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Teaching Foreign Language Literature: Tapping the Students' Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

*Thinking is not merely taking
place in the head. . . , it is a
bodily experience.*

- Robert Wilson

Over the last decade, the focus of my activities as a language teacher, teacher trainer, and researcher/reflective practitioner has been on the theory and practice of drama as a holistic concept of learning and teaching a foreign and second language, especially German as a foreign language. In various publications (Schewe & Shaw, 1993; Schewe, 1993; 1998a; 1998b; 1998c; 2000), I have outlined how language pedagogy can benefit considerably from practice in drama in education, theater in education, and professional theater. Language teachers can widen their didactic-methodological repertoire by observing and learning from those who create interactive scenarios and stage communication in the process of *making* theater, that is primarily authors, directors, and actors. Their work is immediately related to our concerns as language teachers, because the ability to interact and to communicate in efficient ways is, after all, at the heart of language teaching/learning.

In Schewe (1993) and Schewe and Shaw (1993), drawing primarily on research in drama-in-education and language pedagogy with its related disciplines, a case was made for a drama-based approach to foreign- and second-language teaching/learning and a theoretical framework proposed; within this framework a broad range of perspectives were considered – for example, neuropsychological, sociopsychological, psycholinguistic, psychophysiological – which would lend support to the drama concept of foreign- and second-language teaching/learning. I think it is safe to say that, at the beginning of the new millennium, the contribution that drama can make toward furthering the subject debate in language pedagogy has been recognized worldwide by researchers as well as practitioners. Testifying to this are more recent publications such as those by Kao and O'Neill (1998), Bolton and Heathcote (1998), Wagner (1998), Tselikas (1999), Schlemminger, Brysch, and Schewe (2000), or this present volume. Also, in recent years drama was and continues to be a topic of interest for many conference organizers in the area of modern languages.¹

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

For this publication I was asked to offer some reflections on the role of the body in language and intercultural learning. I want to use Howard Gardner's (1993) theory of **multiple intelligences** as a backdrop to my argumentation. There are two reasons for this: (1) It gives further substance to the theoretical framework that I developed and proposed in previous publications; and (2) its implications for curriculum and assessment in Ireland have, between 1995 and 1999, been the focus of educational research at University College where I work; the research findings have recently been documented in Hyland (2000).

In this research report (p. 7, my emphasis) reference is made to Gardner's eight intelligences as follows:

- Linguistic Intelligence allows individuals to communicate and make sense of the world through language (poets, journalists, writers, orators).
- Logical-mathematical Intelligence enables individuals to use and appreciate abstract relations (scientists, mathematicians, philosophers).

¹ Note in this context the 12th International Conference for Teachers of German in Lucerne (July/August, 2001), which devotes a whole section to the discussion and practical exploration of how drama/theater can facilitate the teaching and learning of literature in a German as a foreign language class.

- Musical Intelligence allows people to create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound (singers, musicians, composers).
- Spatial Intelligence makes it possible for people to perceive visual or spatial information, to transform this information, and to re-create visual images from memory (architects, engineers, sculptors).
- Bodily-kinesthetic Intelligence allows individuals to use all or part of the body to create products or solve problems (craftspeople, dancers, surgeons, athletes, choreographers).
- Interpersonal Intelligence enables individuals to recognize and make distinctions about others' feelings and intentions (parents, politicians, psychologists, salespeople).
- Intrapersonal Intelligence helps individuals to distinguish among their own feelings, to build accurate mental models of themselves, and to draw on these models to make decisions about their lives (difficult to observe in specific occupations, but relevant to most).
- Naturalist Intelligence allows people to distinguish among, classify, be sensitive to, and use features of the environment (farmers, botanists, geologists, archaeologists).

The eight areas represent the range of intelligent human functioning. While each area is identified as a discrete intelligence, each also interacts with others in complex ways to produce the richness of human behaviour and achievement. Ordinary human functioning requires such interaction. Many people will exhibit a highly-developed intelligence, not perhaps in their occupation, but in pastimes, interests, hobbies, in personal projects, or in social and personal relationships.

The general research findings seem to suggest that if effective learning is to take place in a (language) classroom, a teacher should ideally create learning opportunities that take into account as many of these intelligences as possible. There seems to be ample evidence for the fact that greater learner participation and student interaction can result, responsibility on the parts of the students is likely to increase, more interest in the subject is created, and improved learning outcomes can be achieved. This would suggest that language teachers who would naturally emphasize linguistic intelligence in their work consider also other intelligences-for example the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence-and become more aware of the language opportunities that can be created, as it were, by bringing the body into play.

