

Drama in Education Conference

Abstracts

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Keynote

Enacted: The Role of Embodied Cognition on Drama, Language, and Learning - Peter Duffy

Dr. Peter Duffy heads the Master of Arts in Teaching program in theatre education at the University of South Carolina where he prepares graduate students to become drama teachers. He offers courses in drama-based pedagogies and arts integration. He is a director and is a former public-school teacher, education director, and a New York City teaching artist. His research interests include teaching and learning, devising new works in community settings, cognition and the arts, culturally responsive pedagogies and performed research.

Presentations + Discussion (Q&A) sessions

Drama for Oracy with Very Young Learners - Sharka Dohnalova

Drama as a complex teaching method offers a variety of techniques and conventions not only for older learners or adults but also for the youngest children entering education. Currently, majority of the EU member states are starting foreign language teaching/learning at the age of 6, some even at the age of 3 (see Eurydice, 2017). Nevertheless, starting early is only one of the aspects of successful mastering a foreign language later and the question for pre-service teacher training institutions is “What are the best practices to be taught to the future teachers in ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care)”. Research proves that teachers using drama in foreign language teaching/learning are more successful in both the listening and speaking domains, so let us talk about which drama techniques and conventions have the impact on language acquisition in Very Young Learner Classroom.

Forum theatre in the German language classroom - Mona Eikel-Pohen

This documentation is the revised, compacted, and translated version of a 2024 article published as *Augusto Boals Forumtheater im Deutschunterricht* in <http://gfl-journal.de/article/augusto-boals-forumtheater/> (Eikel-Pohen 2024) that includes new insights since the second iteration of a Forum Theater project in the German language classroom in 2025. It is based on the author's autoethnographic notes (Rodriguez-Mejia 2023: 71) from a GER 202 university language and culture class in the spring semesters of 2024 and 2025 and it shows Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre application to language teaching in a socially critical, holistic, cooperative, intercultural, and practical way.

Boal's method aims at exposing structural oppression and allowing individuals to explore options for action through play. The instructor integrated this approach twice into an intermediate language course with a focus on social issues in the target language's cultures. She followed Boal's model when it aligned with language pedagogy and modified it without compromising its goals where it did not. This documentation does not claim to present formal research but reflects teaching practices at the intersection of intercultural language education

(Wagner 2019: 9–13) and critical theatre pedagogy. It focuses specifically on the value of reflections, shows examples of reflective methods and delineates ways for formative and summative assessment.

Dr. Mona Eikel-Pohen has worked at Syracuse University since 2015 and is an Associate Teaching Professor of German. She teaches German at all levels and integrates improv, theater, and creative writing activities whenever possible. Her research focuses on democratic teaching practices as part of a larger peace pedagogy.

Getting into Character: Professional Development in Improvisational Drama to Stimulate Foreign Language Communication - Kristina Goodnight

Young people often start their formal foreign language (FL) education just as they reach adolescence. Speaking the FL in class can be intimidating, particularly at this vulnerable stage of development, and this challenge is often exacerbated as teachers report lack of access to engaging speaking activities (e.g. El Majidi, 2022). In language classrooms around the world, improvisational drama techniques (IDTs) have been shown to engender positive affective reactions, such as enjoyment, and spoken interaction (e.g. Galante, 2018; Jacobs, 2023; Nhongo, 2017). Yet the body of research on how to train FL teachers to implement IDTs remains limited. In this recently completed doctoral study, the goal was to discover which characteristics of a professional development program (PDP) can foster integration of IDTs in the FL classroom and in turn stimulate affective factors related to willingness to communicate among secondary school pupils. The first three studies focused on developing design principles for the PDP and consequently a prototype for this training. The following two studies involved testing and refining this prototype by offering this training to secondary school FL teachers in the Netherlands. Finally, the impact of the PDP was evaluated among trained teachers' pupils. The collective findings revealed that the PDP design was viable in its relevance to teachers in galvanizing them to implement IDTs. Training participants found trying out the IDTs during sessions particularly helpful. Trained teachers furthermore reported increased self-efficacy in relation to integrating IDTs as well as teaching speaking in general. Their pupils found drama activities to be engaging and fun, and they expressed greater willingness to communicate than during other types of speaking activities. A less positive finding was that while the frequency of IDT-implementation among teachers increased significantly immediately following the PDP, implementation frequency dropped significantly one year later, which teachers attributed to lack of time.

