

Classroom Acts: performance, identity and the emergence of new communities in German language teaching

Saturday 14 September 2019, King's College London



Abstracts

Panel 1: Performance and Cultural Identities

Maria Khan (University of Cambridge): “Performing Goethe’s *Faust* with Turkish-German Secondary school students in Berlin”

My research examines how individuals from Muslim backgrounds respond to Western literary culture. By taking a prototypical German text i.e. Goethe’s *Faust* (Part I), I studied how Turkish-German secondary school students engage with the text’s notions of German identity and modernity. Over a period of six months and through a performance-based treatment of the text, the students expressed issues related to their own identity. Emerging themes have included religion, politics, the role of family, socio-economic status and sexuality. The findings of my research suggest that while identity is a complicated construct, Turkish cultural values add another dimension to the students’ perception of themselves and the dominant culture. My research emphasizes the importance of performance-based teaching and literature-based education in increasingly complex discussions on Turkish-German integration in Germany.

Lucy Jenkins (University of Cardiff): “Creativity, Global Identity and Mentoring for International Languages”

Now in its fifth year, the MFL Student Mentoring Project brings together pupil mentees (aged 13-14) and university mentors for a period of 5-6 weeks, either in a face-to-face or e-mentoring format. The project is less about building specific language skills than about fostering a mindset which questions social conventions and champions intercultural understanding and curiosity. Its aim is to challenge traditional content-driven language learning (with a transactional focus) and to replace it with an approach and engagement framework which promotes cultural and linguistic questioning. Mentor and mentees are encouraged to reflect upon wider questions of identity and citizenship. Integrated within this experience are performance and creative activities which require mentees to create and play. I will explore the underpinning approach to the creation of these activities, how they intersect with questions of global identity, and how they call upon mentors and mentees to think about languages as intrinsic to the performative self.

Birte Brudermann (Artist): “Show and Tell: Who Is Cihan? - Approaches to Identities and Biographies through Performance”

The project Who is Cihan? is based on the story of Cihan Brown who cannot be deported from Austria as he is stateless and doesn't tell anyone about his origins, upbringing or mother tongue. On the basis of this (non)identity, I asked 25 young people on an individual basis: “Describe your identity without mentioning your name, parentage, mother tongue, ethnical background or gender.” The conversations were recorded, transcribed and then read out by a participant different from the one who had originally told their story. Each reading participant was filmed while the added soundtrack was a recording of someone else's reading of the same script. Thus, in the final footage, content, voice and body are constituted by three different people, who, together, form a fictitious identity. In my presentation, I will talk about the project's' procedure as well as (unexpected) aspects which emerged in the process. I will describe different ways of approaching biographical work through performative methods and explain the relevance of such projects to language learning.

Panel 2: Performance in Foreign Language Teaching: Practical Approaches

Ulrike Pavelka (FH Wiener Neustadt / University of Applied Sciences): “Role-play and improvisation in ‘Business English’ for Robotics”

The setting: A business English course for Robotics at a University of Applied Sciences, Austria. The students are in their first semester and use English on a B2-level.

The course aims: Students are able to present complex content, describe a process and discuss problems in the context of Robotics.

The challenge: Create a form of assessment which is based on the course aims, imitates real-life challenges and involves everyone.

The approach: Using the techniques of role-play and improvisation, students have to give presentations followed by stakeholder discussions. Students can prepare part of their input but have to deal with new information as well. Students who do not participate in the presentation or discussion are assigned the role of observers and asked to give feedback afterwards.

The result: Creating a template for presentations and discussions is a complex process. However, students manage to put it into practice if it is implemented step by step and if there is opportunity to do a test-run. As the assessment contains various activities, attention remains focussed. Moreover, the ensuing student feedback fosters peer-support.

Helen Mayer and Ines Alonso-Garcia (London School of Economics and Political Sciences): “Beyond Language Learning: Interacting Through Improvisation in the Classroom”

Increased spontaneity, confidence, participation: these are just some of the benefits we have observed in improvisation games in the language classroom. The games promote collaboration rather than competitiveness. Moreover, they provide a challenge beyond the target language, which thereby often becomes a tool rather than the game’s main objective. Consequently, the emotional barriers of communicating in a new language are lowered. The structuring of the games makes it easy for all students in the class to participate and we have observed that peer support develops naturally, creating a sense of community within the group. Many of the games are based entirely on student input, an excellent example of student empowerment where the teacher only needs to set the rules.

Our presentation will provide a brief overview of our own experiences in a beginners’ class before introducing some of the most useful games we have encountered and which can be applied to all levels.

Angelique Arts (King’s College London): “Puppets in the Classroom”

My presentation focuses on the usage of finger and hand puppets in foreign language teaching. Research has shown that anxiety is detrimental especially to oral participation in foreign language learning (E.K. Horwitz 2009) and often results in what are perceived as passive and shy students. However, many students have a positive approach to puppets as these trigger positive childhood memories as well as cultural connections. If the positive impact of puppets has previously been demonstrated on children, I have over the past two years been investigating the appropriateness of this tool for adult learners, focusing on its potential to help them overcome shyness and speaking anxiety. So far, the outcome of my study has affirmed this hypothesis. My presentation will have a practical and theoretical angle, presenting my study results while also giving delegates the chance to experience first-hand the benefits of puppets as speaking tools.

Workshops

Workshop by Prof Anne Steiner (Freiburg): "Performative approaches to contemporary German drama and theatre"

Contemporary drama and theatre are, notoriously, mirror images of the societies which produce and stage them. Not only do they evoke the *zeitgeist*, but they also actively participate in contemporary topics and debates. As such, Germanophone post-migratory theatre offers a unique perspective on recent societal trends by negotiating contemporary discourses on migration, integration and identity. In doing so, it creates a specific form of drama. The workshop will explore some of the performative methods which facilitate the engagement with these texts and their mise-en-scène and what opportunities they offer in foreign language teaching. Excerpts will be provided in German and in translation.

Workshop by Prof Manfred Schewe (Cork): "About the Teacher as 'Formmeister' (Form Master) – An Introduction"

Participants will be given an opportunity to experience perFORMative approaches to the teaching of language, literature and culture, and to reflect on their experience. During the brief reflection phases reference will be made to a 'Performative Foreign Language Didactics', especially to the notion of the teacher as 'Formmeister' (Form Master).