

Playwriting in a German Language Class: How Creativity in a Language Lesson Supports Learning and the Acquisition of Political Agency

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Abstract : In this paper, we would like to present how we taught German through playwriting and analyze the usefulness of this method for teaching languages and cultivating a sense of political agency in students and teachers alike. Last academic year, we worked at the German Saturday School in Greenwich, London. This school offers Saturday German lessons to children whose parents are German, living in London. The lessons are two hours long, and the children's level of German varies according to how often or how much German is spoken at home or how often the families visit Germany (as well as other factors which will be discussed in more detail in the paper). The directors of the school provide teachers with learning material and course books, but they strongly encourage individual input on lesson structure and methods of teaching German. The class we taught consisted of six eight-to-nine-year-olds. Midway into the academic year, we ran out of teaching material, and we, therefore, decided to write a play. In the paper, we would like to explore the process we followed in creating or writing this play and how this encouraged the children to collaborate and exercise their skills in writing, storytelling, speaking, and opinion-sharing. We want to examine the impact this project had on the children who wrote and performed the play, the wider community of the Saturday school, and the development of our language teaching practice. We found, for instance, that some students, who were quiet or shy, became very open and outspoken in the process of writing and performing the play. They took the initiative and led the process, putting us, their teachers, in the role of simple observers or facilitators. When we showed the play in front of the school, the other children and teachers, as audience members, also became part of the process as they commented on the plot, language, and characters and gave feedback on further development. In the paper, we will discuss how this teaching project fits into recent developments in the research of creativity and the teaching of languages and how engagement with creative approaches to teaching has the potential to question and subvert traditional notions of 'lesson', 'teacher', and 'student'. From the moment a questioning of norms takes place, we inadvertently raise questions about politics, agency, and resistance. We will conclude the paper with a definition of what we mean by 'political agency' within the context of our teaching project and education, in general, and why inspiring creativity and imagination within teaching can be considered a political act. Finally, our aim in this paper will be to propose the possibility of analyzing teaching languages through creativity and political agency theories.

Keywords : innovation in language teaching and learning, language acquisition and learning, language curriculum development, language education

Conference Title : ICLLL 2023 : International Conference on Languages, Literature and Linguistics

Conference Location : Vienna, Austria

Conference Dates : July 24-25, 2023