Kristina's doctoral research was inspired by teaching her English teacher education students drama techniques at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, where she also works as a researcher within the Multilingualism and Education Research Group. She previously taught English and Drama in secondary school in the USA and the Netherlands.

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Drama in native language teaching -

Lena Kohut

In this presentation, I will share how my background as a theatre maker and drama teacher shapes my work as a native language teacher in Sweden, where I have been living for the past two and a half years. With 20 years of experience creating theatre for young audiences, I have developed a set of drama-based methods that enrich language learning and turn it into an exciting experience beyond vocabulary and grammar.

Since my students already speak the language on some level, the focus is on exploring deeper levels of expression, creativity, and cultural connection. Through playful and engaging drama exercises, I aim to motivate learners to use the language in new and imaginative ways. The important here is building confidence, curiosity, and a stronger relationship to their linguistic identity.

During this session, I will introduce some of my favourite drama exercises, explain how they connect to language learning, and reflect on how the intersection of theatre and education can open up meaningful pathways for both teachers and students.

Clear the stage for Latin / Bühne frei für Latein! Inszenierung KI-generierter

Dialoge im altsprachlichen Unterricht -

Janina Reinhardt, Jochen Sauer

Obwohl Theater im Lateinunterricht eine lange Tradition hat, sind dramapädagogische Ansätze heute im altsprachlichen Unterricht äußerst selten. Lehrwerke verzichten meist auf aufführbare Dialoge, und die mündliche Anwendung alter Sprachen ist kein Lernziel mehr. Daher erleben Schüler*innen lateinische Texte in der Regel nur lesend und übersetzend.

Unser Beitrag zeigt, wie der altsprachliche Unterricht dennoch durch dramapädagogische Methoden bereichert und im Avisieren seiner gegenwärtigen Kompetenzziele unterstützt werden kann. Mithilfe von KI-Textgeneratoren schaffen wir eine zeiteffiziente Grundlage zur Abfassung von dialogischen Texten, die sich für theaterpraktisches Arbeiten eignen. Dabei orientiert sich unser Ansatz an der Praxis der modernen Fremdsprachen (vgl. Schewe 2020) und soll insbesondere die Vorteile bewegten, ganzheitlichen Lernens (vgl. Sambanis 2021) umsetzen, wobei ein emotionaler Zugang zur lateinischen Sprache bzw. eine motivierende Methode zum Erlernen sprachlicher Mittel bzw. zur Textinterpretation geschaffen werden soll.

An Schulen in Nordrhein-Westfalen und Niedersachsen haben wir den schulpraktischen Einsatz der Methode getestet (vgl. Reinhardt & Sauer im Druck). Befragungen von Lehrkräften und Schüler*innen zeigten, dass die Inszenierung von Dialogen die Textinterpretation erleichtert, die aktive Einbindung der Lernenden fördert und die Unterrichtszeit effizient nutzt.

Wir plädieren somit für eine Wiederbelebung der Theaterpraxis im Lateinunterricht, um die Lernmotivation und den Kompetenzerwerb zu steigern. Unser Beitrag bietet Impulse für die Integration performativer Methoden im altsprachlichen Unterricht, die jedoch auch den Unterricht moderner Sprachen bereichern können.

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Dr. Jochen Sauer ist Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter im Fachbereich Latein an der Universität Bielefeld. Er forscht insbesondere zu den staats- und rechtstheoretischen Schriften Ciceros, zur fremdsprachlichen Demokratiebildung, zur Inklusion und zur digitalen Bildung in den alten Sprachen.

