



**Drama pedagogy in intermediate German: Effects on anxiety**

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Drama pedagogy is widely reported to have positive effects on additional language learning, but formal evidence is still sparse. This study contributes to bridging the gap between experimental methodology and fluid classroom reality for this teaching approach. Building on Piazzoli's (2011) research on drama pedagogy and anxiety in Italian, this study uses a mixed-method, pre-and post-test design to investigate anxiety in two parallel sections of intermediate German as a foreign language. One of the classes included drama activities; the other included similarly interactive formats, but no fictional roles. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through surveys, student feedback, external observation reports, and a teacher journal. Results from quantitative data suggest that the drama group shows decreased anxiety in whole-class speaking situations after the study. Qualitative data support this and show that students can overcome even fairly high speaking anxiety in dramatic scenarios due to creative social engagement and responsibility for their part in the scene. Based on study results and an example from the classroom, implications for studying and teaching with drama in the L2 classroom are discussed, in particular the importance of adding drama to the standard pedagogical toolbox to support empathy, inclusive teaching, and critical pedagogy.

### **1. Introduction**

Over the last decades, drama and theater techniques as more open interactional formats in the classroom have attracted increasing interest in the teaching community in general (DICE Consortium 2010) and in the additional (foreign or second) language context in particular (Schewe 1993, 2013; Kao & O'Neill 1998; Even 2003, 2011; Kessler & Küppers 2008; journals: *Scenario: Journal for Drama and Theatre in Foreign and Second Language Education*, *Research in Drama Education* 4/2011). Many practitioners report that drama techniques offer holistic, creative contexts that help foster empathy and lower affective barriers for spontaneous speaking, increase motivation, and improve fluency. However, formal studies on drama and language learning have been slower to manifest, not least because of the complex nature of open interactional formats and the gap between research(ers) focusing on pedagogy and language acquisition, respectively (but see section 2.2. below).

From the acquisitional perspective, there is general agreement that conversational interaction has a positive impact on additional language acquisition (McDonough & Mackey 2013). There is also evidence that multimodal teaching and the opportunity to use gesture and movement are beneficial (Kurowski 2011; McCafferty 2002; Sambanis 2013). Affective aspects such as anxiety can hinder or facilitate language learning, depending on various factors.

Piazzoli's (2011) case study on process drama for foreign language learning is unique in combining these various aspects and shows that the use of drama techniques can increase language use and reduce anxiety in advanced learners of Italian. This paper translates Piazzoli's area of interest into a mixed method design with a comparison group and investigates the effect of drama-based teaching techniques on speaking anxiety in two intermediate German classes.

## **2. Drama pedagogy and anxiety in the L2 literature**

### **2.1. Anxiety and willingness to communicate (WTC)**

MacIntyre et al. (1998:547) defined WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2". Since then, higher WTC has been investigated as a factor contributing to a higher actual speaking rate, which in turn improves oral language skills (Hashimoto 2002; Cao & Philp 2006). Likely antecedents for higher WTC include low communication anxiety (MacIntyre et al. 1998; Hashimoto 2002; Yashima 2002). MacIntyre (2007) clearly links speaking anxiety with WTC: if anxiety is high, WTC will be low and vice versa.

Research has begun to see WTC and anxiety as situational factors rather than as fixed traits. Kang (2005) studies situational WTC via stimulated recall methodology based on video recordings of natural conversation between native-nonnative speaker dyads and concludes that there are three strong antecedent factors for WTC: security, closely associated with confidence and lack of anxiety; excitement, which is linked to the participant's personal interest in the current topic; and responsibility, "a feeling of pressure to deliver and understand a certain message, which arises out of personal, interpersonal, or intergroup motives" (Kang 2005:285).

In exposed speaking and most of all with spontaneous speech, as in a spontaneous role-play, anxiety is likely to be high and students may not be willing to volunteer or speak

(Young 1990; MacIntyre 1995; Tsui 1996; Occhipinti 2009). Why, then, should we use drama techniques in the classroom?

