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Drama in Foreign Language Teaching at Primary School

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Introduction: Setting the Stage

In my life journey, foreign languages have played a fundamental role, shaping and guiding my educational and professional choices. In July 1988, I obtained my high school diploma from the linguistic-oriented *Fogazzaro* teacher training institute in Vicenza, after five years of study that led me to acquire a certain proficiency in English and German. Foreign languages then influenced my choice of university, and in 1988, I enrolled in the Bachelor's degree program in Foreign Languages and Literatures under the then four-year system at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. The languages of study were English and German. I tackled the beginning of my educational journey with great enthusiasm and was progressing well with my exams until I decided to take the competitive examination in 1990 to obtain certification for teaching in primary school.

It took more than six months to prepare well for the State examination, inevitably slowing down my university progression. In September 1992, at the age of 23, I began working in primary school, marking the start of a new chapter in my life. I tried to continue my studies, but at the same time, I was completely in love with my job, which I pursued with great dedication and enthusiasm, significantly reducing the free time available for study. I was fortunate enough to start my teaching career during the years when foreign language instruction was being introduced into primary schools. As soon as my headteacher (back then, there were Educational Circles, headteachers were called directors, and primary schools were referred to as elementary schools) learned that I was studying languages, she immediately asked me to take the exam to access the methodological course to qualify for teaching English. Thus, in September 1993, I began teaching English as a specialist, meaning as a teacher solely for this subject, across eight classes in two different locations. I am still in this position today, one of the last remaining ones, after the government decided to introduce specialized teachers, who teach the language only in their class, along with all the other subjects, and have priority in foreign language teaching over us specialists.

Years passed, during which I moved to the University of Padua, where several exams were added to my workload during the transition, and I completed my studies in 2010. I started my thesis with Professor Dalziel, progressing slowly because, in the meantime, the school had completely transformed, leaving no time for anything else. It was suffocated by meetings, continuous updates, endless bureaucracy, inclusion issues, cultural adaptation challenges with increasingly present migrants included in classes without any knowledge of the language, ever more complex school curricula, privacy concerns, and managing increasingly heterogeneous classes in behaviour with increasingly problematic cases. In short, a world completely different from the school of the 1990s, not to mention the advent of technology, work chats, electronic registers, and a constant state of being connected. Despite this, the passion for my job has never abandoned me.

In the meantime, in 2006 I started to take an interest in theatre, as an absolute beginner, and began staging performances in English with the fifth-grade classes. I noticed how motivation, enthusiasm, and communicative skills multiplied through theatre, positively engaging even the most reluctant students or those with learning difficulties. This convinced me to approach the use of theatre in language teaching more seriously and consciously, trying to incorporate it into daily lessons, not necessarily aimed at a public performance. The first turning point towards the creation of a drama workshop came in 2010. With three fifth-grade classes, I staged *Romeo and Juliet* in English for the first time, followed by a reinterpretation in Italian with a positive ending. It was an event that involved many people, including amateur artists for scenography, parents, students, and some colleagues who helped with the Italian text.

The following year, I moved to Piazzola sul Brenta, where I found a rather depressing situation regarding the teaching of English. I rolled up my sleeves and built, year by year, a more receptive and lively environment, rich in events and opportunities for students, from the youngest in preschool to middle school students. Now we have storytelling workshops, lessons with native-speaker teachers to strengthen oral skills starting from the third grade of primary school, language performances, and the institute theatre workshop that I created for students from the fifth grade of primary school to the second/third grade

of middle school. The second turning point came in 2014 when Professor Dalziel involved me in the Shakespeare Festival organized by the University of Padua. I decided to participate with a new edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, involving the artistic forces of the local community. At the same time, we participated in the regional competition “Europei non per un solo giorno” and won the second prize, with only *Quadri* High School in Vicenza ahead of us. This was followed by “*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*” in 2016 and “*The Heart of Africa*” in 2018.

With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, I had to pause, but the passion for theatre could not help but emerge even during distance learning, through mimed readings, role-play readings, small acted-out parts that students recorded and shared during online meetings or directly online. In 2021, the school did not allow me to resume the institute theatre workshop due to Covid guidelines that prohibited the mixing of classes and gatherings in school environments. The desire to restart the theatre was strong, so, together with the parents of my fifth-grade class, I decided to find an outdoor location for the drama course that I would hold for free. Respecting Covid regulations, with masks and disinfectant gel, we managed to get through the winter, and in the spring of 2022, without the obligation of masks, we staged our *Cinderella* in English and Veneto dialect. In 2023, there was the third edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, highly requested by families and students. With this overview of my work, I have described what will be analysed in the third chapter of this thesis, where some theatrical projects will be examined in more detail.

The work of the Council of Europe and a number of linguists, and the adoption of communicative principles in language teaching materials led to the emergence of the Communicative Approach, making communicative competence the goal of language instruction (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). The origins of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) date back to the late 1960s and represent a significant shift in language teaching methodology. In summary, CLT is rooted in a theory of language that sees it as a tool for communication and interaction: it emphasizes not only grammatical correctness but also the ability to use language effectively in real-life situations. This approach recognizes the importance of context and culture in language use, as well as the various dimensions of communicative competence required for successful communication. Many

approaches to language teaching can be seen to align with the over-arching principles of CLT, including drama approaches, which are the subject of this thesis. Through my work I will attempt to demonstrate how drama-based learning in L2 contexts can have positive effects on emotional attitudes and intercultural understanding. Studies have shown that drama helps improve speaking competence, engagement with language, peer collaboration, and creates a positive classroom atmosphere. It also enhances students' broader understanding of texts, stimulating cultural analysis and drawing on empathy. Large-scale research projects appear to confirm the positive impact of drama on personal development and intercultural and social communicative competences (Belliveau and Kim, 2013).

In the first chapter I will present a brief outline in the world of drama and its value in language teaching. Teaching should aim to ignite students' curiosity and inspire them to pursue independent learning. It should also instil a sense of pride in their achievements. For foreign language educators, this entails engaging and retaining students through dynamic, creative, meaningful, and enjoyable language classes. In situations where language instruction occurs outside the target country, teachers should immerse students in the foreign language and culture by assigning tasks that promote language production in authentic contexts. Therefore, in the first chapter, I will discuss the importance and use of drama and the arts in education. I will explore how drama enhances students' motivation, embedding communication in meaningful contexts, enabling them to make use of their multiple intelligences through task-based learning. This approach may help them to benefit from the advantages that drama in education entails: self-esteem, self-confidence, spontaneity, discovery of new abilities and talents, and improvement in the use of the language (see for example, Belliveau and Kim, 2013; Maley and Duff, 1982; Kao and O'Neill, 1998).