One glance at the intelligences list will suffice in order to realize that a drama-based concept of teaching and learning deserves to be called holistic. Certainly six of the intelligences are heavily drawn upon in day-to-day drama work, and even the remaining two – logical-mathematical and naturalist – could be addressed in specifically designed drama projects.

The discussion on multiple intelligences rekindles the subject debate in language pedagogy revolving around the notion of different learner types. However, even if research in German as a foreign language (e.g., Aguado, 2001) and applied linguistics (e.g., Ellis, 1994, 471-527) has kept on highlighting the fact that learners learn in different ways, these differences have as yet not been too clearly defined and there are relatively few examples regarding the practical implementation of tasks that would accommodate different learner types. The more recent interest in task-based language pedagogy (Ellis, 2000) might help to spark off more interest in pursuing further research on how tasks ought best be designed in order to facilitate learning for different learner types; meanwhile, however, language pedagogy could yet benefit more from ideas put forward by proponents from general education. In this context, I want to revert back to the (UCC) research report mentioned previously (Hyland, 2000), which, among other things, evaluates "action research projects" carried out by teachers and student teachers. In one section of the report (p. 125), a student teacher who used drama in the teaching of Irish and also other subjects is quoted and has this to say:

Drama in Education has worked really well for me in CSPE, Geography and even Irish.... Since beginning this project the classroom had become a very interesting, creative place for both the pupils and myself, a place where learning takes place for everyone. Use of the Multiple Intelligences in class is slowly but surely becoming second nature to me and the more creative I am, the more involved and enthusiastic the students are. In fact our class has become noted in the staffroom and by other students for its creativity and displays – a concept quite exciting for many in the group since they are classed as a lower stream. For me as a teacher, Drama in Education and Multiple Intelligences theory have worked wonders.

Based on the notion that drama is an effective tool in the teaching and learning of foreign and second languages because of its capacity to gainfully utilize multiple intelligences, in the following I offer some thoughts on how especially bodily-kinesthetic intelligence can be tapped in a drama-based language classroom.

We do not necessarily need words in order to communicate, but can express joy, sadness, love, hate-indeed the whole range of human experience-with our bodies. This

shows especially in the art forms of dance and theater for which the body and its capacity to create meaning through movement and/or stillness are of central importance.

That the signaling possibilities of our bodies are endless is, for example, demonstrated in performances of contemporary Austrian playwright Peter Handke's "Die Stunde, in der wir nichts voneinander wussten," directed in the 1990's by Luc Bondy at the Schaubühne, Berlin. Although words are not spoken during this more than two-hour-long performance, the audiences seem to enjoy what is unfolding before their eyes and to be fascinated by what the actors say through (the interplay of) movement and stillness. Note in this context also the fairly recent production of "Körper" (bodies) choreographed by Sasha Waltz at the Schaubühne, Berlin, or indeed many of the plays that American director Robert Wilson staged successfully in renowned European theaters and elsewhere over the last two decades. The philosophy underlying his directing style is encapsulated in the words that introduce this chapter and were translated from Keller (1997, 106).

Drama in the (language) classroom naturally cannot compete artistically with the work of professional theater companies; but even if we have to concede that teachers and learners are more limited in their expressive repertoire and simply have not got the skills a professional actor or director has, they can still gainfully experiment with methods that are used in the professional theater.

One of these styles is pantomime, a form of dramatic art that immediately calls to mind names like Samy Molcho, Marcel Marceau, and the like. Although for the teacher it might be helpful to know a little about these icons and/or to have participated in a pantomime training workshop, it is generally speaking not necessary to have developed pantomime into a high art before one applies it in a classroom setting. In fact, any teacher and any learner is in a position to express with his/her body, for example, what a specific object looks like (a guitar, a gun, etc.), that a person is sad, a couple are quarrelling about something, and so on. Pantomime work in the classroom sensitizes learners to nonverbal aspects of communication. They train the ability to recognize nonverbal signs, including culturally embedded gestures, and learn to communicate despite lacking certain language skills. Pantomime work offers the opportunity to physically connect academic endeavor with a student's individual experience. What is shown in a pantomime can become a starting and reference point for further classroom activities that involve speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

The teacher (of German) can find a useful introduction to pantomime-related basic terminology, principles, and exercises in an article by Kaftan, published in a theater pedagogical volume edited by Vaßen/Koch/Neumann (1998) that contains several contributions focusing on the interrelationship of body and theater, including a foreign language-related article by Bräuer.