## 2.2. Drama techniques in L2 learning

Technically, all activities in the L2 classroom that involve fictitious realities and – imagined or actual – role taking can be called drama. Kao and O'Neill (1998:6) give an overview of the spectrum, from closed activities (short dialogues with scripted roles) over semi-closed activities (role plays with cue-based, student-developed roles, hot seating, still images/tableaux) through open activities (extended simulations or process drama with student-created roles). The more open the format, the more the initiative for speaking rests with the students, while the teacher becomes facilitator and participant in the scenario. For this particular study, which took place in two intermediate German classrooms with identical, fixed syllabi that were not changed for the research period, mostly semi-closed activities were utilized.

Drama pedagogy perceives language as embedded cultural and embodied contexts. It draws on Gardner's model of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1985, 1999) and uses what Boal (1979) calls *metaxis*: the simultaneous realities of everyday and fictional roles. This distancing from the student persona can lower anxiety, since there is less risk of losing face. Hierarchies in the classroom are reduced; students' communicative responsibilities increase; creative experimentation with content, social roles, and language becomes easier, and experiencing the fictive context affectively becomes possible. The more open the activity, the less predictable it is, which can create excitement and dramatic tension.

### *Studies on drama pedagogy and L2 learning*

Although the combination of classroom format and open activity is not conducive to controlled experimental research, there is a growing body of empirical studies investigating the effect of the use of drama pedagogy on foreign language learning (Stern 1980; Kao & O'Neill 1998; Even 2003; Stinson & Freebody (2006); Bournot-Trites et al. 2007; Freebody 2010, 2013; Dunn & Stinson 2011; Kurowski 2011; Piazzoli 2011;; Gill 2013; Bora 2014). Stern (1980) found that speaking anxiety was lowered in drama-based classes and motivation and spontaneity were heightened. The same effects are reported by many drama practitioners (Kao & O'Neill 1998; Matthias 2007; Rothwell 2011; Yaman Ntelioglou 2011; Sirisrimangkorn & Suwanthep 2013).

Piazzoli's research (2011) is directly relevant as a precedent for this study. She investigated the effects of six process drama workshops (O'Neill 1995) she taught in third-year Italian ( $n = 12$ ). They included an introduction of the theme and discussion of linguistic means, a main drama phase, and a reflection phase at the end. Piazzoli collected data within a participatory action research framework via video recordings, interviews, concept mapping, and video-stimulated retrospective interviews with a focus group and performed a thematic analysis. Her data show that most students felt less anxious during drama, since their own roles as well as the teacher-in-role format supplied them with a safe space for speaking spontaneously. Her analysis also supports the hypothesis that the dramatic tension combined with lower anxiety leads to more frequent spontaneous speaking, most noticeably with shy students: the need to communicate overcame the fear of making mistakes.

### **3. Research questions and method**

Piazzoli's analysis confirms the previously mentioned practitioner reports, deepens the extant qualitative research on the subject, and supports the use of process drama in foreign language learning. However, as researchers have pointed out ever since Kao and O'Neill's groundbreaking work (Kao & O'Neill 1998), more stringently experimental methodology is desirable, in particular the use of comparison groups and some quantitative measures. This is the gap the current study attempted to address. It built on Piazzoli's framework, translated it into a mixed-method, pre- and post-test design for smaller scale drama activities, and posed the following research questions:

1. (How) does the use of semi-open drama techniques affect participants' anxiety and willingness to communicate?
2. Do Kang's (2005) categories of security, responsibility, and excitement describe participants' perceptions of drama activities well? Which other categories differentiate drama activities from other interactive activities?
3. Can anxiety be overruled by willingness to communicate, and does this occur more often in drama settings?

The first question was addressed by quantitative data (pre- and post-study surveys); the other two by qualitative data (teacher journal, external observation reports, and activity-specific student feedback).

