

Enacting America in the Classroom: Introducing Drama Workshops into Pre-Service Teacher Training

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Besides gaining in-depth knowledge in the fields of linguistics, literature, and culture, pre-service teachers of English need to be trained in intercultural competence and reflexive processes, as well as communicative and performative teaching approaches. Heeding the performative turn in cultural studies and drama pedagogy, the article introduces an educational project that was conducted at the Pädagogische Hochschule Vorarlberg (University of Teacher Education Vorarlberg) and that was designed to offer students both a holistic and aesthetic-practical learning experience. Over the course of the semester, students developed the skills necessary to write a scholarly paper and process the insights gained in the drama workshop. From an evaluative discussion with workshop participants, we infer that the combination of discussion-based seminar and drama workshop provides an ideal setting to explore literary texts and cultural-societal questions, as well as performative skills. The article encourages and enables university teachers to carry out similar projects.

*Neben dem Erwerb von vertieftem Wissen in den Bereichen Linguistik, Literatur und Kultur müssen angehende Englischlehrer*innen in interkultureller Kompetenz und reflexiven Prozessen sowie in kommunikativen und performativen Unterrichtsansätzen ausgebildet werden. Anknüpfend an die performative Wende in den Kulturwissenschaften und an Methoden der Theaterpädagogik stellt dieser Artikel ein an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Vorarlberg durchgeführtes Lehrprojekt vor, dass den Studierenden eine ganzheitliche und ästhetisch-praktische Lernerfahrung ermöglichte. Im Laufe des Semesters entwickelten die Studierenden die Fähigkeit, eine wissenschaftliche Arbeit zu schreiben und die im ‚Drama Workshop‘ gewonnenen Erkenntnisse in einem kreativen Projekt zu verarbeiten. Aus einer evaluativen Diskussion mit Workshop-Teilnehmer*innen schließen wir, dass die Kombination aus diskussionsbasiertem Seminar und Theaterworkshop einen idealen Rah-*

*men bietet, um literarische Texte und kulturell-gesellschaftliche Fragen zu untersuchen sowie performative Fähigkeiten zu erproben. Der Artikel ermutigt und befähigt Hochschullehrer*innen, ähnliche Projekte durchzuführen.*

Introduction

The effects of globalization, migration, climate change, and increasingly multicultural and multilingual societies in Europe and countries associated with the “English-speaking world,” and issues like health and gender inequalities, climate injustice, racism, and anti-Semitism challenge educators to constantly reflect on the aims of teacher education programs and the methods used in these university courses. The changes affecting our society and schools are partially mirrored in the learning goals specified in the new curriculum for the Bachelor of Arts study program for students studying to become teachers of English at secondary schools in western Austria (Curriculum, 2019). Although the new study plan contains many familiar aims, such as gaining in-depth knowledge in the fields of linguistics, literature, and culture, acquiring communicative and teaching competences, there is an increased focus on abilities involving intercultural competences and reflexive processes, such as understanding complex cultural connections and relationships and interdependencies between social, intellectual, cultural, and political developments. The curriculum, however, does not offer concrete advice regarding the means that should be used to achieve these goals. In connection with these objectives and to provide high quality teaching, university instructors and researchers in the field of didactics of foreign languages (Haack, 2018; Elis et al., 2015; Haack & Surkamp, 2011) emphasize the crucial role of personal and social skills and the importance of acquiring practical experience in using new teaching methods during the phase of pre-service training.

Although the aims described are certainly on the minds of educators today, university teachers and students would profit from more examples of methods, topics, and activities suited to reach the goals stated in the curriculum. In this vein, the present article draws on the performative turn (Fischer-Lichte, 2016) in cultural studies and introduces an educational project that was conducted at the Pädagogische Hochschule Vorarlberg (University of Teacher Education Vorarlberg) and that was designed to offer students both a holistic and aesthetic-practical learning experience to support them in attaining the study aims connected with their courses.