UNIVERSAL AND CULTURALLY SPECIFIC BODY LANGUAGE

Even if the idea of doing pantomime work in the classroom initially might seem to be daunting and even paradoxical, there are good reasons for using this resource, as I demonstrate further. That it is by no means a novel idea can be shown by a few lines from the introduction of a small booklet *Instant Greek*. A teacher of German who had participated in my drama workshop at the Goethe Institute in Athens some years ago had seen it in a bookshop and gave it to me, because she was intrigued by the direct connection to some of the pantomime-based exercises we had experienced in the workshop:

Greek is a difficult, complicated language. It can take from a year to ten years to learn and most tourists do not generally have that sort of time. There is firstly the problem of a different alphabet, then an intricate grammar, difficult pronunciation, dialects ... the list is endless. True, it is always possible to find in the big centres a Greek who can speak English, French or German but for those who venture into the villages, the small tavernas, the problem remains ... how to communicate?

Now for the first time you can learn to communicate in a way that is probably older than language itself. With the help of one of the master exponents of this method, Professor Barba Gianni A.M.C., D.G., H.P.H., you will be able to converse easily on the most essential subjects of Greek daily life.

Follow the Professor carefully, study his movements, watch his facial expressions, the slight lift of an eye-brow, the shrug of a shoulder, a twinkle in his eye, his stance ... and you too will be able to speak Greek in a flash. (Papas, 1985, p. 4)

It is quite amusing to study the drawings in this booklet, each of which shows a man expressing something with his body. What he intends to express and how he does it is explained on the page opposite the picture. For example:

- *What: "I am telling the truth."*
- *How: "Look awful, cross your index fingers, kiss them and bring them apart."*

or:

- *What: "You can put a hole in my nose."*
- *How: "This is a very Greek expression and implies 'you can do what you like but I still won't do what you want.' Screw up your face, place one forefinger against your nose and twist."*

The underlying assumption in this booklet is that there is a specific Greek body language that the reader can learn "in a flash" and, according to the author, is "far more effective and simpler" than learning the words. Thumbing through this booklet, which is apparently written for fast-track tourists, one soon realizes that the author might be going a bit far here and there. Some of his cliché drawings and corresponding explanations have more entertainment value than anything else. Although tourists with little or no knowledge of the language might encounter serious communication problems in certain situations and have no other option but to resort to body language, it is important to note that nonverbal communication cannot be restricted to culturally specific conventionalized gestures. This becomes clearer when I refer to Baur's reflections (1990, 33-36), which introduce readers to "Suggestopedia," an alternative method of language teaching/learning that draws heavily on the use of gestures and therefore is immediately related to a drama concept of foreign- and second-language teaching and learning. On the basis of research findings in semiotics he states that the number of culturally specific gestures and the role they play in intercultural communication are rather limited. (Examples for such gestures: Germans would not necessarily understand the gesture "I'll keep my fingers crossed for you" used in English-speaking countries; native speakers of English would not necessarily understand the equivalent German gesture "Ich drücke dir die Daumen" which translates as "I press my thumbs for you."). He emphasizes that our interest as language teachers should preferably be in the universal aspect of body language—for example, in "deictic gestures," which are used to point at/locate something ("here," "there," "above me," etc.); "pictographs," which are gestures used in order to illustrate the image of a reference object (e.g., a guitar, a glass); and all those gestures that accompany our speech and serve, for example, to sequence what we say, regulate the course of the interaction, accentuate specific meanings, or express our feelings.

NONVERBAL ACTIVITIES: SOME EXAMPLES

In order to make learners aware of the possibilities and also limitations of nonverbal expression, I often give them the following instruction: "Think of all the different countries that exist in this world. Focus on three of these, the first of which should geographically be quite near to your own country, the second at a further distance, and the third the most remote. In this order, write your choices on a slip of paper." The students, who are seated in a circle, put their slips of paper on the floor. Then I ask them to get themselves a slip that is not their own, adding that they not show it to their neighbor on the right or left. The students are then paired off, and all pairs simultaneously carry out the following task:

Begin with the first country on your list, taking turns with your partner to explain what countries you have on your list. Note, however, that you are not allowed to use words, but are restricted to a non-verbal form of explanation. This may include the making of sounds.

This usually generates a lot of fun and makes for a very lively class. During the feedback session immediately after the exercise, the students will, for example, become aware of the following:

- Culturally specific conventionalized gestures/movements (a student who has to explain Spain might choose to raise his/her arms above his/her head and, while turning round, might snap his/her fingers in order to imitate Flamenco)
- Cliche images of a country (a student who has Australia on his list might decide to hop like a kangaroo)
- Strategies they apply when giving a nonverbal explanation (hum the national anthem of a country; indicate geographical location by drawing on a piece of paper or black-/white board; use movement and gestures to hint at a country's typical products/activities (for example, in the case of Italy, eating spaghetti))
- The difficulty of expressing something that is not related in any way to one's own first-hand or mediated experience. For a student who has never been in or even heard of a particular country, there is really no point of departure.

