BLC ROUNDTABLE

What Should Be the Knowledge Base of Foreign Language Teachers in Higher Education?

MY JOURNEY PERFORMING LANGUAGE

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The BLC family: engagement and participation
An impossible task?
Expand your horizons, take chances, embrace difference...
What do you mean?
A language class: a well of opportunities, an experimental lab where:

- a. identity construction occurs
- b. social justice awareness is raised
- c. critical and reflexive thinking is encouraged
- d. power dynamics, power struggles, status games, and social hierarchies are encountered and discussed
- e. perceptions are changed
Connect with the social reality outside the classroom and be ready to get muddy...
“American politics is in fact what we will need to explain when we go abroad, we will be asked our opinions on a range of topics, and as much as learning the Italian words for fruits and vegetables might be useful, it will not help us in a conversation on the Trump administration or the rise of populist movements in Italy. We should be exposed to more relevant vocabulary”

A Senior, Spring 2020
Performance Studies is an interdisciplinary field of research that draws from the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. It focuses on the pervasiveness of performance as a central element of social and cultural life, including not only theater and dance but also such forms as practices of everyday life, storytelling and public speaking, avant-garde performance art, popular entertainment, micro-constructions of ethnicity, race, class, sex, and gender, non-verbal communication, political debate and demonstrations—potentially any instance of expressive behavior or cultural enactment.

The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism

Critical Language Pedagogy is defined as an approach to language pedagogy where language teaching is a tool for developing learners who are 1) critically aware of social problems that emanate from oppression and injustice and 2) able to argue and counter-argue, hence triggering critical discourse in the classroom.

Principles of Critical Language Pedagogy: A Literature Review

Performative Teaching and Learning refers to an approach that uses techniques and strategies coming from the arts, especially theater. It is an approach that promotes engagement, identity formation, ownership and active participation, in which body and emotions take center stage alongside cognition.

My definition
ITALIAN THROUGH THEATER: FROM PAGE TO STAGE

- Giovanni Boccaccio’s Decameron
  - +
  - Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s Love in the Time of Cholera
  - =

- Life in the time of Corona

- Luigi Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author
- Dario Fo’s The Test Tube baby
Italian Through Theater: From Page to Stage

“Life in the Time of Corona”

1. write a story in narrative mode set in the context of the times we were living, as writers
2. tell the story orally to the class, as story-tellers
3. adapt the story for the stage and write a script, as playwrights
4. edit each other’s scripts collaboratively, as editors
5. cast students to play the multiple characters they created, as directors
6. perform the parts assigned to them, as actors
7. reflect on a) the interpretation and performance of their work by others, and their interpretation of other students’ work b) how embodying the conflicts in the stories told by students, helped them better understand other perspectives, and feel the power struggles not only of the characters in each respective script, but the power dynamics of the actors/students while grappling with language and meaning, through their respective Italian-American, Mexican-American, Russian-American, and Chilean-American cultural lens, as critics.
A factory of ideas!
Pirandello’s play: Six Characters in Search of an Author
Dario Fo’s play: The Test Tube Baby

- Students’ adaptations:
  - Six immigrants in search of a border
  - Six nurses in search of a mask
  - Six inmates in search of justice
  - Six women in search of equal pay
  - Six scientists in search of a vaccine
  - An afternoon in the kitchen of a Republican
Six Immigrants in Search of a Border

A scene written by students

Cast

José: a first generation Mexican American man

Kevin: a white American border patrol guard
José: I lost five years of my life at Soledad Prison for a crime I did not commit.

Kevin: I am sorry, but I believe in our justice system.

José: You are sorry? And what justice? Do you know what’s like to look like me, no job, no education, and an accent... Kevin: I have an accent, so what.

José: No, my Chicano accent.

Kevin: Look, I have many Mexican friends...

José: Your bourgeois international friends from Mexico City don’t count. They are... like you.

Kevin: Right, I guess we all have to be poor and brown to get it.

José: (pauses, then tries a different approach) What’s the word border to you?

Kevin: A line separating two countries.

José: Do you know what it means to me? Do you know what it means to Amir, to Kayla, to Malek who walked for days, got robbed, got raped, and saw family members drowning in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea when their rickety, overloaded boat capsized on their way to Italy?

Kevin: I am sorry, I truly am, but what do you want me to do? Solve the problems of the world? Do you also want to blame me for getting the virus?

José: Yes, I am. We had no access to information, no access to masks, didn’t have the luxury to work from home like you people... (pauses)... ever tried to put yourself in our shoes?
“I learned a lot about the plight of immigrants, wrote essays about it, watched movies on the subject, but I never really ‘got it’ until I worked through this scene. Playing a Mexican immigrant in search of a border had a profound impact on my view of immigrants in general, as I truly ‘felt’ his pain when I spoke his words, which caused me to move my body in a certain way, and say things I wouldn’t otherwise have said, when I had to struggle to put myself in his shoes and call out injustices that, as part of the dominant culture, I am a part of…”
Thank you and let’s keep our language community alive!