Design and Structure of the Courses

Our experiences stem from two courses in the fields of American cultural and literary studies in the third year of the Bachelor of Arts in Education study program. Course titles and specific topics varied from “Representations of the American Family in Transition” to “Climate Change Literary Activism,” but the basic goal was the same. The discussion- and case studies-based seminars introduced students to the rich field of American literatures and cultures not only on a theoretical-analytical level, but also on an aesthetic-practical level. We read and analyzed a variety of performative texts, including spoken-word poetry and plays, and we explored – and eventually tried out ourselves – how the performative arts can be used to engage in questions of identity and belonging, self-reflection and forms of activism, all of which were topics of interest in the courses. Workshopping with two performance artists from Entity Theatre e.V. Munich, an English-speaking community, we embarked on a special and fulfilled journey of devising, rehearsing, and performing plays about family and climate change.

American Families in Transition

The seminar “Representations of the American Family in Transition” aimed to provide insights into the development of American literature in the context of intellectual, social, and political developments and connections by studying exemplary, selected areas of this field of study. The

topic was chosen because of the striking recurrence of “the family” as a theme in American drama (Wakefield, 2003) and because of the great potential this topic holds for exploring connections between socio-economic and political developments and cultural phenomena. It is undeniable that family structures and people’s perceptions of the term have changed and have become more inclusive during the past few decades, as the topic continues to occupy an important place in American society. However, as social historians have noted, Americans display a striking tendency to idealize certain family traits and to view family and gender relations with a sense of “nostalgia for a mostly mythical past” (Coontz, 2016; cf. also Black, 2018). In the seminar students were asked to analyze the various ways in which American plays, short stories, and poems question dominant concepts of family and frequently challenge persistent myths and idealized perceptions. Another aim of the seminar was to examine the political and cultural factors that have influenced the diverse experiences of families of various ethnic groups from a diachronic perspective. Texts included poems by Anne Bradstreet, plays by Susan Glaspell (*Trifles*, 1916), Edward Albee (*Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, 1962), Lorraine Hansberry (*A Raisin in the Sun*, 1959), Sam Shepard (*True West*, 1980), Quiara Alégría Hudes (*Water by the Spoonful*, 2012) and fiction by Sandra Cisneros (*The House on Mango Street*, 1984), and Ken Liu (*The Paper Menagerie*, 2016). In addition to studying literary texts and reading excerpts from sociohistorical and feminist studies (Coontz, 2016; Friedan, 1963), the students also focused on the representation of American families in films and in two TV series: *Modern Family* (2009-2020), and *Pose* (2018-2021).

Climate Change Literary Activism

In 2019, the planet heated up to record-breaking levels, the seas continued to rise, and wildfires, storms, floods, and other manifestations of human-induced climate change made headlines every single day, but at the same time movements for environmental justice as well as climate change activist art and literature continued to thrive. Not only noting but heeding these developments, the seminar “Climate Change Literary

Activism” focused on the multiple repercussions of climate change and how they are reflected in global Anglophone cultural products, from poetry and short fiction to microplays. The course promoted the appreciation of cultural and literary works and conveyed analytical skills to understand the function, relevance, and role of the respective texts in relation to climate justice and climate change activism.

After reading and discussing a selection of programmatic texts by Amitav Ghosh (2016), Naomi Klein (2014), Julie Sze (2016), Joni Adamson et al. (2002), and Scott Slovic (2010), teacher and students set out on a journey to find out what is already being done in terms of literary activism and what we can contribute. For example, “Project Hieroglyph,” an initiative founded by American writer Neal Stephenson in 2011, has produced visionary science fiction. The initial prompt for writers was to present ideas that could be realized (both technologically and artistically, i.e., methane mitigation technologies in the Arctic, or murals, and rooftop gardens) and to move away from the negative dystopian vision of much cli-fi (Climate-change fiction). One of the “Project Hieroglyph” texts, Vandana Singh’s cli-fi novella “Entanglement” (2014), proved to be particularly helpful for initiating classroom discussion. The protagonists in Singh’s five vignettes are connected through an experimental network called Million Eyes that links people through a wristlet in crucial moments when they need help, support, or inspiration. Students fervently discussed what it would be like if technology followed the needs of people and the environment. We then delved into the rich archive of Climate Change Theater Action (CCTA) microplays. CCTA has been founded in 2015 as a worldwide series of readings and performances of short climate change plays that are presented biennially coinciding with the United Nations Conferences of the Parties (COP), where world leaders gather to discuss strategies to reduce global carbon emissions. Since COP 21, which was held in Paris, France, CCTA has brought communities together and encouraged them to take local and global action on climate. The reading list was complemented by several poems of Marshall Island per-