I deliberately ask the students to do this exercise simultaneously. This puts them at ease, especially those students who have no previous experience in expressing themselves nonverbally and/or might have reservations about it. While the students are involved in this activity, I observe carefully how each pair is coping and have those pairs who come up with interesting solutions and seem confident enough with the task show one of their

nonverbal explanations to the rest of the class so that the learners have a focus and can exchange views on what they have seen. Especially in the case of a new class, the teacher needs to be very sensitive and must not ask the students to perform before they are ready for it.

A simple exercise like this could, especially in the case of a multicultural learner group, lead on to further work on culturally specific gestures – bearing in mind, of course, as we noted earlier, that the number of these is rather limited and that learners might therefore find it difficult to retrieve and show such gestures. In that case the teacher could, if she/he is in a position to do so, supply appropriate examples here.

The benefit of using pantomime in foreign- and second-language teaching/learning has been touched upon occasionally in the past (e.g., Long & Castanos, 1976; Carels, 1981; Mariani, 1981). In the area of German as a foreign language, Wolf (1990; 1993) has put forward what to date appears to be the most convincing rationale for pantomime as a means of triggering speech. She offers a four-phase model of pantomime work that is based on universal themes like time, space, people, objects, dreams, and so on. Her video documentation and accompanying booklet give a good impression of how, in the first phase, learners are introduced to the topic. In the second, they collect as many topic-related 'scenes' as possible, and, in the third, they work toward connecting these scenes and creating a story, before in the fourth phase a longer spoken scene evolves in which gestures and miming and speech interact together to make a whole. With regard to the topics she chooses for working with multicultural learner groups, Wolf (1993) points out: "The topics as a whole are conceived to incorporate the various dimensions of life in general, thus encouraging the student to venture into using his personal experiences based on the individual cultural background" (203-204). However, in the practical example that I describe in what follows, my starting point is not a general, universal topic, but a concrete extract from a literary text. It will be shown how this can be made dramatically serviceable, by employing pantomimic action and by means of the production technique of "shadowing," that is, the re-creation of an action by a second group immediately after the first group has performed it.

Nevertheless, what Wolf (1993, 202) has to say on the purpose of pantomime might serve as a backdrop:

to make visible a fictional reality through movement. The miming performer selects, outlines, exaggerates in order to get across his own ideas. The activation of the imagination is essential just as much for the process of performing as it is for the act of beholding, guessing at the meaning of and recognizing an act or a scene.

A NONVERBAL APPROACH TO A LITERARY TEXT

I'd like to show an example of how I would see the opening phase of a teaching unit on the subject of Intercultural Encounter, and particularly how pantomime-based activities can form an integral part of classroom work centered on the study of a literary text with the goal of arriving at a deeper understanding of a sensitive and complex intercultural issue: asylum seeking. I chose to work on this topic because several European countries, including Switzerland, Germany, and Ireland, have to cope with a growing number of asylum seekers. Especially for Ireland, this is a relatively new phenomenon and, accordingly, the reactions of the Irish population are very mixed.²

In order to illustrate a particular point I am making, I at times refer to my teaching experiences in a group of second-year students of German whom I presently (February 2001) teach at University College Cork.

The Text (Extract) to Be Used

The basic idea comes from the 1990 story *About the Concealment of a Guest* by the Swiss writer Linus Reichlin. It takes as its theme an extreme form of intercultural meeting, namely, the existential problems of people who have to seek asylum and are thereby dependent on assistance from their fellowmen and women. A translation of a short review by Martin Kraft (1990) gives further details:

A Kurd from Turkey, whose father and brother were shot dead, and who has himself endured prison and torture, flees to Switzerland. There, after his application for asylum has been turned down, he finds refuge in a "Wohngemeinschaft," illegally, needless to say. This is a very typical personal fate, which Linus Reichlin presents with documentary-style credibility combined with narrative verve.

This is a book not only about asylum seekers but also perhaps even more about the Swiss and their difficulties with them. Although the book is not impartial, it is ideologically not clearly one-sided in that also the lack of solidarity among the Turks themselves becomes evident.

² In this context, note two headlines in the Irish Times (February 3, 2001, p. 3): "Immigrants turned back by ferry staff"; "Prefabs to house asylum seekers."

The facts, although appearing to be credibly researched and documented, are, however, only the point of departure for a lively investigation into the emotions of the Kurd, who is suddenly confronted with a strange world, as his presence knocks the unthinking everyday routine of the Swiss out of kilter. The story is at times sad and touching; at others, in spite of the tragic background, it demonstrates grotesquely comic graphicness. An example of the latter is the scene in which the hungry Kurd finds himself in the presence of a woman, who, as she consumes a huge breakfast, delivers a reproachful harangue about the social conditions in his country.