### *Setting and participants*

The study was implemented in two sections of a 3<sup>rd</sup> semester German class at a large Midwestern university. German classes at this university tend to be homogenous in cultural background; students largely come from small, predominantly white towns in rural or semi-rural areas. The 3<sup>rd</sup> semester course integrates linguistic and cultural aspects, and the language level with respect to the CEFR is approximately A2-B1. Most students take the course in order to fulfill a foreign language requirement. While both classes participated as a whole, not all students completed all surveys and feedback activities. For the quantitative analysis, only students who had completed everything were included, so that the final numbers were  $n = 15$  for the comparison group and  $n = 9$  for the drama group. The study period ran from week 7-11, covering one unit about multicultural life in Germany with identical, highly detailed syllabi and near-identical materials in both classes.

### *Teaching format*

In the drama group, at least one 50-minute class per week (out of three) was based on drama activities. Drama formats included hot seating, empathy questions, role-plays, still images, more open scenarios, and a simplified version of forum theater (Boal 1979)<sup>1</sup>. Even's (2003, 2011) phase model for drama grammar was the loose basis for including explicit teaching of relevant structures. The comparison group was taught in a similarly lively and interactive style, but without the use of fictional roles. On non-drama days, there was little difference between activities in both groups.

### *Data collection*

Since the study involved a teacher/researcher in the drama group and focused on students' individual differences, several methods of data collection were chosen to provide some measure of triangulation. Data sources included teacher, student, and observer perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief explanation of these formats, see appendix.

*Observations.* Once a week, an external observer observed both classes. These observations were performed by a different observer each week. Each observer provided a written report focusing on all types of interaction, speaking behavior, and how students appeared to feel about activities.

*Teacher journal.* During the study period, I kept a reflective journal on class atmosphere and dynamics, apparent anxiety, and speaking behavior in the drama group.

*Student activity feedback.* Students answered open-ended online feedback questions on the observed class days, relating to their speaking behavior, motivation, and anxiety during particular class activities that day.

*Surveys.* On the first and last days of the study period, students were asked to fill out one 62-question, four part online survey based on 5-item Likert scales, identical except for ordering both times. The survey was combined from the (slightly adapted) following sources:

- Mini-AMTB for motivation (Gardner 1985), 11 questions.
- General anxiety (Sheen 2008), 8 questions.
- Activity-specific anxiety (Young 1990; Occhipinti 2009), 18 questions.
- WTC survey (Cao & Philp 2006, based on Hashimoto 2002), 25 questions.

The four blocks were varied in order between pre- and post-study survey; questions were randomized within blocks. Items were balanced for direction of scales. Only the results for anxiety are discussed in this paper.

The structure of the study is summarized in Table 1.

	<i>Survey</i>	<i>External Observation</i>	<i>Student Feedback</i>	<i>Teacher journal</i>
Week 7	Wed	-	-	ongoing
Week 8	-	Wed	Wed (non-drama) <sup>2</sup>	ongoing
Week 9	-	Fri	Fri (drama)	ongoing
Week 10	-	Wed	Wed (non-drama)	ongoing
Week 11	Wed	Mon	Mon (drama)	ongoing

**Table 1: Structure of the study**

<sup>2</sup> Information in brackets refers to the drama group only.

## 4. Data analysis and results

Survey data were analyzed statistically via SPSS (Version 23) for internal consistency/reliability and significant differences between groups and time points. Data sets were only included in the analysis if all of the documents (two surveys, four feedback activities) had been fully complete; however, most students completed most documents, so that the bias for especially motivated or conscientious students is probably not large. Three (out of 1736) missing data points were replaced by mean values for the relevant variable.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically by scanning for likely categories for reasons for anxiety; choosing the five most represented ones; comparing these to Kang's (2005) safety, responsibility, and excitement; and coding and choosing representative comments as well as 'contrary' voices.