formance artist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner (“Dear Matafele Peinam,” “Two Degrees,” “Tell Them,” 2017), and the play *Sila* (2015) by Canadian playwright and CCTA co-founder Chantal Bilodeau.

Drama Pedagogy

The Method in Context

Drama pedagogy uses elements of the theater for educational purposes (Kessler 2008, p. 37; Bonnet & Küppers, 2011, p. 41). It is based on the teaching and learning method “Drama in Education,” which has a long tradition in British educational institutions. In the 1990s, Martin Schewe transferred this concept to the field of didactics of foreign languages, producing his pioneering study *Fremdsprache Inszenieren* (Schewe, 1993), which delineated the conceptual framework and concrete application of the method in the classroom. Today, drama pedagogy is considered an integral element of a communicative approach to foreign language teaching and an established method and reference discipline in the field (cf. Küppers et al. 2011, p. 7).

The method Drama in Education can be described as a collaborative process involving all participants in which the learning content is put on stage and reflected on afterwards (cf. Bonnet & Küppers, 2011). Learning typically takes place within the safe space of the imaginary and attractive world of drama that motivates learners to engage in situations they experience as if real. In contrast to purely theatrical projects, the focus does not lie on the artistic quality of the final product but rather on the educational development of the participants (Schewe, 1993, p. 112; Kessler, 2008, p. 37). Further characteristic aspects of Drama in Education are the holistic orientation of the approach and its emphasis on the physical and affective dimensions of learning.

In their introduction to their *Handbuch Dramendidaktik und Dramapädagogik im Fremdsprachenunterricht*, the editors Wolfgang Hallet and Carola Surkamp (2015) observe that dramatic texts and drama techniques are used in foreign language teaching to pursue many different aims,

including the promotion of students' linguistic, communicative, social, aesthetic, and intercultural competences (p. 5). Moreover, as the results of various studies and projects indicate (Volkman, 2008; Kessler, 2008; Kessler & Küppers, 2008; Even, 2003), drama-based methods can effectively be applied to the three core areas of foreign language discipline: the teaching of language, literature, and culture (Schewe, 2013).

The potential of Drama in Education in teacher training has been recognized in English-speaking countries and is increasingly drawing scientific attention elsewhere (Mages 2020; Haack, 2018; Fleiner, 2016; Elis et al., 2015; Athiemo-olam, 2013; Haack & Surkamp, 2011). The conclusions drawn from different projects involving the implementation of drama in teacher education all point in the same direction, namely that the integration of performative elements into the regular study program are beneficial for future teachers of English: 1) the trainees' language competences are increased; 2) drama methods afford students the opportunity to gain practical experience of innovative methods; 3) students acquire important personal and professional skills. We concur with these researchers in their view that performative methods are ideally suited to enhance the professional training of future teachers and should receive a definite place in the study program.¹

Design and Functions of the Drama-based Teaching Concept

The integration of a drama workshop into the curriculum of regular university programs constitutes the central element of the teaching concept proposed here, and the drama activities that were part of our project fulfil several important functions. All of them are connected to two principal aims: to support students in their course of studies and to enhance their professional development.