In the second chapter, I will attempt to define the terms 'drama' and 'theatre' within the context of drama pedagogy and performative foreign language teaching, providing a brief overview from the 1980s to the present. In the second section, I will explore the difference between small-scale drama projects and full-scale drama projects (Schewe, 2013), comparing them in order to understand whether one may be more beneficial than the other

in primary schools or if both, complementarily, can become part of the routine for foreign language teachers, enhancing the communicative aspect of their lessons. I will investigate how product-oriented drama is able to embed processes and, through activities like improvisation and storytelling, to play a crucial role in foreign language teaching. These activities, common in theatre education, foster spontaneity, creativity, risk-taking and collaboration. Especially in primary school children, then, the collaborative and humorous nature of improvisation lowers the affective filter, building learners' confidence in both acting skills and language competence (Dalziel and Pennacchi, 2012). I will also address how improvisation helps in familiarizing students with literary texts and character exploration, when working towards staged performances of scripted plays. Hegman Shier (2002) affirms that innovations arising during the rehearsal process often influence the final performance, emphasizing the importance of the journey over the outcome, as usually happens in the drama workshops discussed in this thesis.

Finally, in Chapter Three, as I have already mentioned above, I will analyse four of drama workshops, describing their organization and the realization of the final product, highlighting the collaboration with families and the artistic resources of the local community. I will focus on the results achieved with foreign students and with young people with learning disabilities, those who have given me the greatest satisfaction. The workshops were inclusive from every point of view and, despite being product-oriented, managed to give ample space to the "process" through dramatic conventions, improvisation, and warm-up activities (Piazzoli and Tiozzo, 2023).

Overall, this thesis will attempt to demonstrate how the teaching and learning of a foreign language can derive enormous advantages from the use of drama in general. It will focus on the idea that a large-scale theatrical workshop, with the goal of producing a performance for an audience, is no less valid than one that values the process. Indeed, it aims to demonstrate that they are complementary, and their combination constitutes a significant strength, especially in primary and middle schools. I would also like to emphasize how, through drama, it is possible to conduct "vertical" workshops, involving participants from different classes and school levels, with varying language skills and often undiscovered abilities in students. In such a workshop, the teacher takes on various

roles, but his/her main characteristic should be that of a guide. The drama teacher must welcome and support, encourage, and become a “child among children”, transmitting his/her passion for theatre and eliciting it from the learners. By creating a positive and “affective” environment (Piazzoli, 2011), it is possible to reduce performance anxiety or insecurity. The older students collaborate with the younger ones towards a common goal, a group is formed, everyone grows together, and the magic of theatre begins to unfold.

CHAPTER 1

Drama and Language Education

Learning a second or foreign language can be very challenging for students, especially if they are not exposed to the target language on a regular basis and are not able to practice the language in authentic situations. As underlined by scholars, two vital conditions in order to language acquisition to take place are the presence of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) and opportunities to produce “comprehensible output” (Swain, 1985). The teacher in the second or foreign language¹ class may, thus, encounter major obstacles in his/her class, especially since many of the learners may lack the confidence to communicate in the target language or to respond to questions in class. As Arnold (2019: 12) underlines, “In language learning there is a strong relationship between competence and confidence”. In fact if the teacher does not make a concerted effort to enable his/her learners to be active participants rather than passive recipients, they may be reluctant to use the target language. As a result, learners become disinterested, apathetic and sometimes create disciplinary problems in the class, especially in the case of primary school learners.

The teacher who is prepared to experiment with innovative methods of teaching may however be able to make a meaningful contribution to the development of communicative competence among the learners. In this regard, drama-in-education could have a constructive role to play in second/foreign language classes: it aims to encourage language acquisition and to reward learning experiences.

In this thesis I intend to explore the use of drama as an approach to foreign language learning at primary school level, and I will argue that drama-based learning and teaching can provide an excellent setting for foreign language learning. In this chapter I will try to clarify what drama is in this context and to highlight its connections with Arts Education. I will then explain the possible value of drama in language teaching, dwelling on the

¹ The terms Foreign Language and Second Language will be explored in the sub-section 1.2.1 “Motivation”.

learning styles and the multiple intelligences it involves and on the strong motivation it may be able to arouse in young learners. Finally, I will mention the psychological benefits that drama and theatre could have on the learners thanks to the affective space (Piazzoli, 2011), a more relaxed atmosphere and the reduction of anxiety, which are able to facilitate the teaching and learning of a foreign language. At the end of this section, I will discuss about the task-based learning and the Communicative Approach, highlighting the fact that they are strictly connected: the process of using drama to teach and learn languages, especially through the task-based pedagogy, has increased with the popularity of the Communicative Approach, providing students with opportunities for active and involved participation, with a special eye on cultural aspects and on authentic interaction.

1.1 What is Drama?

As Schewe and Piazzoli (2023: 77) point out, the word ‘drama’ derives from the Ancient Greek word ‘dran’ meaning ‘to do’ or ‘to act’. In line with this meaning, Wessels (1987 in Krivkova 2011) stresses that: “Drama is doing. Drama is being. Drama is such a normal thing”. According to this quote, drama is actually an intrinsic part of everyone’s life; it is an essential form of behaviour in all cultures, and it is a fundamental human activity. Each of us is an actor and has to perform his/her everyday roles, even to hide our inner thoughts or feelings. Drama, therefore, may be considered a unique tool to explore and express human feelings. Successful drama reflects life in a realistic or metaphorical way: the content of drama can be considered real life in all its manifestations. Drama has an emotional and intellectual impact on both the participants and audience members. It holds up a mirror for us to examine ourselves, deepening our understanding of human motivation and behaviour. It broadens our perspective through stories that portray life from different points of view, cultures and time periods.

The use of drama as a learning medium is becoming increasingly common in educational contexts. Drama in education has a clear pedagogical aim, focusing on the personal and social development of its participants. It should encourage learners to imagine, act and thus reflect on human experience and the process of this social learning is stressed over and above the final product. This is not, of course, the only aim that a teacher using drama

in his/her classroom wants to obtain. Drama in education gives, in fact, an invaluable contribution to the development of oral communication competence of learners studying English as a second or foreign language.