I thought it would be very interesting to work pantomimically with the course participants on the following extract from the story. The narrator describes an event using "a minimum of words," and this treatment of the extract will be instantly familiar to learners of a foreign language. It goes like this: One person tries to communicate with another – in the mother tongue, in the foreign tongue, and, if necessary, with hands and feet.

(1)

On the 18th of April the carpet weaver moved into the workroom upstairs. He placed his two plastic sacks beside the bed. Paul – everyone else being out of the house that Saturday afternoon – showed the guest the bath and toilet and took him downstairs to the kitchen and living room. Paul was surprised that, contrary to his expectations, he was not dealing with an intellectual. Having quickly established that the worker spoke no foreign language, the tour of the house was carried out with a minimum of words.

(2)

Then they stood silent in the living room. Paul invited the guest to sit down. The carpet weaver offered him a Marlboro. Paul was a non-smoker. In return he asked the guest if he wanted something to drink. Paul took a glass from the shelf and put it several times to his mouth. Smiling, the carpet weaver declined, although he was thirsty.

Paul's embarrassment grew.

After ten minutes of silence, spent smiling at each other, Paul excused himself, saying he had things to do.

(3)

Now, for the first time the carpet weaver sat alone in his host's living room. He saw that he was visible from outside. He changed his seat and sat in the corner, where he was safe from prying eyes. He had good reason to be cautious: on the way to this house he had seen two men in grey-blue uniform getting into a car outside the house opposite. One of them had been wearing a leather jacket.... They could just as well have been harmless night watchmen as a special unit of the police.

For about two hours he sat alone in the living room. His concept of hospitality, and the conduct this concept expected of a guest, prevented him from drinking from the tap in the kitchen. He saw bread, but didn't touch it. As he saw no sign of an ashtray, and felt too apprehensive to look for one, he didn't smoke. The room was markedly different from that of his former hostess by virtue of the condition of its furniture: the stuff here seemed older and more used. He waited.

(4)

Vreni saw that he had nothing to drink. She asked him if he wanted a beer, some mineral water or milk, and the carpet weaver put his hand on his stomach and shook his head. He had not yet learned that in this, her country, it was the custom first to ask the guest if he was hungry and thereafter to give him food. He hoped the woman would now give him something to drink and something to eat, for he was hungry. Instead of which, she sat down next to him and leafed through a dictionary. After searching for a long time she bade him welcome, in Turkish.

I would now like to outline a procedure that is definitely transferable to other literary texts- insofar as these texts contain interactive situations that the course participants can act out by means of gestures and mime. Even if the organization of the sequences to be acted out by the class is quite complex, the basic idea is simple: The teacher presents the literary text extract as a puzzle, which in the course of the class is assembled by the students.

Planning the Class

For the following teaching steps, I would foresee a double class (two forty-five-minute sessions) and a group of sixteen to twenty intermediate standard learners of German. Every step begins with an impulse that triggers the participants' learning actions. In each step, it is indicated by (a) which means these actions are carried out, that is, if the students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups; (b) how the working space is organized; (c) which props and aids are needed; and (d) the production techniques employed. (Full details on the planning of drama-pedagogical classes can be found in Schewe 1993,275-300).

Teaching Steps

Teaching Step 1

Impulse: The teacher explains that the class will be devoted to working on a new literary text and explains the procedure: "We need seven actors who will perform the mime. Then we need another seven actors who will re-create the mime performance. All the other participants are spectators/audience who will observe the actions in both performances. But, like the actors, they will have a written task to fulfill."

The teacher divides the participants into the aforementioned groups.

Learning Actions: Seated in a circle, participants listen and consider to which group they wish to belong.

Teaching Step 2

Impulse: The teacher organizes the dividing up of the participants and makes clear:

- a. which participants will be first to perform the mime;
- b. which participants will afterwards attempt to accurately re-create the mime, using words;
- c. which participants will act as audience/observers of the two staged actions.

The teacher then allots specific written instructions and explains that each group of performers will get different text extracts, which they are not to show to the other groups.

Learning Actions: The participants get into their chosen groups, read their work assignment, discuss it, and decide among themselves who does what.

Props/Aids: Extract from the literary text; written instructions (see the appendix at the end of the chapter).

Teaching Step 3

Impulse: The teacher tells the first group of actors to begin rehearsals for their performance and asks the second group (the re-creators/shadowers) and the third group (the audience/observers) to closely observe the rehearsal work.

Learning Actions: On the acting area, actors try out pantomimic actions until they find a form on which they agree. In the audience/observer area, the participants watch closely and try to understand the main points of what is being shown in the pantomimic action.