Firstly, by integrating a drama workshop into pre-service teacher training, students receive the opportunity to experience an approach to learning and teaching that is not limited to the cognitive level but involves all senses and emotions

(cf. Elis et al., 2015, p. 320; Schewe, 1993, p. 8). Moreover, this holistic method holds the potential for rendering the process of foreign language learning learner-centered and based on personal experience (Surkamp & Hallet, 2015, p. 8). In addition to that, drama pedagogy is oriented towards productive skills and encourages students to be active (Elis et al., 2015, p. 319). Several studies indicate that ways of learning that involve personal experience, creativity, and in which learners take an active role, are more effective than traditional approaches (Haack & Surkamp, 2011, p. 53). While some of these findings and observations refer to younger learners, they are equally relevant for students studying in institutions at the tertiary level.

The drama workshop also intends to support students in their efforts to attain the content-based aims of courses in American literature. In this context, we would like to emphasize that drama exercises should not be regarded as activities that merely offer a pleasant diversion from dry, academic content; on the contrary, we argue that acquiring a solid basis of content-based, relevant, and current knowledge of the field is equally important for future teachers to help them become well-versed in a wide range of proven and innovative teaching techniques. As a learning experience for pre-service teachers, the project also entails the core methods of literary and cultural studies, such as critical reading, reflection, and one's own (creative) adaptation. It is a form of self-determined, student-centered learning. The course in combination with the drama workshop is thus suited for pre-service teachers, as well as more generally for any BA program in British, German, or American Studies, Ethnic Studies, interdisciplinary, gender and women's studies. Students develop a range of skills and competencies that are often implicit in the curricula anyway: critical reading and media literacy skills; and the ability to effectively communicate the findings of one's reading (through the performative act).

Engaging in drama activities may prove to be an effective strategy for approaching and mastering challenging learning content, also when working with literature. Indeed, it has been not-

ed that drama methods contain a striking potential for promoting literary learning (Surkamp & Hallet, 2015, p. 9). Relevant aspects include the motivating effect of drama techniques and playful elements in the context of working with literary texts (Schmidt 2008, p. 25), the central role of empathy and emotions, and the fact that students act autonomously and actively shape the learning process (Ilg & Theinert, 2017, p. 133). Moreover, it is certainly significant that the process of staging a literary text constitutes an experience with all senses and encourages students to constantly negotiate the meaning of the text with others (Franz & Hesse, 2011, p. 104).

Consequently, the drama workshop was designed in a way that would encourage students to intensively engage with the literary works on the course syllabus. For this reason, the course sessions before the workshop already contained exercises that invited students to reflect on the motivation of the characters, the effects of plot developments, the relevance of the socio-cultural context of the plays, and other elements. The main aim of these activities was to offer students a creative and personal approach to the literary texts that would enable them to develop a more profound understanding of American literature and culture that goes beyond the knowledge of facts that is often the result of rote learning. In fact, the results of recent studies suggest that drama pedagogical methods are valuable tools for teaching “culture,” and they are also an effective means for promoting intercultural learning in the English language classroom (Kessler, 2008).

Apart from the functions described above, the drama workshop plays an important role in the professional development of pre-service teachers in various ways. On one level, it offers students an opportunity to acquire valuable practical experience they can rely on once they begin teaching. Research clearly suggests that it is important for students to be able to try out innovative didactic strategies during the phase of training, as this experience increases students’ confidence and directly influences their readi-

ness to implement the new methods encountered at university into their own teaching in the future (Haack & Surkamp, 2011, pp. 56-57).

Moreover, the workshop strengthens students’ performative skills: through drama exercises the participants develop a stronger awareness of themselves and others, physically and emotionally, which has a positive effect on their communicative skills. They also learn how to create a presence on stage and acquire techniques for using their voices expertly and effectively in the classroom, an important skill for anyone planning to work in the profession of teaching (Schewe, 2011, p. 25). In addition, participating in theater projects encourages students to interact with each other and to perform on stage. Thereby, the participants gain self-confidence and expand their range of personal expression, which contributes to the overall development of their personality. As Adrian Haack convincingly argues, developing “performative competence” and “self-competence” should play an important role during pre-service training in order to achieve the goal of high-quality, student-centered instruction. In line with the idea of “teaching as performance,” the potential of art is used for the learning process, and teachers assume new roles, acting as “artists of improvisation” who are capable of staging learning in a democratic process with their students (Haack, 2010, p. 37).