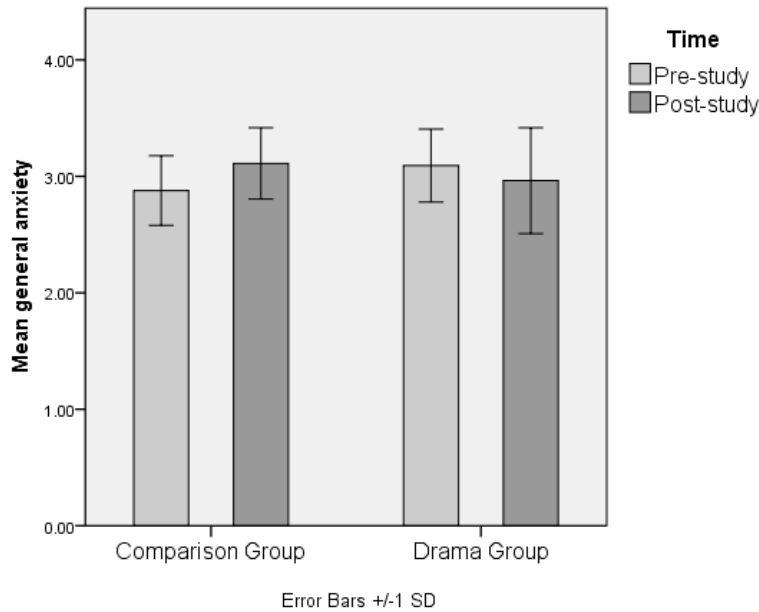
### 4.1. Quantitative results

The general anxiety survey showed low correlations, so that the results are not strong. However, the data fulfilled all criteria for further analysis. A mixed ANOVA was performed and yielded a significant interaction between time and group factors ( $F(1,22)=6.4$ ,  $p=.02$ ; effect size eta squared  $=.22$ ). A post-hoc paired sample t-test showed that the comparison group became significantly more anxious over the study period ( $p=.025$ ). This was not true for the drama group ( $p=.24$ ). Table 2 provides the descriptive data; Figure 1 shows the bar graph; whiskers represent one standard deviation in either direction.

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Comparison Group pre-study	15	2.88	.30
Comparison Group post-study	15	3.11	.31
Drama Group pre-study	9	3.09	.31
Drama Group post-study	9	2.96	.45

**Table 2: Descriptive data: General anxiety)**



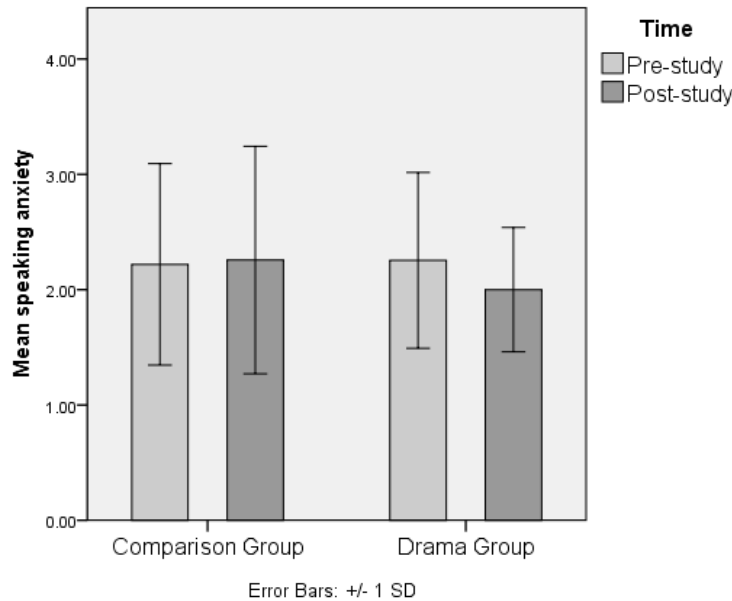


**Figure 1: Mean general anxiety. The change in the comparison group is significant.**

For activity-specific speaking anxiety, the subset of whole group activities was reliable (Cronbach's alpha =.82). Table 3 provides the cumulative descriptive data for these eight activity types; Figure 3 shows differences from pre- to post-study survey in both classes.

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Comparison Group pre-study	15	2.22	.87
Comparison Group post-study	15	2.26	.99
Drama Group pre-study	9	2.25	.76
Drama Group post-study	9	2.00	.54

**Table 3: Descriptive data: Anxiety in whole group speaking activities)**



**Figure 2. Anxiety in whole group speaking activities. Tendencies only.**

Although none of the group differences reach significance, the drama group shows a tendency for reduced speaking anxiety after the study period relative to the comparison group, and the tendency is sustained for single activities from this subset, i.e. it does not represent a cumulative result of divergent changes. This will be revisited in the discussion section.