1.1.1 Drama and Arts Education

Drama can be considered part of Arts Education: “The arts are organized expressions of ideas, feelings and experiences in images, in music, in language, in gesture and in movement. They provide for sensory, emotional, intellectual and creative enrichment and contribute to the child’s holistic development” (Primary School Curriculum, Dublin, 1999:2). As William Bennet, Former U.S Secretary of Education, affirmed: “The arts are an essential element of education, just like reading, writing and arithmetic [...] music, dance, painting and theatre are all keys that unlock profound human understanding and accomplishment”.²

In alignment with these quotes, one could affirm that Arts Education has a basic role in the development of the child’s personality as a whole. Through the arts, the child has the opportunity to work out personal and creative ideas and to discover or improve different abilities and intelligences. Arts Education has the power to enhance self-esteem, to increase the spontaneity of the child and his/her capability of risk-taking. Arts Education celebrates what is different, what is able to convey emotions, feelings, creativity. Arts Education is integral to Primary Education and arts activity can be considered a focus for social and cultural development and enjoyment in school. There are a range of activities in the visual arts, in music, in drama, in dance and in literature and these activities help the child to make sense of the world, to question, to speculate and to find solutions, to deal with feelings and to respond to creative experiences. Drama comprises interrelated activities which explore feelings, knowledge and ideas and it can gain themes and topics from the knowledge, interests and enthusiasm of the child.

All of the arts can be used in drama: first dance and music, followed by visual arts and literature. Dance provides the child with opportunities to organize and develop his/her

² <https://www.independencetheatreandperformingarts.com/>

natural enjoyment of expressive movement in dance form. Music is an essential part in a drama performance: songs, instrumental playing, music and sounds are used to emphasize particular scenes which are emotionally strong. Music and dance, moreover, are powerful means to help children with learning difficulties, physical or mental disabilities to find a way to express themselves together with their schoolmates. Through music and dance these children can feel able to do the same things others do: they become more self-confident and learn to free their emotions with joy if they perceive that they are accepted in the group. Through literature, then, the child is guided to explore the world of the imagination and to discover how language brings it to life, while arts and crafts are used to create props, costumes and scenery: “An elementary school that treats the arts as the province of a few gifted children or views them only as recreation and entertainment, is a school that needs an infusion of soul”.³

The great importance of Arts Education has been recognized by UNESCO as well. At the thirtieth session of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in November 1999, the Director-General of UNESCO launched an “International Appeal for the Promotion of Arts Education and Creativity at School” (UNESCO 1999). In this paper, the promotion of Arts Education is viewed as part of the construction of a culture of peace, “through knowledge of the artistic and cultural values of different countries and civilizations”. (UNESCO 1999: 33) The Director-General for the promotion of Arts Education writes in his appeal: “Today we are clearly and strongly aware of the important influence of the creative spirit in shaping the human personality and bringing out the full potential of children and adolescents and maintaining their emotional balance – all factors which foster harmonious behaviour [...] Creativity is our hope” (UNESCO General Conference 1999:3). Drama is part of Arts Education but, at the same time, it includes, develops and makes use of all of the arts. If “creativity” is our hope, “drama” is the tool to make this hope come true.

³ William Bennet, Former U.S Secretary of Education, <https://throughthearts.wordpress.com/>

1.2 Drama in Language Education

In order to understand the importance of using drama approaches in language education, I will attempt to illustrate its benefits in second language and foreign language classes, starting briefly from a historical point of view. Throughout history, there has been a strong connection between drama and education, dating back to ancient times. One of the earliest indications of this relationship can be found in the observations made by Plato regarding the moral influence of drama: Plato recognized the significant role that drama played in shaping the values and character of individuals (Giacetti 2021:45) and believed that drama had the power to evoke strong emotions and sentiments in its audience.

Since then, drama has continued to be recognized as an integral part of education, offering unique opportunities for learning and personal growth. It provides a platform for students to explore different perspectives, express themselves creatively, develop empathy, and enhance their communication skills. Drama-based activities, such as role-playing and improvisation, allow students to engage actively in the learning process and experience first-hand the complexities of human interactions and emotions. In contemporary education, drama is often adopted as an effective pedagogical tool across various subjects and disciplines. It is used to enhance learning outcomes, foster critical thinking, promote collaboration and teamwork, and cultivate an appreciation for the arts. Teachers in who adopt drama approaches, often become “teachers-in-role”, acting as facilitators and allies to students, encouraging their participation and improvisation (Giacetti 2021).

One significant difference between different drama-based approaches is the scale of the activities. Some, often referred to as drama or Process Drama activities, tend to be small-scale, with improvised and episodic scenes that allow for the re-planning and shifting of the dramatic action within the classroom context. This contrasts with larger-scale approaches, which often involve staged performances and extra-curricular activity (Schewe 2013). Moreover, drama approaches may encourage the integration of language and content: through practical activities, students not only expand their vocabulary but also develop the ability to use language in context. Considering that language and context are inseparable and that interaction plays a central role in language learning (Belliveau and Kim, 2013), another significant benefit of using drama in foreign and second

language classrooms is its ability to create an environment where language is presented, learned, and used through interactive and socially situated contexts.

The integration of drama pedagogy into language classrooms has emphasized the importance of process and performance over the traditional focus on language as a scientific discipline. Performative foreign and second language teaching recognizes drama-based teaching and learning as both a science and an art, creating unique insights and learning opportunities. The goal of this performative teaching is to utilize various art forms, such as theatre, music, visual arts, dance, literature and film to enhance language teaching and learning, emphasizing teacher artistry and personal transformation (see for example Piazzoli 2018). Despite its potential benefits, drama is not so widely implemented in language classrooms: according to some scholars, when it is used, it often falls short of its potential, as it is limited to decontextualized scripted role-plays, superficial dialogues, or warm-up games that do not align with the curriculum (Belliveau and Kim, 2013).

In summary, we can say that educational drama encourages spontaneous interaction, exposes learners to different registers and discourses, develops skills of discovery and interaction. It also contributes to overall language and literacy skill development, enriches reading experience, connects language, literature and culture, enhances learners' confidence and motivation and fosters alternative ways of learning and knowing. As Boudreault (2010) suggests: "ESL/EFL professionals need to use this medium more because the artificial world of the classroom can be transformed into a quasi-real language situation and provides an endless amount of opportunities for student's personal growth. We cannot only teach grammar and phonetics with drama but also it has the power to transform the actors as well as the audience. We shouldn't underestimate this powerful teaching tool to reach our students". However, further empirical research is needed to establish a more substantial foundation of evidence. According to Belliveau and Kim (2013), future studies should attempt to adopt systematic methodologies and careful reporting in order to enhance our understanding of the precise impact and effectiveness of incorporating drama into FL and L2 teaching and learning.