According to Andreas Bonnet and Almut Küppers (2011), reflection and empathy are the central principles of the drama-based teaching and learning process (p. 41); these two aspects of the method are ideally suited to strengthen the personal and social skills of students during the phase of pre-service training. Students who frequently engage in drama activities become accustomed to adopting a reflexive attitude towards themselves and their actions, an important condition for professional development and personal growth (cf. Haack, 2018; Haack, 2010).

Finally, a drama workshop that is part of the training program of pre-service teachers constitutes an aesthetic learning experience. Besides

providing insights into the performing arts and promoting students' aesthetic skills, this method can turn the process of learning a foreign language into an enjoyable experience and an artistic event (Schewe, 2011, p. 28). The combination of a course with a drama workshop produces positive effects in a study program for teachers, improving motivation and promoting the acquisition of specialized knowledge and technical skills and abilities. This, in turn, increases the chance that students who have gained experience with drama activities will integrate this experience into secondary school education as future teachers. Indeed, teachers who are trained in drama-based teaching methods are capable of effectively integrating performative teaching concepts into their own lessons and providing their students with opportunities to strengthen their performative skills. The relevance of developing performative competence in the context of foreign-language learning is an aspect that has been noted by scholars in the field of didactics who maintain that developing performative skills in the foreign-language classroom helps improve learners' performance in real-life social and cultural interactions (Hallet, 2010, p. 8).

Devising the Seminar and the Drama Workshop

Seminar

Both seminars were structured in three phases. During the first phase, the students received input in various forms, from the independent reading of academic, lyrical, dramatic, and fictional texts, to a guest lecture on the play *Sila* by Chantal Bilodeau, to student presentations. Moreover, the activities in class as well as the assignments deliberately juxtaposed different types of texts and media, including literary texts – mostly plays and poems, chapters from recent sociohistorical studies dealing with the development of the American family and climate change justice, as well as films and TV series. The students were also required to select a literary text or film from each of the two courses' reading lists, analyze it, and host a discussion focusing on the representation of the family or of climate change in this particular text. Students were asked to get at the key issues of the selected text and the session's overarching topic addressed (i.e., contemporary protest poetry; climate change [cli-fi] fiction; The Puritan family; American families in the 1950s; the American family in popular culture; American



Figure 1: Tableau exercise, creating a still image: "At the station." Photo by Ingrid Gessner.

families in contemporary American society – new directions, families by choice). As part of this assignment, students chose and presented text excerpts and developed their own critique of them; by asking and answering questions they generated a discussion among their peers.

The drama workshop constituted the central element of the second phase of the seminar and extended over two days. On the first day, the students engaged in various warm-up exercises. On the second day, the program of activities integrated the texts the students had read in their courses into the dramatic exercises. After the performance of the dramatic scenes the students had chosen and worked on, the final part of the second phase consisted of an online feedback session. Participants, performance artists, and teachers discussed their experience of the drama workshop and reflected on the potential and the challenges of the drama techniques they had encountered.

The third phase included time for independent study to focus on the two requirements connected with the seminars, one of them allowing students to work creatively, the other one ensuring that students practiced academic writing and research skills; for each of the two requirements the students were given a choice between two tasks. One of the options of the first requirement consisted of writing a short play that was inspired by one of the texts discussed in the seminar. Alternatively, the students could write an essay describing their personal experience and reflections of the workshop. Neither of these options were graded. As for the second requirement, the students were able to choose between writing a mock research paper and an annotated bibliography.

The latter assignment asked students to create a bibliography on a topic of their choice that had a relation to the respective seminar topic. For each of the at least six secondary sources, they needed to be able to clarify its relation to the literary text, topic, author, or research question implied by the topic. Asking for at least one monograph or one entire collection of essays



Figure 2: Moving Tableau exercise, create a moving image: "Waiting for a friend in a café." Photo by Ingrid Gessner.

and five articles, print and web, ensured that students 1) familiarized themselves with the different forms of scholarly literature and had to find an appropriate 'mixture' of print and online sources, 2) used different search options including library catalogs and online bibliographic databases, and 3) read and reviewed at least one longer secondary work.