#### 4.2. Qualitative results

A first survey of the qualitative data (teacher's journal, external observation reports, student activity feedback = SAF) showed that the different perspectives on classroom atmosphere and speaking behavior were largely consistent with each other. Kang's (2005) categories (safety, responsibility, excitement) were strongly represented in the data (Research Question 2). Additionally, three other categories were established, namely perceived competence, group dynamics, and a catchall category for interesting comments which were not representative but illustrated supporting or contrasting views of classroom activities. These were included because excessive streamlining of data would not only have reduced participants' voices in the report but also misrepresented the diversity of views in the classroom (cf. Caraganajah 2004).

I will now discuss each of the categories and their interaction in the SAF data in more detail, supplemented by observer data where applicable.

### *Student Activity Feedback*

*Security/Anxiety.* This topic was frequently addressed in both groups, but pervasive in the comparison group. Speaking in front of the whole class was the most anxiety-provoking activity. The following comment is representative for both groups (C = comparison group, D = drama group):

Answering questions with the class as a whole makes me unmotivated to speak and intimidated. Group works helps me speak more. (C4)

*Group dynamics.* SAF, observers, and teachers agreed from the start that the drama group was an ‘average’ class, but the comparison group was perceived as unusually reluctant to participate, especially in whole-class settings. Both teachers happened to sub for each other before and after the study and agreed on this dynamic; they also agreed that the drama group had further relaxed after the study period, while the comparison group had not.

*Perceived competence* was mentioned by both groups, but the focus differed. The comparison group more often mentioned being unsure whether their answers were correct (accuracy). In the drama group, students were more concerned with not being able to express what they wanted to say (complexity).

I felt most nervous speaking German when she calls on people to answer questions. Especially when it’s a free answer because I don’t know if my answer is right. (C10)

My favorite made me the most nervous because racism is a huge issue to me and I have a lot to say but didn’t know how to say it. (D5)

Two of the four external observers noted that the drama group seemed less concerned about mistakes and more about getting things communicated, which matches the SAF results.

*Responsibility* was mentioned less often. In the comparison group, students felt obliged to speak because nobody else did, or the task demanded it. In the drama group, while specific task demands came up, there was also a responsibility to the process associated with role-playing:

I spoke the most German during the acting sequences (questions or the acting), because it had to be in German. (D12)

I spoke the most German during the old lady questioning [hot seating] because I had a role. (D14)

*Excitement* was barely present in the comparison group. In the drama group, the word 'passion' surfaced twice, and students mentioned their strong interest in discussing actual solutions to problems raised in a scenario. The following comments are all related to the topic of xenophobia.

I liked voicing my solutions to the problems in Kreuzberg, I wanted to share those. (D6)

I am passionate about the topic, so I tried harder to get pieces of language out. (D1)

I most enjoyed the activity of acting like the people in the picture because it got me to think more creatively with German. (D19)

*Interesting comments.* Unsurprisingly, individual feelings contributed to speaking behavior. One student explicitly stated "Today I was too tired to be motivated to speak in any language" (D18). One student (C4) was so focused on accuracy that it inhibited his speaking most of the time. In the comparison group, a few students mentioned that others resorted to English in group work, which made it very difficult to keep talking in German. Others, however, said group and pair work reinforced speaking, especially if the task required it, and some felt they were becoming more comfortable with speaking. One student in the drama group was particularly clear that roles determined her speaking:

I spoke the most German during the old lady questioning because I had a role. I was least motivated to speak when I did not have a role. (D13)

Drama did not necessarily activate speaking. Some students mentioned that a few activities seemed pointless to them. However, this comment occurred at a comparable rate for non-drama activities.

*Interaction between the factors.* It is impossible to separate factors in a classroom context via feedback data, but there was an interesting observation: While groups agreed that anxiety was high for speaking in front of the whole class, in the drama group, there were students who were most nervous, but also most active during drama activities. The same dynamic was not noted for teacher questions or other tasks which required interaction. Since drama was able to help at least some students cross the anxiety barrier into speech, Research Question 3 can be answered positively on the basis

of the qualitative data.