Props/Aids: Extract from literary text.

Production technique: Pantomime

Teaching Step 4

Impulse: The teacher organizes the sequence of the four performances. The performing duo A/B commence their performance. Immediately after they have finished, their "shadow group" A¹/B¹ re-create the action, this time with words. The teacher asks all the observing participants:

1. to take notes during and/or after each of the four scenes;
2. to note down how they understand the scene (Where does the action take place? What are the people in the scene doing? What are they reacting to? How are they reacting? What are they saying to each other or to themselves?).

Before moving on to the next scene, the audience/observers give feedback on what they have seen, before the performers themselves report back on the scene they have played.

Learning Actions: The participants on the acting area perform. The other participants, seated in a semicircle (audience area) pay close attention, attempt to find meaningful connections, and write down their thoughts and compare notes on their interpretation of each scene.

Props/Aids: Paper/marker

Production Technique: Pantomimic performance/re-creation of performance by the first group by the "shadowing" second group.

Teaching Step 5

Impulse: After all the scenes have been performed, the teacher asks the actors and audience/observers to

1. Form mini groups (3 or 4 persons per group), and, once again, using their notes, recall what happened in the four scenes.
2. Agree on (a) a meaningful running order for the scenes; and (b) uniting the four scenes under a suitable title. (The chosen title is then written on the board for all to see.)
3. Justify why they've chosen that particular running order and that particular title.

First, each of the minigroups in turn gives its chosen title, and then, again in turn, each minigroup gives reasons for its choice.

Learning Actions: participants in minigroups, reading, negotiating with each other, formulating, writing, speaking, listening.

Props/Aids: Black-/Whiteboard

Production Technique: Reflection

Teaching Step 6

Impulse: The teacher distributes the text extract from Linus Reichlin's "Concerning the Concealment of a Guest" to the participants. S/he asks them to note the details of the text, particularly the sequences of the action. S/he asks them to decide which of the enacted scenes and suggested titles of the previous learning steps best fit the text.

Learning Actions: Participants in minigroups listen, read silently, agree on the content and details of the text. They identify connections between the new text and the scenes they have played. They voice their views on this subject.

Props/Aids: Text extract

Production Technique: Reflection

Didactic Notes

In intercultural encounters, like those described by Linus Reichlin in his docu-story, words have their limitations; a point that becomes clear in later sections of the story, as can be seen from this example:

The man asked him a question. The carpet weaver couldn't understand it. So, smiling, the carpet weaver told the man, in Turkish, that he couldn't understand him. The man, in turn, couldn't understand what the carpet weaver had said, and made a resigned gesture with his hands and shook his head regretfully. (pp. 38-39)

Clearly, text material like this is an inducement to test the limitations and possibilities of nonverbal communication in the classroom, and it provides a ready-made subject for a teaching unit devoted to intercultural encounters. The drama-pedagogical point of departure described here aims at making the participants curious about the text. At first they may well feel confused by the pantomimic performances, and they may have questions concerning elements of these, but gradually the connections between the scenes performed become clearer.

This type of treatment of literature is based on the techniques employed by professional creators of literature. "Throwing up questions and not revealing connections is a popular literary technique which has two functions: one, it makes the reader curious, and, two, it creates tension"³ (Ehlers, 1992, p.16).

As has become clear in teaching steps 4 and 5, I usually ask the students who are observers/audience to practice their writing skills by noting down what they have seen. Sabrina, a second-year student of German, wrote in response to the mimed action based on part three of the text extract (see earlier list):

Er guckt durch ein Fenster an. Er ist total erschrocken, neugierig. Er schwießt, ist nervös. Er hat Hunger. Vielleicht wartet er auf jemand. Er denkt immer an, dass vielleicht etwas Schlimmes passieren könnte, oder jemand kommen könnte, der gefährlich ist. Er kann nicht ruhig sitzen, der Fuß macht immer Bewegung. Er macht etwas mit die Rolladen. Er denkt immer an die Zeit, hat sie viel Zeit? Oder hat sie nur kurze Zeit?

What she attempts to express in German is this:

He looks through a window, is completely terrified, curious; he is perspiring, nervous. He's hungry. Perhaps he is waiting for somebody, he keeps thinking that something terrible might happen, that somebody dangerous might turn up. He does something to the shutters. He keeps thinking about the time. Has he got a lot of time or just a little?

When held against the original text, this example shows that students at this level are well able to (a) make a fictional reality visible through movement and (b) recognize and interpret what they saw performed. By comparing their written versions with each other, the students become aware of details, get a good overall sense of the essence of the four scenes, and form opinions on how these interconnect. Rhona, for example, suggests the following scene-titles in this order: 1. The new tenant; 2. An awkward situation; 3. At the window; 4. The interview.