It seems advisable to remind students to make the scope of annotated bibliographies narrow enough so that the six works provide a good basis for a research paper on the topic (although they will not actually write such a research paper). Annotations should be abstracts of approximately 80-100 words. The following example illustrates what students should bear in mind: If they want to discuss how governments of the Global North and their legal entities deal with climate change and how this practice is criticized in South-African playwright Mike Van Graan's short CCTA play *#youtoo* (2020), students should not only look for secondary literature on the genre of drama or on the author, but they should also list articles that discuss environmental justice. An article on environmental justice



Figure 3: Moving Tableau exercise, create a moving image: "Stuck in prison." Photo by Ingrid Gessner.

might not explicitly deal with the literary work or author under discussion, but the article's findings could be applied to what the literary text criticizes.

The second option, the mock research paper assignment, asked students to pretend that they were writing a research paper. The final product, however, would be a 'mock research paper' that would consist of a title page, a table of contents page, an introduction (of about 500 – 1000 words and including a thesis statement), and a list of Works Cited (with a minimum of six secondary sources required, including at least one article from a scholarly journal, at least one article from a collection of essays [anthology], and at least one monograph). Students were required to include titles for chapters and sub-chapters of the body of their paper (in the 'Table of Contents' section). They were not required to write these paragraphs or a conclusion. However, in the introduction students were asked to describe the topic and to inform the audience about exactly which stance they intended to take; this stance was to be clearly identified as

the thesis statement. Although they were not writing an entire seminar paper, which seems to be the standard assignment in literary and cultural studies classes to prepare students for the BA thesis, they followed all the steps necessary to write it, practicing the required skill sets along the way: close reading of the primary text, thinking about a topic, conducting research, using online bibliographies and databases, evaluating sources, taking notes, outlining, and crafting a thesis statement. Since students were freed from the actual writing task, they could use this time to engage in the creative parts of the seminar as playwrights (for the creative task, see above) and as actors in the drama workshop.

The Drama Workshop

The drama workshop was divided into three different parts or sessions. The opening session (about two times 90 minutes) that took place during the afternoon of the first day was designed to prepare the participants physically and mentally for drama pedagogical activities



Figure 4: Students perform a scene from Sam Shepard's True West (1980). Photo by Fabian Moritsch.

and to build trust among the group members. The students were invited to take part in ice-breakers and warm-up exercises that enabled them to become aware of their bodies, their breath, and the space in which they acted. Other activities, such as the counting exercises or the mirror exercise (Maley & Duff, 2005, p. 9) increased concentration and challenged the participants to be acutely aware of each other. Another example of a task during which the students learned to focus was a silent exercise in which they were asked to begin and stop walking

upon the spontaneous initiative of individual group members. At the same time, these exercises helped to create a sense of mutual responsibility within the group, which emerged as an important objective of many exercises, such as the 'machine exercise'; during this activity, everyone had to contribute one action and one sound to an increasingly complex, always functioning machine (see table 1).

The opening session of the first day also included improvisation and characterization exercises that required imagination, visualization skills, and attention to detail. Some of these exercises involved the representation of a single



Figure 5: Students perform Mike Van Graan's #youtoo (2020). Photo by Fabian Moritsch.



Figure 6: Students perform Abhishek Majumdar's The Arrow (2020). Photo by Fabian Moritsch.

Table 1: Overview of drama activities used in first part the drama workshop (about 180 minutes), compiled by Ashok Vasudevan and Bogdan-Andrei Tabacaru (Entity Theater e.V. Munich), slightly adapted by the authors.