1.2.1 Motivation

Education is not the filling of a pail

But the lighting of a fire!

(William Butler Yeats)

Motivation is strongly believed to be one of the factors necessary for effective language learning, affecting both the rate of acquisition and success (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009). Harmer (2007:51) defines motivation as “some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something”. In addition, Dörnyei (2002: 6-7) talks about “motivation” as a “convenient way of talking about a concept which is generally seen as a very important human characteristic but which is also immensely complex”. He affirms that: “human behaviour has two basic dimensions – *direction* and *magnitude (intensity)* – and motivation by definition concerns both of these” as it is responsible for “the *choice* of a particular action, the *effort* expended on it and the *persistence* with it. Therefore, motivation explains *why* people decide to do something, *how hard* they are going to pursue it and *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity” (Dörnyei 2002:6-7).

Harmer and Dörnyei give us two different definitions of what motivation is but at the same time both of them can be considered useful. There are “over twenty internationally recognized theories of motivation with many opposing points of view, differing experimental approaches, and continuing disagreement over proper terminology and problems of definition” (Włodkowski, 1986:44-45). It could be a very interesting and formative experience to study all these theories in depth, but it is not the focus of my theses. What I wish to highlight in this section is the fundamental role of motivation in a foreign language classroom. Dörnyei (2002:1) also affirms that “motivation is one of the key issues in language learning and that skills to motivate learners are crucial for language teachers”. Every single teacher of foreign languages is aware of the truthfulness of this statement. We use the term ‘motivation’ when we intend to describe the presence or the lack of “enthusiasm, commitment and persistence” (Dörnyei 2002:5) in the process of

learning of our students. To help them, most of all if young children, our mastery of motivational skills is essential, and this will be examined below.

As concerns students' motivation, two types are often referred to: extrinsic, which "may be influenced by a number of external factors such as attitude of society, family and peers to the subject in question", and intrinsic motivation, which is "generated by what happens inside the classroom; this could be teacher's methods or activities that students take part in" (Harmer 2007:20). Harmer (2007:20) also proposes that if we "involve the students or excite their curiosity and provoke participation, we will help them to stay interested in the subject". In other words, learners are motivated by their perceptions of how they will use the language in their future lives, but also by the enjoyment and satisfaction gained by taking part in achieving certain language tasks in the present.

The use of drama undoubtedly represents one of the approaches used by teachers to foster intrinsic motivation. Not only does it help to build a good teacher-student relationship, but it also actively engages all the students and all the time. As Maley and Duff (1982:13) explain "drama activities also help to get rid of the diffidence and boredom that come from being forced to stay passive most of the time". Maley and Duff (1982) also mention another motivating factor of drama, which is its versatility and unpredictability:

If drama is motivating – and we believe it is – the reason may be that it draws on the entire human resources of the class and that technique, in its own way, yields a different, unique result every time it is practiced (Maley and Duff, 1982: 13).

Having stated what is motivation is, in general, I would like now to try and contextualize it with Italian primary school children. In both Primary School guidebooks and in the Italian scholastic legislation (see the *Indicazioni Nazionali per I Piani di Studio Personalizzati nella scuola Primaria*⁴), Foreign Language (FL) and Second Language (L2) are considered the same. However, the two terms can be used with different meanings. The adjective "foreign" refers to a language which is studied and practiced

⁴ <https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/>

mostly at school, whereas an L2 is also spoken in the outside environment. A child is brought up with a second language as he/she uses it to communicate with his/her family and/or to participate in the local community life. Motivation to improve the L2 is often strong because it is part of the environment, yet the child may also need to enhance his/her linguistic abilities at school. Learning a FL is quite a different experience. A child learns it only at school, it is taught by a teacher, and the motivation may be weaker as it is bound to the degree of the child's desire to obtain a good mark. Upon this reflection, we can affirm that the English language, which is taught in Italian schools, is for certain a Foreign Language. The point is "how" to arouse Italian children's motivation in studying English at school.

We must keep in mind that all learners already speak a language, which is their first language, and that they may find it hard to realize the importance of learning different languages. Furthermore it might not seem to make sense to them to study another language, unless they can have a great deal of fun in doing it. It is for this reason that the duty of a good teacher is to seek the best techniques and methods to achieve their goals, as Dornyei (2002) suggests, that is to capture the students' interest and to involve their feelings and emotions in a stimulating and exciting learning experience. Learning a new language can be a marvellous journey, full of magic and adventure through which young learners broaden their cultural horizons, discover new aspects of their character. It may foster abilities learners did not know they possessed and help them to develop different "intelligences" to learn, remember, perform and understand the world.

The focal point with young learners is for this to happen whilst having fun. What is more amusing, involving, exciting, motivating and educational than teaching English through drama? As Maley and Duff (1982:13) stress, "enjoyment comes from imaginative, personal involvement", that is to say that motivation and drama are closely connected. I would argue that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can be present and active in a foreign language classroom, which is created not only by the teacher and his/her approach, but of a multitude of different human beings, each of them with different abilities and social and cultural backgrounds, each of them with a direction and a

magnitude and, therefore, capable of making a choice, sustaining effort and persisting with it.

1.2.2 Meaning in Context

It could be argued that drama represents an ideal approach to work if teachers want to put meaning into a context. Unlike in guided practice, students are involved in real communication while they “activate language to communicate real meaning, rather than just practicing language” (Harmer, 2007:270) and thus develop their communicative competence in a natural way, using body language, making pauses and interruptions, showing emotions, and creating relationships. Phillips (1999:6) encourages using drama in second language teaching because “it encourages children to speak and gives them the chance to communicate, even with limited language, using non-verbal communication, such as body movements and facial expressions”. Moreover, making students focused on the process of the creation of drama rather than the final language product, provides them with natural and purposeful need for speaking, which Maley and Duff (1978: 13-14) describe by stating that “the problem of not wanting to speak or, more often, not knowing what to say is practically resolved because the activity makes it necessary to talk”.