Although I think that the proposed procedure of leading the students into a literary text via mime and having them piece together a "nonverbal puzzle" certainly will arouse interest on the part of the students and result in a lively language class, during which the students practice their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, the following needs to be taken into consideration:

3 I have given concrete examples in other works of how the conscious employment of the tension factor plays an important role in the preparation and presentation of drama-pedagogical teaching units in the foreign-language classroom. One example would be the adaptation of a novel (Schewe & Wilms, 1995; Schewe, 1998a), another example would be an extended teaching unit on the subject of "Youth in Germany," for which a photograph and a short newspaper report supply the initial trigger (Schewe, 2000).

It is important that non-verbal approaches do not turn into mere "guessing games," where the group expends its energies on trying to decipher what is happening in the tableau or mime, rather than interrogating the images or sequence of gestures for the meanings they contain. (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, 31)

Still Image: A Basic Drama Technique

In light of space limitations I can only sketch briefly how I would propose to continue the work on "meanings" at a deeper level. This could be done by asking the students, after they received and carefully read the text extract, to form *still images*,⁴ which capture key moments of the story in the text. This could, for example, be done in pairs (A is working on B as the statue) or small groups of three (A as the director gives instructions to B, the sculptor, who models C into a statue). It is important that students take their time for this task and bear in mind that every detail of a gesture and/or facial expression carries meaning. The ensuing discussion arising from a comparison of text and images could then feed into more text-independent work. The students at this stage would bring their own (mediated) experiences and knowledge regarding the life situation of asylum seekers into play, and this could be looked at from two perspectives: the asylum seekers' own perspective, and the perspective of native people (social workers, police, people in the street, etc.) who come into contact with them. I asked second-year students of German at University College Cork to form still images encapsulating these different perspectives and to respond to those images in writing. A few (translated) examples of their written work might suffice here to show how the students engaged with the task and give the impression of the kind of images that were created:

1. Still images under the title: "How we see ourselves":

- We are victims of bureaucracy. We are forced to queue, are regarded as statistics rather than people. (Jeremiah)

⁴ A still image or tableau is a visual representation of a state or action that occurred, occurs, or will occur at a particular moment. As in a photograph, the people in a still image show specific postures, gestures, and facial expressions. How this basic drama technique can be gainfully utilized in the language classroom is described in more detail in Schewe (2000, 87-90).

- We find it difficult to make a living. She is selling magazines and really has to push for a sale. He is playing the accordion and thinking of home while playing familiar melodies. (Ellen)

2. Still images under the title: "How others see them":

- They ignore the asylum seeker and try not to look at him. They look everywhere else except at him. One person tries to help him and the man with her disapproves. He is beneath them not just physically but metaphorically. People see him as a hindrance and seem to be annoyed by him. They try to avoid him as he begs. One person is very hostile to him, calls him a 'parasite.' (Elaine)
- Many walk past him. Few give him money. They feel intimidated or else they are quite unfeeling towards him. Everybody looks away from him, ignores him, only one really notices him. (Clare)

Focus on a 'Critical Incident'

In a further step students could be asked to invent a "critical incident" that involves an asylum seeker and other people. This incident would become the focus of further work that would draw on techniques described by Bertolt Brecht in "The Street Scene. A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre." The following gives a sense of the kind of classroom activities that might arise when re-enacting the invented incidents:

It is comparatively easy to set up a basic model for epic theater. For practical experiments I usually picked as my example of completely simple, "natural" epic theater an incident such as can be seen at any street corner: an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place. The bystanders may not have observed what happened, or they may simply not agree with him, may "see things a different way"; the point is that the demonstrator acts the behaviour of driver or victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident. (Willet, 1994, 121)

Students would take on the role of witnesses and relate to the incident from various points of view. This of course needs preparation and puts considerable demands on the students' ability to express themselves in a foreign language. However, at the intermediate level of my students, this seemed to be appropriate.

A group of students (Barry, Ellen, Elaine, Gordon) chose a busy street as a setting for the incident:

It is Christmas and the streets are busy. A Romanian man is hungry and looking for some money for food. (Christmas music in the background adds to his feeling of aloneness and alienation.) He gets verbal abuse from a rowdy drunken youngster. He gets up to try and chase the young kid, but trips and winds up falling flat on his face thereby adding to his shame and embarrassment. He's even worse off than at the start!"

Various aspects can be looked at when this incident is enacted and possibly re-enacted by different students: Who observed this happening? How did those who observed this respond? Did they do anything? If not, what did they think? What was going on in the youngster's head? What did he actually do? How did he actually do it? What words did the asylum seeker use? How did he say them? What will he do next? And so on.