Theme	Exercise	Outcome
Introduction	Stand in a circle; come to the center, look at everyone eye to eye, start an action, add a sound, say your name aloud three times and one sentence about how you spent your time during COVID-19	Icebreaker – getting to know each other
Warm-up	Simple stretches for neck, shoulder, wrist, hip, ankle, knee	Warming-up the body
Warm-up	Machine Movements	Teamwork, complementing each other
Visualization	Machine Movements	Awareness of one's body
Trust	Walk around, start, and stop together	Awareness of people and objects
Focus	Game of counting to 20 facing each other and back turned to everyone else	Awareness of people and self; flow
Focus and Multitasking	(alternatingly) Count 1-2-3 in pairs	
Focus	Mirror exercises	Awareness of leader-follower-status; focus
Focus	Find your animal	Imagination and awareness of stereotypes
Story-circle	Create a story, one sentence each	Give and take, acceptance, improvisation
You are in a box	Imagine you are in a box, improvise the scene	Definition of inanimate objects, feelings of weight, attention to details
Tableau	Create a still image: at the station, on a mountain top, at a hospital	Imagination, visualization, aesthetics, creation of space
Moving Tableau	Create a moving image: e.g., waiting for a friend in a cafe, baking a cake in an unfamiliar kitchen	
Shift to Text Work	In a group: choosing a script from one of the texts from the literary seminars, thinking about necessary adaptations	Decisions on scripts

character, an animal or an inanimate object, others the creation of a whole scene: after defining a certain space, the workshop leaders briefly described a setting – a bus stop, the top of a mountain, or a table in a café – and minimal plot elements (figs. 1-3). Based on these prompts, volunteers were invited to enter the stage and improvise a scene, involving dialogue or not, depending on the scene. During these mini-performances and in the short reflection sessions following these improv exercises, the students quickly realized that the success of a performance rarely depends solely on the effort of an individual but in most cases on the collaboration of all members of the team.

In the last half hour of the first day, the focus shifted towards the literary works that had been discussed and analyzed in the two seminars. Students were divided into four teams, and each pair or small group selected a play they had read. Group 1 chose Sam Shepard's play *True West* (1980), in particular the last scene of Act 1, in which the confrontation between the two brothers has very much been brought into the open and is performed there (fig. 4). The other three groups chose short CCTA plays that can be found in the *Lighting the Way* (2020) anthology: Mike Van Graan's *#youtoo* (fig. 5), Abhishek Majumdar's *The Arrow* (fig. 6), and Madeline Sayet's *Blood on the Leaves*.

The second session of the workshop commenced on the morning of the second day (about 120 minutes) and was devoted to adapting the content and devising the scenes. Within the time frame, the students worked intensively with each other on the script, developing and preparing their scenes. This process typically required the students to take decisions as a team, concerning not only the assignment of roles, but more often the group's perception of a characters' motives or their interpretation of plot developments.

In the third session of the workshop rehearsals took place (about 120 minutes). This phase also comprised several segments in which each team worked closely with one of the two the-

ater professionals, receiving feedback and constructive advice from them. The final highlight of the day was the performance of the four scenes on a stage, in front of the whole group.

Conclusions from the Reflection Session and Student Feedback

Two weeks after the production, participants, performance artists, and teachers met (online) to reflect on the project. When asked about their personal experience of the drama workshop, the participants unanimously reported that they had thoroughly enjoyed the activities, in particular the improvisation session, the one-on-one sessions with the performance artists as mentors, acting on stage, and watching others perform. Most of the students expressed the feeling that some of the exercises had challenged them "to step out of their comfort zone" (S1, S2); although this had unsettled them at first, it had nevertheless been a fascinating experience. The feedback session also revealed that the participants had been able to gain confidence quickly: as one student pointed out, when doing the improvisation exercises in the second part of the first session she realized "how much had changed since the beginning" (S3). Generally, the students were amazed by the rapid progress they had made and by the high quality of the final performance.