The value of drama is often attributed to the fact that it allows the creation of contexts for different language uses, thus fostering students’ language awareness. In both language teaching and drama, context is often thought to be everything. To cite Boudreault (2010):

The improvisation aspect of drama gives students opportunities for developing their communicative skills in authentic and dynamic situations. By using drama in the English classroom, we can use English with our students in intriguing and useful ways. The language can be used in context and makes it come to life. Drama has the potential of making the learning experience fun for the students and even memorable because it is interactive and visual.

Children talking and listening to each other in a dramatic play situation use language in a communicative way, taking turns, interacting verbally, using body movements, gestures

and facial expressions, listening actively (see for example Surkamp, 2014). They can try out everyday situations in a friendly environment and this experience gives them a good preparation for real life. This is also a great motivation for them to prove to themselves that language is really a way of communication.

Dramatizing is one of the children's favourite activities from an early age. It is their way of acquiring the world. Children play out scenes from the life of adults, fairy tales and other children around them. They act the role of doctors, teachers, shop assistants and so on. It is useful to take advantage of these familiar games and use them to teach children something new (Phillips, 1999: 6). Choosing the right context is therefore the very first step language teachers should take in using drama in their classrooms. The context varies from realistic, everyday situations (for example, a summer camp) to possible but less likely contexts (for example, taking part in a television show) to imaginary scenes (for example, a trip to Mars). The teacher will determine the context basing it on the learners' linguistic abilities, socio-cultural backgrounds and skills, as well as their age levels. As Kao and O'Neill (1998: 24) affirm, a good context can "offer a light-hearted, playful atmosphere, in which exploration and enjoyment are the primary purposes and the lack of pressure to produce a "correct" speech promotes confidence and fluency".

In Process Drama approaches, once the context has been decided, the teacher will give the class a "pre-text" so as to begin to unfold the dramatic world. "Pre-text", a term coined by O'Neill (1995), refers to the source or impulse for the drama process: it will determine the initial moments of action, establishing the location, atmosphere, roles and situations. A "pre-text" may be represented by "a word, a gesture, a location, a story, an idea, an object, an image, as well as by a character or a play script" (O'Neill, 1995: 19). As an effective starting point, the pre-text will launch the dramatic world in such a way that students will initiate and identify their roles and be responsible for what is going to happen in the development of drama. For example, by looking at a picture, students can start describing the setting and at the same time ask questions about it, so as to establish the what, where, when, who and how of the story (see for example Dunn and O'Toole 2020).

1.2.3 Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences

Harmer (2007) examines the theories of Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Multiple Intelligences and warns that “in any one classroom we have a number of different individuals with different learning styles and preferences, which means that we have to offer a wide range of different activity types in our lessons in order to cater for individual differences and needs” (Harmer 2007:16). As every teacher will notice in his/her classroom, there are children who are good at mathematics, others good at learning languages and for some of them it is easy to play a musical instrument. It appears that different people have different abilities, which result in their various learning styles. It is noticeable, also, how different children respond to the same stimuli. The classroom, therefore, forms a perfect environment for using drama work which includes all kinds of stimuli and can develop all types of human intelligences. According to Neuro Linguistic Programming, in fact, learners can be divided into: visual learners, responding best to visual stimuli such as pictures, written texts and diagrams; auditory learners, benefiting most from auditory input such as traditional lecturing or music; and kinaesthetic learners, who acquire information fastest when participating in a science laboratory, drama presentation, dance practice or similar activities (Harmer 2007).

Another concept of students’ individualities in learning that teachers should take into consideration is the theory of “Multiple Intelligences”, first introduced in the 1980s by an American psychologist, Howard Gardner. His theory claims that each individual possesses different types of intelligences defined as:

abilities to solve problems that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community. Problem-solving skills allow one to approach a situation in which a goal is to be obtained and to locate the appropriate route to that goal (Gardner 1993:15)

Gardner (1992) points out that evaluations such as I.Q. testing are limited by verbal, logical-mathematical and some spatial intelligence, while he identified other kinds of intelligences based upon eight criteria. These intelligences are: linguistic intelligence,

logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence and naturalist intelligence. The first, linguistic intelligence, represents people who are good at reading, writing and speaking. The logical-mathematical group instead includes those who excel in mathematics or computer programming. They are also good at chess and analysing logical problems. This type of intelligence together with the first, linguistic intelligence, is typically valued at schools. Spatial intelligence instead is used by people who have a strong visual memory and a very good sense of direction. The fourth, bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, represents those good at sports or dancers, for example. People with this kind of intelligence prefer activities which involve movement: for example, they like acting and creating things.

Musical intelligence implies sensitivity to sounds, tones, rhythms and music. People who are representatives of this area are able to sing, play an instrument or compose music. These people like learning and memorizing via songs or chants. The sixth kind of intelligence, interpersonal, is said to refer to extrovert people who are sensible to others' feelings. They are social and they can empathize easily with others. They like group work and are good at cooperation. The seventh intrapersonal intelligence denotes, on the contrary, introverted people. They prefer working alone and they are usually self-aware and know their goals. The eighth kind of intelligence was added later. It is the naturalistic intelligence and this area deals with nature and classification. People with this kind of intelligence are said to have a great sensitivity to nature and the ability to interact with animals (Checkley 1997: 8-13).

An individual can demonstrate an extraordinary ability in one of the eight described intelligences, but each individual has usually developed several of them. The teacher's task is to create a variety of learning activities able to help particular students to develop their intelligences. Considering the fact that drama includes all kinds of stimuli, visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic, and encourages students to develop all the intelligences through active exploration of reality and problem-solving, its use in education can be regarded as extremely beneficial.

1.2.4 Psychological Benefits of Drama

The relationship between drama and foreign language teaching may also flourish thanks to all the benefits we can observe for foreign language instruction. Hamilton and McLeod (1993) describe this relationship as follows:

It is hard to imagine anything else that offers to language teachers such as wide variety of types of talks, for example monologues, paired speaking, role-plays, group discussions, reporting, talking in response to other stimuli, problem-solving, developing scenarios, acting out, etc. from explaining, complaining, praising, disagreeing to exhorting, apologizing and requesting – there is no language function that drama is not capable of easily encompassing.

Drama, in fact, allows students to include their personal experiences, emotions and their personality in the process of learning and this is a great advantage. The involvement of students is one of the most important parts of the teaching process.