Questions such as these make clear that every detail is meaningful and counts in order to come to a fuller understanding of the incident. The demonstrator's task isn't easy, because s/he has to find a way of showing and simultaneously narrating from his/her perspective as a witness how the incident happened, what exactly happened, and what effect it had on those who were involved in it and/or witnessed it. Nevertheless, for the language teacher and learner it comes as some relief that Brecht emphasizes: "The demonstrator need not be an artist" and "need not imitate every aspect of his characters' behaviour, but only so much as gives a picture" (Willet, 1994, 122-123).

The Broader Intercultural Perspective

A final step in this teaching unit would be to look at the issue of asylum seeking from culturally specific perspectives. Reverting back to our text extract, this would throw up the question: What experiences have the Swiss had with asylum seekers/immigrants over the last decades? And, in comparison, lead on to the question: How do the Irish, in times of an unprecedented economic boom, deal with a rapidly increasing number of asylum seekers coming into the country?⁵

5 When I recently used this material with the group of second-year students whom I referred to in my chapter, it also happened that Oonagh Kearney's play *Urban Angels* was being performed in the local university "Granary Theater" (January 23-27, 2001). It is a new Irish play that, among other things, deals with the life circumstances of Davor, a young man who had to flee war-stricken Macedonia. It highlights the difficulties he encounters in Irish society. I saw a welcome opportunity to compare the text extract used in my German class, which accentuates the plight of a Kurdish carpet weaver looking for asylum in Switzerland, and passages from this new Irish literary text.

At this stage it would seem appropriate to refer to further text and film material from different sources (statistics, newspaper articles, TV documentaries, etc.). It is likely that this information now can be absorbed better by the students, because they can link it to the concrete images that evolved during the activities outlined here. These required that they tap primarily (but not only) their bodily-kinesthetic and linguistic intelligences, but also their spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences.

I wish to conclude by proposing that my following contention be discussed further in language pedagogy: The more intelligences come into play and interconnect when dealing with language, literature, or culture-related issues, the deeper will be the understanding that can be achieved and the more likely it is that foreign language students, as potential mediators between cultures, will be in a position to take a stand, indeed to take action with regard to these issues.

Foreign- and second-language education, after all, consists of more than learning how to speak, listen, read, and write. In Europe, for example, language teaching and learning needs to be seen within the broader context of an "Education for European Citizenship" – a central goal of which is to use language in order to get "access to knowledge at social, cultural, administrative and political levels" and participate actively "in transnational concerns" (Wringe, 1996, 77).

Within a holistic drama concept of teaching and learning a foreign and second language, the two goals can be achieved: to systematically further the students' language skills and to explore and address issues that will, even if in varying degrees, affect all our lives, be it here in Europe or on a more global scale.

APPENDIX

Task 1: For the three performer duos A/B, C/D, E/F and solo performer G: Read the following paragraph attentively and find answers to the following questions:

- Which persons in the text are named? What image do you have of these persons?
- What are these persons doing? What direction are they moving in, and how are they moving?
- What are they expressing through mime and gesture?

Each person decides on the role s/he is going to play. Rehearse a pantomimic performance that shows as precisely as possible what is described in the section of text. Act out your scene when asked to by the teacher.

Tip: As part of their production task, each performer receives a text extract. Depending on the previous drama-pedagogical experience of the participants, the teacher decides whether the different paragraphs of the text should be played in accordance with their sequence in the text, or whether this sequence should be broken, as in the following suggestion: Performer duo A/B (passage 4); performer duo C/D (passage 1); performer duo E/F (passage 2), and Performer G (passage 3).

Task II: For the shadowing duos A¹/B¹, C¹/D¹, E¹/F¹, and the solo shadower

G¹:

Observe carefully what the performer duo X/Y are showing in their pantomimic performance:

- What movements are the persons making?
- What are they showing by gestures and mimicry?

Consider: What is happening in this scene? What sense does it make? Try to imagine what the people in the scene are saying and thinking! You should not only imitate nonverbally what the performer duo X/Y have shown physically but also express verbally what they might have said and thought.

Task III: For the rest of the participants, who perform the function of audience/observers:

1. In the first part you will see a play without words-that is, pantomime. What does each of the four scenes show? What are the persons doing? What connection is there between the four scenes?
2. In the second part you will see a repeat of the four scenes. This time the actions will be accompanied by words. Judge how well the scenes have been re-created by the shadowers (Which details were once again evident? Which details were not so clear this time? What new details were added in this performance of the scene?) Note also whether what the persons say is appropriate to their actions.

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