Since a central element of the teaching and learning design presented here is the connection of drama activities with studies in the field of literature, the students were asked to ponder the question whether participating in a workshop like this one can support university students and/or younger learners when working with literary texts. The answers clearly indicated that the drama methods the students had encountered in the workshop had effectively enhanced their understanding of the plays. One student summarized it in the following way: "The workshop gave us the chance to spend an entire afternoon focusing on one text and to really look at its subtleties and nuances. For me personally, it was almost as if I could suddenly

see what was written between the lines and that gave me a deeper understanding of the text and the underlying topic of our play” (S1). To sum it up, the participants themselves attributed their learning experience to two aspects: their emotional involvement during the activities and the opportunity they had had to watch others act out the roles: “I imagined the texts of the other groups very differently when reading them in the seminar, but the other students’ performances showed me a new perspective and another way of looking at them” (S1). According to another student, “emotions [...] played a big part, and I think that was really helpful to understand what the play is really about [...] to get a better connection to the play” (S2). Another participant described her experience in the following way: “I really felt the pain of the characters. We read those plays and I knew that those environmental issues are serious problems, but [...] [the emotions everyone put into their roles] definitely helped [me] to get a better understanding of the topic” (S3). Similarly, another student observed, “Although we had read and discussed certain plays, the opportunity to engage in one of them was far more intensive” (S6). The one-on-one sessions of each small group with a mentor, in which the students were encouraged to carefully consider the motives of the characters and other important aspects of their scene, were also described as highly beneficial. As one student put it, the method of the drama workshop “was more fun, you could learn more from it because you thought of it [i.e., the answers] yourself” (S4). And another student recalled: “It was incredible how he [my mentor] managed to make us reflect about the piece and think in great detail about how we wanted to perform each sentence and with what emotion” (S1).

A further point that emerged from the feedback discussion was the relevance of drama workshops for future teachers of English. In this context, the students pointed out that the drama activities had made them more aware of the role of body language, gestures, and voice in the profession of teaching; moreover, after having taken part in this workshop, they considered the method an effective means for strengthening

their performative skills and overcoming existing anxieties connected with drama exercises. One of the participants observed that “a theater workshop can improve students’ self-confidence because performing in front of their colleagues can help students come out of their shells” (S6). The workshop was clearly perceived by the students as an opportunity for enhancing their personal skills and professional competence. As one of them observed, “I definitely think that a teacher or a future teacher can profit from this [workshop]” (S1). Other participants valued the practical approach of the project and the innovative methods for working with groups they had encountered. Using the words of one participant, “the introductory exercises, ice-breakers, those were phenomenal ... we can certainly take away methods of dealing with group dynamics.” The students were also confident that these activities could increase their future students’ motivation and “invigorate the flame of learning” in the classroom (S5).

Concluding Remarks and Outlook

Conducting this project showed the university teachers and researchers involved in it that a combination of critical-analytical ways of studying American literature and culture with a drama-based approach affords students excellent opportunities for engaging with literary texts and cultural questions. It also provides students with first-hand experience of holistic, performative forms of teaching and learning and increases their motivation to transfer these concepts to the secondary school classroom. Due to the unique potential of drama pedagogy, this approach is also well-suited to enhancing future teachers’ personal development and strengthening professional skills and qualities important in teaching, such as flexibility, empathy, creativity, and intercultural competence, to name just a few. We therefore support the view expressed by a growing number of scholars and educators who maintain that it would be highly beneficial for pre-service teachers and their future students if more performative elements were implemented in teacher education (Mages,

2020; Schewe, 2019; Haack, 2018; Fleiner, 2016; Mewald et al., 2016; Elis et al., 2015; Haack & Surkamp, 2011) and who suggest using drama-in-education in seminars, training students in drama-based approaches to teaching and learning and integrating drama methods into the regular course of studies for teachers of English.

With this project and our description of it, we hope to have started a broader conversation on how literary studies and, even more so, acting can help advance skill sets that are crucial to American Studies but that are often only implied or suggested but rarely carried out. The course setup we described expands the limits of pure academic instruction by enabling students to share their findings and engage in a dialogue with a wider public. It is these dialogical possibilities of theater that invite dialogue and contestation as a strategy of social change.

Endnotes

¹ In the context of teacher education in Austria, a notable example of a successful drama project implemented at university level is the Elective Drama Module that has been part of the Bachelor's Studies Program at the Pädagogische Hochschule Niederösterreich (cf. Mewald et al., 2016) for more than a decade.

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