Another advantage is that drama gives the opportunity to enter a parallel world and explore various situations. It offers the possibility to escape from our everyday lives and to put on a role. It may be easier to speak as somebody else; it is like hiding behind a mask, and it gives a person freedom to express their feelings more easily and without anxiety (see for example Goodnight 2021). The mask is a good tool, especially for shy people, above all, I would argue, if we have to deal with a class of teenagers. Students of this age, in fact, often do not want to reveal anything about themselves, and the role gives them a chance to speak and not to disclose their real feelings.

The role of anxiety in foreign language learning and teaching deserves further exploration, as it is one of the primary causes of communication failure in the foreign language, both for adults and younger individuals. Foreign language teachers often face students who struggle to learn a new language due to mental blocks. Even though these individuals might excel in other subjects and have a genuine interest in the language, anxiety can hinder their progress. Anxiety, characterized by tension, apprehension, and

nervousness, can hinder language learning, much like it can impact performance in other areas (see for example Horowitz, Horowitz and Cope 1991).

In 1982, Krashen proposed the affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that affective factors, such as anxiety and low self-esteem, can influence one's ability to acquire a new language. To quote Krashen (1982: 31):

The Affective Filter hypothesis captures the relationship between affective variables and the process of second language acquisition by positing that acquirers vary with respect to the strength or level of their Affective Filters. Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter – even if they understand the message, the input will not reach the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device. Those with attitudes more conducive to second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input, they will also have a lower or weaker filter.

This theory has been widely accepted in language learning institutions and has shaped the way language lessons are designed and delivered. In fact, the focus of additional language teaching in many contexts since the 1980s has been on creating a supportive and relaxed environment to reduce the affective filter that acts as a barrier to language acquisition (Piazzoli 2011).

To further explore the negative impact of anxiety, Horowitz, Horowitz, and Cope (1991) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), which encompasses communication apprehension, text anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation from others. They argue that these anxieties can significantly impede language learning progress. Piazzoli (2011) argues that drama, and the "affective space" teachers can create within it, can be a valid solution to deal with FLA. Establishing an affective space in drama activities requires a collaborative and trusting atmosphere among the participants. Nicholson (2002 in Piazzoli, 2011) highlighted the importance of trust, and Bundy (2003 in Piazzoli, 2011) further expand on this notion. Bundy (2003 in Piazzoli, 2011) notes

that participants need to trust the drama workshop leader, the group dynamics, the responses of fellow participants, their own role and status within the group, the appropriateness of their contributions, their self-perception, and the disclosure of their personal experiences in a public setting. She argues that if these conditions are met and trust is established, this can have a multiplying effect on the participants' engagement and thus improve their learning experience. As a result of such a process, some participants in Piazzoli's (2011) study experienced a reduction in their affective filter, leading to a decrease in language anxiety and an increase in self-confidence. These positive changes culminated in spontaneous and confident communication in the target language. The affective space played a central role in facilitating language acquisition and creating a more conducive atmosphere for effective language learning (Piazzoli 2011).

In conclusion, I would argue that among all the psychological benefits that drama brings to the teaching and learning of a foreign language, the most significant is undoubtedly the reduction of anxiety. The drama techniques, the more relaxed and often playful atmosphere, the teacher's role as a facilitator, the elimination of competition among students, and constructive collaboration among participants make language learning easier and more immediate. This is particularly true with primary school children, as well as teenagers and adults.

1.2.5 Task-based Learning and the Communicative Approach

Task-based learning is an approach which arose out of communicative approaches to language teaching, and I believe it could be useful to provide some basic information about it in this discussion of drama and language learning. As Richards and Rodgers affirm (2001: 153-177), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) originated in the late 1960s as a response to shortcomings in traditional British language teaching methods. Before that, Situational Language Teaching was the primary approach in the UK, emphasizing learning language through situational activities. However, the rejection of structural linguistic theory and the influence of the American linguist Noam Chomsky led British applied linguists to question the theoretical foundations of Situational Language Teaching. They argued for a focus on the functional and communicative aspects of language, rather than just mastering grammatical structures. This shift was

partly driven by the need to teach the major European languages due to increasing European interdependence (Richards and Rodgers 2001:153-154). The work of the Council of Europe, British linguists, and the adoption of communicative principles in language teaching materials led to the emergence of the Communicative Approach, making communicative competence the goal of language instruction.

Several factors led to the evolution of CLT: the rejection of Structural Linguistics, which was replaced by an emphasis on Communicative Competence; the Council of Europe's influence; and the Functional Approach, which proposed a functional or communicative definition of language, emphasizing the communicative functions of language. This approach shifted the focus from traditional grammar and vocabulary teaching to understanding how language serves communicative purposes (Richards and Rodgers 2001, 154-155). In summary, CLT is rooted in a theory of language that sees it as a tool for communication and interaction. It emphasizes not only grammatical correctness but also the ability to use language effectively in real-life situations. This approach recognizes the importance of context and culture in language use, as well as the various dimensions of communicative competence required for successful communication. A document which has come to underlie much work in language learning is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001), which emphasizes the importance of acquiring communicative competence. As regards drama in language teaching, Fonio and Genicot (2011) argue that practice can be seen to align with the foundations of the CEFR, concluding that (2011: 88): “we are convinced that there exists a synergy between our approach to language teaching through drama practice and the CEFR main objectives. The CEFR could thus represent a powerful ally for the legitimization of drama practice amongst the other traditional methods in foreign language teaching”.

Nowadays CLT is still widely accepted, but it can be interpreted and applied in various ways. This adaptability is one of the reasons for its popularity: it means that educators from different educational backgrounds can incorporate CLT principles into their teaching while accommodating their specific teaching styles and classroom contexts. One of the learning principles associated with CLT is the "Task-Principle" (Richards and

Rodgers 2001:161), which promotes learning through activities where language is used for meaningful tasks. The pedagogy of task-based language learning, therefore, originates directly from Communicative Language Teaching and it is an increasingly explored area in applied linguistics (Carson 2012), with efforts to define and outline the nature, scope, and purpose of a task in the language classroom. One common factor in the various definitions of task-based learning, ranging from one-time exercises to more structured activities, is the emphasis on authenticity. Tasks should help learners become language users in a contextually authentic way or with authentic interaction. Skehan (1998 in Carson 2012:50) provides a useful framework to determine what qualifies a task in formal language learning:

Does it engage learners' interest?

Is the primary focus on meaning?

Is there an outcome?

Is success judged based on the outcome?

Is completion a priority?

Is the activity something that occurs in "real life"?

