entry --	Putting a jig-saw together
Analysing a text/poem in more detail	Studying a completely different aspect of the text/poem Interpreting a text in a personal way
Being a runner Climbing over a wall Being lost in a forest	Being part of a basketball team Going through a gate Discovering a new world
Playing chess Watching TV	Playing the piano Doing a jig-saw puzzle Singing in a choir
… didn't hold interest	Held interest

3. Assessment Criteria for Practical Assignment

- Contribution to workshops dealing with literary texts (discussion, interpretation skills, independent research)
- Contribution to performance piece (awareness of dramatic form, dramatic skills)
- Improvement of German language competence
- Contribution to special working group
- Overall commitment (punctuality, attendance)

4 Texts / text extracts used as basis for performance

LITERA-TOUR - Eine kleine Reise in die deutsche Literatur

Author	Title	Genre	Period
Peter Handke *1942	Publikumsbeschimpfung	Play	20th c.
Robert Walser 1878 - 1956	Das Alphabet	Short Prose	19th c.
Gebrüder Grimm Jacob: 1785 - 1863 Wilhelm: 1786 - 1859	Der Fuchs und die Gänse	Fairytale	19th c
Peter Otto Chotjewitz *1934	Reisen	Poem	20th c.
Kurt Tucholsky 1890 - 1935	Augen in der Großstadt	Poem	20th c.
Wolfgang von Goethe 1749 - 1832	Erlkönig	Poem	18th c.
Peter Jankowsky *1940	Cold War and Warmth	Extract from Autobiography	2001
Matthias Claudius 1740 - 1815	Der Mond ist aufgegangen	Poem/Song	18th c.
Hans Manz *1931	Ein Stuhl	Poem	20th c.
Peter Bichsel *1935	Nichts Besonderes	Short Prose	20th c.
Ernst Jandl *1925	Ottos Mops	Poem	20th c.
Franz Hohler *1943	Der Traumprinz	Fairytale	20th c.
Yüksel Pazarkaya *1940	die deutsche sprache	Poem	20th c.

Biodata

Dr. Manfred Schewe (www.ucc.ie/german/schewe.html) was a (German Academic Exchange) lecturer at the German Department, National University of Ireland, University College Cork, from 1982-1987. He was a lecturer/teacher trainer at Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg in the areas of Drama/Theatre in Education, German and English Studies from 1987-1994. Since 1994 he has been a permanent full-time lecturer at the German Department, University College Cork. His primary interest in research and teaching has been to develop holistic approaches to the teaching and learning of language, literature and culture by building bridges between different but complementary disciplines: Drama and Theatre Studies, Education, German as a Foreign Language, Applied Linguistics, Language Pedagogy, Literature Studies and Intercultural Studies.

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