Dr. Janina Reinhardt ist derzeit an der Universität Bielefeld für die Didaktik des Französischen und Spanischen zuständig. Ab Oktober 2025 wird sie an der Philipps-Universität Marburg als Qualifikationsprofessorin für Linguistik des Französischen und Fachdidaktik der romanischen Sprachen tätig sein. Eines ihrer zentralen Forschungsinteressen liegt im sprachreflexiven Einsatz digitaler Medien.

Beyond Talk: Improvisation as Discovery through the PRODEM Model - Nicca Vignotto

This paper delves into improvisational theatre as a pedagogical tool rooted in physicality, emotional presence, and narrative exploration. Traditional frameworks like CROW (Character, Relationship, Objective, Where) often encourage beginners to over-explain or impose exposition, resulting in scenes driven more by dialogue than by action or emotion. To address this issue, we propose an alternative framework: REVERTED PRODEM = MEDOPR (Person, Relationship, Objective/Obstacle, Environment, Emotion, Movement). Grounded in the etymology of the Italian word "prode" (courageous, useful), this model guides students in co-creating stories through embodied choices and relational tension.

This study discusses two parallel experiences conducted over five months: one involved participating as a student in a improv course collaborating with amateur improv actors (*Amsterdaje*), and the other as a teacher applying the same activities in the classroom with adult students at the Italiando language school.

With REVERTED PRODEM = MEDOPR, emphasis is placed on sequential action and reaction: students begin with simple physical tasks, gradually incorporating emotional responses and mutual engagement, leading to the development of story characters and fluent verbal communication. This approach provides a discovery-oriented alternative to invention-driven improvisation, empowering learners to construct meaningful scenes through embodied listening, emotional authenticity, and shared tension—critical elements not only in effective theatre, but also in transformative education. Reflecting on these actions, I will describe the

similarities and differences of the application of improv rules in two distinct contexts (Italian native speakers and foreign language learners) to explore the benefits.

Nicca Vignotto is an independent researcher in performative didactics and language teacher based in the Netherlands. She has worked at various schools as an Italian and Spanish teacher, since 2011 she has been managing and teaching at Italiando, a private school, where Italian language and culture are taught to adults through drama and performative teaching. More info about Nicca at www.niccavignotto.com and www.italiando.nl

1 Minute Readers' Theater -

Dora Wong

This talk shares the experience of conducting readers' theatre in an undergraduate class in Hong Kong. Before their performance, the students needed to translate the scripts of three one-minute American plays into Cantonese or Mandarin. Sample scripts and student recordings will be analysed to examine the students' rendering of culture and rhetorical devices. In addition, how the drama activity could be designed to facilitate linguistic studies and peer learning.

Dora Wong teaches part-time translation and bilingual writing at a university in Hong Kong. She has been using readers' theatre in the training of translation and pronunciation skills. Her experiences of using process drama in creative writing can be found in *The Power of Storytelling in Teaching Practices: Narratives from Hong Kong and afar*, published by Routledge in 2024.

Workshops

Saint-Exupéry und/vs. Petr Sís: Der Pilot und Der kleine Prinz – oder Eine bekannte Geschichte aus einer ungewohnten Perspektive -

Tamara Buckova, Aneta Buckova

Dieser Workshop bietet einen Einblick in die Möglichkeiten, sich kreativ, mit den Methoden der Dramapädagogik, mit dem Genre Bilderbuch und Graphic Novel auseinanderzusetzen. Im Mittelpunkt steht die Wahrnehmung des Textes mit allen Sinnen, die Reise vom Wort zum Bild und wieder zurück. Sie greift auf die Poetik der beiden Autoren zurück und fügt der zeitlosen Geschichte Des kleinen Prinzen einen auktorialen und zeitgenössischen Kontext hinzu. Das Prinzip der Intertextualität und das Wissen nicht nur über Literatur sind wichtig.

Addressing Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) performatively in teacher education - Fiona Dalziel, Martina Giacetti, Veronica Maistrello

When I opened my mouth

and birds flew out

there was laughter, sneering,

scorn and doubt.

there was shame. Shame. Shame.