Improvised dramatic activities and rehearsals are especially relevant because language use is inherently unpredictable, and any statement can lead to various responses. Dougill (1987 in Carson 2012:50) refers to this as "unpredictability in language use". Drama activities help bridge the gap between the controlled classroom environment and the seemingly chaotic nature of language in the real world. Healy (2004 in Carson 2012:51) also highlights the balance between collaboration and risk-taking. As Carson claims (2012: 51), "drama provides the opportunity to create imagined roles and situations with authentic contexts for meaning-focused L2 interaction".

Maley and Duff (1982) emphasize how drama contextualizes language, bringing classroom interaction to life through a focus on meaning. Applying Skehan's schema (1998 in Carson 2012: 51) to drama, we can affirm that:

Drama engages learners' interest, both as participants and audience members.

There is a primary focus on meaning.

Concrete outcomes are achieved, from short utterances to extended monologues and from sketches/one-act plays to full productions.

Assessment is based on the outcome, whether in rehearsal or performance.

Completion is essential, at least to the extent that utterances are delivered.

It is an activity rooted in real life, as everyone is familiar with drama even if they have not been involved in acting or production.

Moreover, drama involves a variety of sub-tasks, such as discussing the topic, allocating characters, researching the original story, script-writing, reading and rehearsing dialogue, creating advertising posters, and making costumes and props. Task-based learning and drama involve various communicative activities and materials, including games, role plays, simulations and other interactive exercises. These materials are often designed as one-of-a-kind items, such as exercise handbooks, cue cards, activity cards, pair-communication practice materials, and booklets for student interaction. As Fonio and Genicot (2011) point out, when staging foreign language plays displaying a high degree of linguistic and cultural complexity, teachers and learners can adapt parts of the text, modify dialogues for specific audiences, and explore related cultural materials. Learning foreign languages through drama encourages plurilingual and pluricultural development, as students must decode the cultural elements in the play, leading to improved sociolinguistic skills.

To conclude, we can say that the process of using drama to teach and learn languages, through the task-based pedagogy, has increased with the popularity of the Communicative Approach, providing students with opportunities for active and involved participation, with attention to cultural aspects of learning and on authentic interaction.

CHAPTER 2

Full-scale Drama in Primary Education

The aim of this chapter is to explore the framework within which my project is set, in other words full-scale drama and its adoption in primary education contexts. I will start by looking into terms such as ‘drama’ and ‘theatre’ and how process and product-oriented approaches can be relevant with young learners of English. The discussion will also include an investigation of the use of improvisation as a fundamental component of drama practice.

2.1 Definition of Terms: Drama-Theatre

In the early 20th century, during a period of pedagogical reform, there was an increase in theatre-oriented projects in schools, accompanied by efforts to incorporate drama-based learning activities into the curriculum. Educators began to recognize the potential of drama to enhance learning in various subjects, including English. Teachers started using acting as a powerful tool for learning, as it connected thought, word and action, leaving a lasting impression. This approach was seen as a way to make subjects like English history, grammar and composition more engaging and meaningful (Schewe, 2013:7).

Theatre and drama, however, for educational purposes have been defined in many different ways. Methodology books and papers abound in terms such as drama education, theatre education, educational drama or creative drama and drama teaching. Traditionally, ‘theatre’ has been associated with live performances, while ‘drama’ refers to the written works designed for stage presentation (Elam, 1980). However, within the context of drama education, these terms have taken on different nuances. Theatre was traditionally linked to communication between actors and the audience, focusing on that interaction. On the other hand, drama placed a greater emphasis on the experiences of the participants themselves, regardless of the need for communication with an audience (Way, 1967 in Schewe, 2013). During the 1980s and 1990s, in Britain for example, a notable division emerged between proponents of different approaches to teaching drama. Educators who favoured a theatrical approach emphasized concepts such as ‘acting’, ‘rehearsal’, and

‘performance’. In contrast, those with a focus on drama stressed the importance of ‘experience’ and “living through” improvisational activities (Hornbrook, 1989).

Today drama pedagogy has become an important reference discipline in foreign language teaching and has laid the foundations for the development of what can be referred to as performative foreign language teaching (Schewe, 2013). This approach considers drama-based teaching and learning not only as a science but also as an art, creating unique insights and learning opportunities. Performative foreign language teaching aims to integrate various forms of art, such as theatre, music, visual art, dance, literature, and film, into language teaching and learning. It seeks dialogue and exchange between the arts and traditional disciplines associated with language education. The goal is to create a new approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes aesthetic expression, including the pleasure and playfulness of language and the interaction between language, body, sound, word, sentence and movement (Schewe, 2013:15-18).

As regards primary school, in the upcoming sections, I will explore which approaches may be most effective in teaching a foreign language. I will also examine whether these approaches lean more towards "Theatre in Education," "Drama in Education," or perhaps even a combination of both, involving both product and process.

2.2 Drama: Process-Oriented Approach vs Product-Oriented Approach at Primary School

In alignment with the beliefs of drama practitioners, Dodson (2002) affirms that the value of incorporating drama into language education lies in the opportunities it gives students to express themselves in the target language with genuine intent, surpassing mere vocabulary and grammar exercises. As language learners take on different characters and adapt to new roles, they engage in vocabulary and grammar practice within a sustained context, mirroring real-life interactions in the target culture. Moreover, the advantages derived from drama activities extend beyond language skills: activities in the classroom often lead to an increase in self-esteem, self-confidence, and spontaneity, thereby reducing inhibitions, feelings of alienation, and sensitivity to rejection (Dodson, 2002).

Furthermore, participation in drama frequently boosts students' integrative motivation, fostering a desire to learn the language for effective communication with individuals from the target culture. The use of drama in language teaching has become more popular with the increase in the communicative approach, in which students use language in real situations to discuss genuine issues (Dodson 2002: 2).

The term "Process Drama" covers many different activities, providing various options for sessions that can meet students' needs and ideas (Maistrello 2019: 4). This aligns with Gardner's idea of "Frames of mind" (1993: 8). As already mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Gardner criticizes labelling people as "smart" based on IQ tests (Gardner 1993: 6) and argues for recognizing different intelligences not captured by a single test method (Gardner 1993:4,8). While I will not delve into Gardner's detailed theories here, it is essential to note that diverse intelligences suggest different ways of learning (Gardner 1993: 334). If a student excels in a specific learning method, it should be used in various situations. Process Drama helps with this by letting students explore concepts in different ways: visual, verbal, kinaesthetic, or emotional (Chang 2011:7) which engage different types of intelligences.