### *Teacher journal*

For observation days, teacher perception matched SAF and observations on the whole. However, it placed these observations in context. A few quotes are provided here to illustrate this point. For this section, I will use first person narrative.

*The non-drama letdown.* Right after the study period, the drama group spent a whole week without drama activities, and to my perception, the level of engagement fell. We came back to drama later in the semester, and the tension rose again promptly. This pattern also prevailed during the study period:

After the drama class before, this was kind of a letdown. Students liked figuring out the words, they cooperated readily, but there was this expectancy of something that didn't happen. (Week 4)

*Practical considerations and participation.* The physical constraints of the classroom space limited the extent to which all students could be involved in drama activities:

[...] not everyone took part in the acting. [...] However, some people spoke up who otherwise don't. You can get involved at different levels, and people do. Fewer students were asked to act than I had initially envisioned (space). (Week 3)

However, my journal noted that the volunteer participants were not always the same students. There were students who had never volunteered an answer before but did so readily during drama activities. Also, students in the audience – when there were any – were usually very attentive (laughing and otherwise reacting to the actors), since the unpredictability of the scenes made things interesting. That different degrees of participation are possible is one of the strengths of drama pedagogy.

*The effect on oral presentations.* During the study period, students finalized presentations of platforms for fictional political parties they had created. In my previous experience, students presented well but did not speak freely or use nonverbal strategies. In the drama group, several students spoke completely freely and played their politician's role very actively, and class engagement was high as a result.

*Sensitization and language.* My distinct impression was that the boundaries between students and teacher became more permeable by the role shifts and the sometimes unpredictable development of scenarios.

I am more open to what students need [...] we're accountable \*to each other\*. Is this a consequence of leaving (infinitesimally) more of the initiative to them? Or just my shift in perception, taking them seriously? (Week 4)

As my students developed their sense of appropriate language, so did I. I found myself shifting away from my standard 'teacher' register:

TiR [Teacher-in-role] makes me, as a teacher, produce more useful German (more register-specific, louder, slower, clearer). Begin to think about teaching as always 'in-role'? (Week 3)

While this paper does not discuss the wider concept of teaching and learning as a performative space, this theoretical perspective is addressed by Fleming (2016), for example.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Results in context**

This study set out to trace the effect of drama techniques on students' speaking anxiety in the German foreign language classroom. Whether anxiety was really lower for the drama class after the study period could not be answered by quantitative data. The only significant difference was found in the comparison group, which had higher general anxiety ratings after the study period than before. Two possible factors may explain this. First, the study period ended soon after the oral presentation of political parties mentioned above. The Anxiety level for oral presentations was rated high in that group, so that the overall score may have reflected the influence of that recent experience. The difficult dynamics in the comparison group are likely to have exacerbated speaking anxiety. It is just possible that anxiety would have risen for the other group too, if it had not been for the drama, which partially prepared them for their oral presentations. However, this is a tenuous possibility.

The lack of other significant differences may have several reasons, among them time and the nature of the surveys. The three tried-and-tested surveys in this study focused on traits, which are unlikely to change over four weeks. Young's survey, although the least formalized, appeared to make the most sense to students: it was situation-specific and reflected class activities. This survey came closest to showing an effect.

Results from the qualitative data closely paralleled Piazzoli's results (2011) for process drama workshops, extending them to smaller drama formats, a different language, and a lower proficiency level. They also echoed the experiences of drama pedagogy practitioners inside and outside of foreign language teaching. Kang's categories of security, responsibility, and excitement (Kang 2005), along with group dynamics and perceived competence, proved helpful for explaining anxiety levels. Most importantly, there was evidence from teacher journal and student data that drama helped students overcome anxiety in order to speak, as in Piazzoli (2011). Interactive tasks could sometimes also override speaking anxiety, consistent with research on task-based language learning (Gass 2003; Pica et al. 2006). However, the emotional engagement in drama activities was not paralleled. As documented by teacher journal and SAF in the drama group, students were generally more willing to speak and more engaged on drama days. This was supported by the fact that in the drama group, feedback entries on drama days were about 18% longer than on non-drama days.

