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Report: 8th Scenario Forum Symposium

"Sore Back, Square Eyes?" Going Performative in Digital Teaching and Learning Spaces

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In this conference report, I reflect from a student's perspective on my experience as a participant in the 8th Scenario Forum Symposium "Sore Back, Square Eyes? Going Performative in Digital Teaching and Learning Spaces".

The 8th Scenario Forum Symposium entitled "Sore Back, Square Eyes? Going Performative in Digital Teaching and Learning Spaces" was the first conference of this series to be held online. In the previous years, the Symposia have been held in Ireland, the US and Germany. In 2021 the Symposium focused on new techniques, observations, research, and challenges that come with transferring teaching processes to an online space and on how teachers and students performed teaching and learning online with a specific interest on language learning. The Symposium took place on 18th and 19th June 2021 via Zoom. There were two parallel paper sessions followed by workshops. On the first day one paper session was held in English and the other one in German. Each paper session consisted of three consecutive papers. The workshops were held in three to four different zoom rooms. Participants selected in advance which to attend. The full programme is available online.

Throughout the Symposium, the speakers shared learnings from their experience of online and blended teaching over the last year, highlighting what they might keep or reject going forward in their teaching practice both in person and online. For example, during an exchange of plenary remarks after Jenna Nilson's presentation entitled "Exploring Critical Intercultural Language Pedagogy Through Online Process Drama", we discussed how building trust and relationships seems more difficult in an online setting especially with big groups of students. Many observed that in an online setting smaller groups are needed to engage fully with the students, despite online classes offering a higher capacity of students.

In the first paper presentation that I attended, Laure Kloetzer, Ramiro Tau, Martin Vergara, Julie Burnier and Emilie Bender shared research about their module 'Psychology of Migration' that offers students subjective experience of migration via performing arts practices. Every year students are invited to put together a three-minute performance based on selected

novels such as Elif Shafak's *Bastard of Istanbul*. Being the first year of teaching this module online, the speakers outlined that they had to reconfigure the course regularly, which was especially challenging for the students. Supported by theatre professionals, the students used puppetry techniques to create their performances with two groups making videos and one performing live via zoom. Some of the data collected during the module were the students' learning diaries. The researchers showed that the entries were quite different in form and content, giving insight into how the students engaged with the teaching style and also highlighting an interesting area for future research projects. Reflecting on this, I believe, learning diaries offer a great insight into the learning process of the students, which is very hard to achieve online. As a student I have observed over the last year of learning primarily online that many students choose to keep their cameras off and stay muted most of, if not all of the time. Staying focused is also a challenge. When teachers ask for feedback, it is hard to speak out, be open and honest. Thus, teachers are faced with a wall between them and the students' learning process. And these are observations I have gathered from college students; I doubt it is easier for teenagers. If anything, it is most likely harder. Learning diaries open up the opportunity for students to express themselves a lot easier. From a student perspective, key aspects, such as remarks on the teaching practice, the lack or an abundance of material, can be highlighted in these diaries, and they might help teachers make necessary adjustments and make them better understand the learning process of their students.

Eva Göksel focused on the value of drama in online settings in her paper *Conquering the Zoombies: Why we need drama in online settings*. At the very start of her paper, she asked us two questions: How have you experienced performative teaching and learning in online settings? How comfortable have you become with using drama in online settings? The answers were discussed in the chat. Göksel said that most people would say that teaching with drama is not possible or at least not as good as face-to-face drama. She argued that drama is not only an important tool, but a necessary one, especially online. It is relevant, valuable & flexible. Even if it is just a drama game, it engages with the other people. Regarding her title she explained the word play of Zoombie: It is a fusion of Zoom and zombie. Online classes are incredibly demanding as everyone involved has to stare on a screen for extended periods. Before the end of her talk, she asked us two questions again: What are you proud of? And what would you like to change in terms of teaching online? This time we were sent in breakout rooms in pairs. It was a short but fascinating talk! To finish, Göksel motivated all of us to keep on using and exploring drama as a tool, to see performance as a strength and to encourage other teachers to use drama.

Keynote speaker Thomas Strasser's entertaining talk used a DJ analogy to bring focus to how technology can enhance learning and teaching. He imagined the school as a nightclub and the

teacher as the DJ. The bouncer would be sceptical colleagues and the DJs loyal fans are colleagues open to try everything new and usually early adopters. As a student, my curiosity was piqued when he pointed out the importance of letting the students partake in decision making. As part of Strasser's teaching practice, students are invited to engage in lesson planning, and they can receive participation marks as part of this engagement. While Strasser's talk was a global discussion of use of online digital media, he filled it with advice on how to make pre-recorded videos more interactive and pointed out that less can be more when using digital media. The open interactive nature of Strasser's Q&A prompted participants to share links to resources such as design websites in the chat, creating further discussion and sharing of resources throughout the Symposium. The links were eagerly discussed and shared. Exploring the connection between Strasser's work to drama and the importance of performative games and exercises in classes would be an exciting project.

On both days participants could choose between a number of workshops running simultaneously. I decided to join Stefanie Giebert's *Secret agent meets pirate professor at the airport: collaboratively creating characters in a digital space* workshop, mainly because of its amusing title. She explored ways to create a character online by giving the participants tools to help fuel the imagination. After some warm-up exercises, Giebert put us into groups of three to four people. Then she provided each group with a PDF-file which consisted of images of items in a suitcase. With these items, we were given the task to create a character in the breakout rooms. We had to think of their name, age, where they are from and their goals. The final step was to play out the character, which was worked on in different breakout rooms. I ended up with Giebert herself and another participant in a room. She told us to use the background filters to help us get into character. I struggled to find the filters and only found them after it was over, but it did not hinder my participation. We ended the workshop with a round of discussions. The workshop was well structured, at every step, and Giebert explained why she chose the tool and how it could be used. While we did struggle with time, enough was given to the participants to exchange their thoughts.

The last presentation of the Symposium I had the pleasure to attend, was Susanne Even's *Three drunken sailors, a spy, and a fugitive: The creation of virtual images.* Although at first sceptical about online teaching, Even reported that while many of the performative activities (such as creating characters, hot seating and discussions), can be adapted to online settings, still images were a challenge. In order to transfer still images online, she created the idea of virtual images. In one of her classes, she asked the students to take screenshots of themselves as different parts of a still image. Then Even experimented with these screenshots and found that the editing process resulted in collages with more layers and new or enhanced meanings. During the Q&A, Even conceded that students should edit the screenshots themselves in the

future, since the resulting virtual images have unlimited potential to offer deeper reflections and revisions. Even wants to explore this tool more in the future, whether it be in an online setting or not.

As a Higher Diploma theatre student, I found it reassuring to see that drama is used so widely to enhance and help learning. Attending the Symposium gave me a great insight into the perspective of teachers and how they dealt with all the changes that came with online learning. Subjects to further explore emerging from the Symposium could be students and their opinions, tools, and time management issues. Sometimes it is hard to feel heard as a student, so it was refreshing to see that Strasser's students get to partake in the decision making. By hearing out the students' opinions they feel more included. Originally going into the Symposium, I expected at least a few people pointing out online-induced time management issues, however in the talks and workshops I have attended it was not mentioned. The lack of the discussion on this subject, makes me even more curious. It would be intriguing to hear about how teachers deal with lost time and classes drifting from the original plan. As mentioned above, Göksel talks about drama as a tool and that connects to Even's still and virtual images, but I wonder what other tools have emerged for students through drama? How can teachers learn from students' use of drama as a tool? These are the areas that could be the centre of future discussions.