From: *A Short History of Mortification* by Shauna Darling Robertson, 2023

The aim of this workshop is to explore some possible drama-based activities to use with teachers of secondary school learners of English in order to raise awareness of issues related to Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in the classroom. FLA may lead students to fear the act of speaking the target language, and to be discouraged from engaging in learning (see for example, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986). When anxiety predominates the language class, as well as producing less output, learners may not benefit from the available input, slowing up the learning process (MacIntyre and Gardner 1994). It has been argued that drama may be successful in enabling students to embrace and understand their emotions and feelings while learning (Capra 2015; Heathcote 1984; Nicholson 2002; Swale 2009), and create a safe, affective space, conducive to reducing FLA (Piazzoli 2011). In the workshop, embodied activities will encourage participants to reflect on their own fears about being judged in certain situations in order to put themselves into their students' shoes, and through the reading of a poem written for young adults, they will share and discuss strategies that can be adopted to lower FLA. The workshop will conclude with a performative poetry-writing activity.

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Fiona Dalziel is Associate Professor of English Language and Translation at the University of Padua, Italy. Her research interests include: promoting metacognitive learning strategies and learner autonomy; English-medium Instruction (EMI); translanguaging in the language classroom; and the use of drama in language learning, including that of adult migrants.

Martina Giacetti is a secondary school English teacher in Italy with BA and MA degrees in Foreign Languages and Literatures from the University of Padua. Her research focused on process drama for foreign language learning and drama in education in CLIL. She actively applies a Drama in Education methodology with her students.

Veronica Maistrello teaches English at *I.C. XIV Galilei*, a lower secondary school in Padua, Italy. She graduated at the University of Padua, where she started her research about the use of drama to reduce FLA. She experienced Process Drama with adult migrants, and she uses drama with teen students.

Drama in challenging school settings -

Stefanie Giebert, Eva Göksel, Alexandra Hensel

Working with drama in various settings, we usually assume that there is a baseline level of cooperation between facilitator and participants and also participants amongst each other.

How does drama work change in settings where some or many of the participants are not willing or able to cooperate or at least not over a sustained period of time?

Over the last few years, all three of us have been working with children and young people in primary and secondary school settings. We have noticed that we had to adapt our work to meet certain challenges, such as:

- Low motivation of participants to participate in drama work
- Conflicts between participants
- Sustaining focus and concentration
- Language challenges (outside language learning settings)
- Cooperation with teachers and other school staff

In our workshop, we want to look at typical situations from our work and explore some of the challenges with workshop participants.

Murder at the Hotel – a language learning process drama -

Stefanie Giebert

People in a hotel –enjoying holidays, staying on business or looking after the guests – offer a great variety of characters to play with that are yet easy to imagine for learners of most ages. And when suddenly someone is found dead, tensions that had brewing already can come to a boil. The “murder at the hotel” is a process drama structure that I have used repeatedly with secondary school students in L1 and L2 settings and that offers spaces to include implicit and explicit language learning opportunities.

Dramactivate: Let Puppets Tell the Story -

Evi Karydi

This practical workshop showcases how puppets can be powerful storytelling partners in the EFL classroom—helping learners unlock language through imagination, voice, and play. Participants will experience how puppets can be used to tell stories, spark curiosity, and lead students into dramatic worlds where they can speak, move, and interact with confidence. Combining puppetry with simple drama techniques, this approach creates an engaging, low-pressure space for learners to practice language meaningfully. Whether it's a shy child or an energetic group, puppets offer a playful way to bring stories and language to life. **Session** This workshop aims to:

- Demonstrate how puppets can act as a bridge between language input and student expression.
- Share drama and storytelling activities where puppets guide learners into imaginative participation.

- Provide practical tools for using puppets to boost speaking, listening, and vocabulary skills.
- Encourage teachers to use story-based drama techniques that invite all students—especially hesitant speakers—to join in.
- Help us create (!!!) our very own and very simple puppets!

Evi Karydi is an EFL teacher, the owner of iLearn Language School in Greece, a certified storyteller and educational drama coach, a teacher trainer, the founder of Dramactivate: teaching through embodiment, a volunteer educator with the Hands-Up Project but above all she is an ardent supporter and practitioner of life-long learning who whole-heartedly believes that teaching is a work of heart.