## **5.2. Class dynamics, critical pedagogy, and inclusive teaching**

Using drama to reduce anxiety also had effects on class dynamics. The drama group included one Black student. My experience in past classes with isolated minority students had been that class interaction was stilted during the multicultural unit, and especially when discussing racism, since all students felt subject to stereotype threat and hampered by their very limited German. White students in particular were afraid of sounding racist or offensive: a very particular type of speaking anxiety. In small group work that included the minority student, conversation would sometimes cease entirely after a very short time.

The drama activities were designed to bring this issue out in the open without putting individual students on the spot. One sequence, modeled loosely on Boal's Theater of the Oppressed (1979), where actors can be exchanged and situations replayed by audience members to try out potential solutions to a problematic social scenario, was based on a short film portraying an old woman using racist slurs to insult a young Afro-German man while the rest of the streetcar looks on in silence<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> *Der Schwarzfahrer*, Pepe Danquart (1993).

We recreated the streetcar scene with chairs, and I stressed that whatever the fictional characters said or thought did not necessarily reflect our own individual thoughts. We first had a round of thought-tapping: several students volunteered to be passengers in the street car and sat quietly; audience members chose to come forward and tap one of them lightly on the shoulder. The tapped player would then voice what their character was thinking at the time. In this first scene, all volunteer actors were white. The old woman uttering racist comments in the movie was predictably thinking racist thoughts, and so was one other passenger, but the other silent bystanders voiced messages of disagreement, discomfort, and insecurity.

When every character had voiced at least one thought, we interrupted for a reflection period. I asked students how they had felt, and there was a broad consensus that the situation was highly uncomfortable. Many of them felt bad for the attacked young man, but students agreed that they would not speak up either, because they would not want to expose themselves or get in an argument. It was simply easier to be silent. I then asked students to talk to a partner for a minute and consider how this scene would play out in an ideal world.

After the minute of consideration, I told students we would replay the scene, this time with actors speaking directly. I was going to be the racist old woman, and I explicitly made clear that I was doing this so that none of the students would have to. Students volunteered again; the attacked Black young man was played by a white student, and the Black student also volunteered this time, choosing a chair that was on the margin of the scene. I could feel the tension relaxing: by participating, she conveyed that she trusted the class not to be hurtful. When the racist old woman (I) began to speak, she was interrupted quickly and determinedly by one passenger after another. Some passengers used whole sentences, some fragments, and one just said “Yes!” very loudly after another passenger had told the old woman she should shut up, which caused chuckles. Two passengers stayed quiet: the white man playing the Afro-German and another student, who had voiced support for the old woman in the first scene. After a few minutes, we returned to our everyday roles and reflected on the effect. The student playing the insulted Black man had felt increasingly good due to the support, and so had many of the other students. I summed up that this might be something to remember: speaking up feels better than silence.



To add the personal perspective of the old woman, I asked three volunteers to collectively represent her on the hot seat. They sat back to back in the middle of a circle of students who asked the old woman questions about her life. These were answered spontaneously. Questions ranged from mundane (“Are you married?”) to searching (“Why did you insult the man?”). Most students contributed, and the ones who did not were still listening attentively. The three students created a persona for the old woman, revealing that she was all alone and afraid of life in general and had once had a bad experience with a foreigner, so that now she was afraid of all of them. This added empathy to our perception of the situation without condoning her racist remarks.

At this point, we watched the amusing and positive ending of the short film, which released the tensions we had generated. Reactions in the online feedback were largely excited and positive and confirmed students’ satisfaction with being able to voice anti-racist messages in a context where they were needed. Interaction among students and between the Black student and me stayed more open for the remainder of the unit, as well as for the rest of the semester.

While this is only one experience, it means that the effect of drama techniques on emotional attitude as a precursor to speaking behavior and language learning cannot be determined by studying specific activities on a cognitive level alone; it has to be documented over time and holistically, and also from the perspective of critical pedagogy (Doyle 1993, Dunn et al. 2012). This argues strongly for the thoughtful application of qualitative methodologies such as discourse analysis or ethnography. However, more easily measurable effects of drama pedagogy on language skills (cf. Stinson & Freebody 2006, 2009 for general speaking skills; Gill 2013 for fluency, or pragmatics) are good candidates for quantitative research. To chart the connections between a holistic process and its concrete details and effects, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, along with a critical perception of the research process itself, are likely to be needed.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study investigated the effect of drama pedagogical techniques on anxiety and willingness to communicate in intermediate German. Quantitative findings show that surveys found reliable in the literature are of limited value in a specific classroom setting and that group dynamics and self-report characteristics may overshadow any

measurable effects. However, there is an indication, supported by qualitative results, that the intrinsic tension, identity distancing, and leveling of hierarchies in the drama classroom contribute to higher excitement and a sense of responsibility for keeping up the communication and may enable students to overcome speaking anxiety. This is not only consistent with Piazzoli's results for advanced Italian (Piazzoli 2011), but extends them to smaller drama formats, a lower proficiency level, and a different language. Drama techniques were seen to involve reticent learners; drama may also contribute to a broader register variation on the parts of both the learners and the teacher and were found to be useful from the angle of inclusive teaching.

A more thorough investigation of effects of drama pedagogy on particular foreign language communication skills via a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies remains a desideratum.

However, the data collected in this study support what practitioners have reported for years: the usefulness of drama pedagogy for foreign language learning, even when time and resources are scarce and language skills limited. In a context of increasingly diverse societies, cognitive work is often not sufficient to bridge gaps in understanding, and critical inclusive pedagogies fostering empathy, intercultural learning, and symbolic competence are essential. Drama pedagogy, with its capacity to lower anxiety and build affective and creative spaces with mutual accountability, is clearly one such pedagogy. This suggests that drama and improvisational techniques should be included in teacher training as an integral part of the pedagogical toolbox for language teachers.

## Resources

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### **Biography:**

Silja Weber is a PhD student and Associate Instructor in Germanic Studies with a minor in Second Language Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington, USA. Her background is in cognitive Second Language Acquisition, but her current research investigates interaction and discourse in the L2 German classroom, and specifically performative pedagogy as a rich environment for pragmatics learning. Other interests include critical pedagogy and inclusive teaching. She is the founder and facilitator of the department-internal pedagogy workshops by and for Associate Instructors.

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## Appendix

Common drama techniques in foreign language learning. For more detailed descriptions and examples, see e.g. Even (2003).

*Empathy questions.* Students are given a visual cue, such as an image of a person in a particular situation. The instructor asks students to imagine they are this person and slowly speaks a list of non-factual questions that students answer in their heads, e.g. “Where were you this morning? How long have you been here? How warm or cold do you feel? What are you thinking about?” Students then typically share their answers with a partner.

*Forum Theater.* An adaptation of Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed. Originally, actors would play out a scene in a public place, and then it would be replayed incorporating suggestions for changes by the audience; also, audience members could take the stage and replace actors. In this way, different processes and solutions to a social problem could be experimented with. For a more exact description, see Boal (1979).

*Hot seating.* Students and teacher sit or stand in a circle, with one student (or more) in the middle. The students in the middle (collectively) represent one character; the people in the circle may ask the character questions that are not answered by previous knowledge and the character will answer, creatively extending the character.

*Scenario.* A larger format that involves spontaneous in-role development of the action, for example a townhall meeting, where students take and develop particular roles of people who might attend to discuss a particular issue. They may mingle get to know each other in role and form alliances, someone will play the moderator and introduce the topic, moderate the discussion, and help to sum up. (This may or may not be the instructor.)

*Still image/tableau.* A group of students portrays a situation in a “freeze frame”; this may be either concrete, as in a scene from a book or from a cue (“Bus stop”), or abstract, e.g. representing relations between concepts. The image can then be used either as the start of a scene, or as a cue for description by the other students, or to find out what the characters in the still image may be thinking (they can be tapped on the shoulder to elicit their thoughts, or other students can imitate their posture and voice what they might be thinking).