This leads me to take a closer look at what the "Process-Oriented approach" and the "Product-Oriented approach" are and how they differ in drama pedagogy. Moody (2002) asserts that there is a debate regarding the learning potential of educational drama in foreign language acquisition, which has often been polarized between Process-Oriented and Product-Oriented approaches. These two approaches are quite different in goals and methodologies, and seem contradictory in nature, but at the same time it is also true that they can be considered complementary within a broader perspective of using drama in the teaching and learning of a foreign language.

The Product-Oriented approach is a teaching approach that is centred on the final interpretation, rehearsal, and public performance of a text and it is a beneficial form of educational drama. It highlights the importance of the ultimate public performance by students, considering it a key objective in the learning process. On the other hand, the Process-Oriented approach tends to concentrate on the dramatic medium itself. Here, the

emphasis is on negotiation, rehearsal, and preparation for a more informal in-class dramatic representation, making it the focal point for language learning (Moody, 2002). Considering the fact that educational drama can include both process and product oriented approaches, it is important to underline what Moody (2002: 139) affirms:

I believe that the process of doing foreign language theatre, which brings together a variety of methods that I identify as “essential play”, promotes highly productive opportunities for L2 acquisition. Process and product approaches are not opposite ends of a spectrum that are mutually exclusive, nor is one approach superior to the other. A great deal of learning also takes place when the methods of second-or-foreign language acquisition through dramatic processes are text-based and product-oriented. I believe that the supposed dichotomy between process-oriented and text-based approaches should not exist.

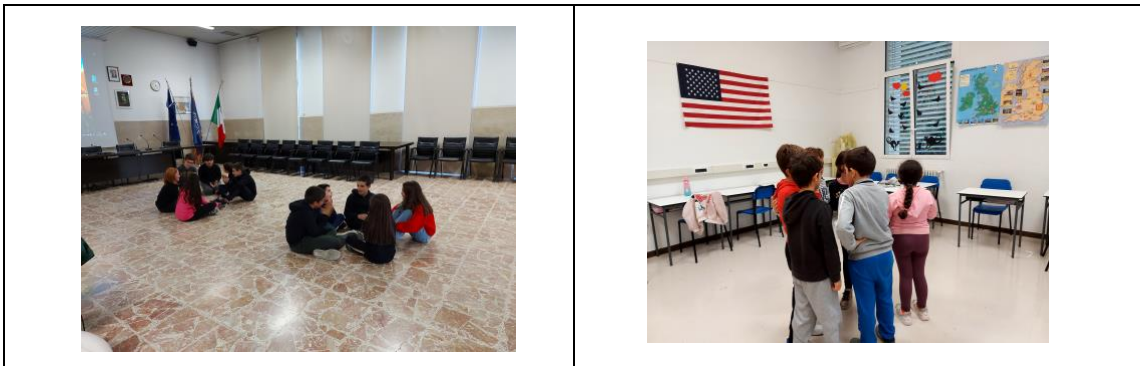
Drama-based teaching and learning can alternatively be classified into small-scale and large-scale forms (Schewe, 2013). Small-scale forms involve performative activities within a single class or a short teaching unit (around 3-5 classes). This includes “Process Drama”, where students and teachers take on various roles and engage in performative activities, creating tangible outputs like improvisations and freeze-frame depictions. These activities allow learners to use their language and cultural abilities and improve them.

Large-scale forms involve expanding the framework beyond regular classroom activities. Examples include staging productions in a foreign language, which is time-consuming and often takes several weeks or months as an extracurricular activity. Participants gain lasting learning experiences in language, literature, and culture during rehearsals and performances. Theatre-in-Education projects, where teacher-actors stage plays based on topics from the language classroom, also fall into the large-scale category. The performance in school, while primarily for learning purposes, maintains a high aesthetic standard and provides a motivating learning experience (Schewe, 2013).

After examining the nature of these two drama approaches, the reflection should be directed back to the focus of this thesis, which is foreign language learning through drama at primary school. The target audience of the literature above, discussing the advantages of using a process-oriented, small-scale theatre approach or a product-oriented, large scale theatre approach, is frequently university or high school students. Rare are the studies conducted on the impact that drama can have on language teaching and learning among children in primary schools.

Based on my experience of over 31 years of teaching English in primary schools and approximately 16 years of involvement in drama, both approaches can be applied to children of this age group. However, it is crucial to adapt them to the children's linguistic skills and the specific educational objectives. In process drama, improvisation is a distinctive feature and an essential technique. Still, with Italian-speaking children in their early years of foreign language learning, this approach may need to be scaled down. By providing children with instructions using familiar language structures and vocabulary, they can be encouraged to organize themselves into small groups to create simple scenes. In these scenes, they independently decide roles, choose lines to say, and attempt to represent them with body language, facial expressions, and voice in front of their peers. Voice is not always necessary: a situation (such as a volleyball match) can be given, asking a child to start miming it while allowing others to enter the scene, choosing different roles to create a dynamic representation.





FIGURES 1-6: Students aged 8 to 10 organize themselves to create simple scenes on a topic given by the teacher (author's photos)

As stressed by many scholars and practitioners, the teacher's role in this method is primarily that of a facilitator. As Smith (2017: 13) outlines: "It is the social attunement of the facilitator to participants which generates a willingness to use their physicality to support the participants. The teacher/facilitator has the task of providing instructions, preparing students linguistically and grammatically, and then allowing them the freedom to "improvise" their scene. The teacher assists in discussions that inevitably arise, such as role selection, fair distribution of lines, and the creation of simple stage props. This phase can only occur in the native language, given the age of the children. With students aged between 10 and 13, I found the product-oriented approach to be extremely engaging. Developed over seven months of a voluntary, extracurricular theatre workshop, that I propose and lead in almost every school year, this approach always brings numerous benefits to the participating students (see Chapter Three of this thesis).

My approach can be aligned with that of Fonio (29012), who states that staging full-scale plays, following a predominantly product-oriented theatrical approach, may prove very

beneficial in terms of students' commitment and of intercultural learning, and that the students' involvement in the staging project and their motivation in learning can be further stimulated by the staging of comic plays (Fonio, 2012). This approach can be easily used with primary school learners to enhance their motivation towards the studying of a foreign language. In one of my past drama labs I staged "Cinderella", where at the end or at the beginning of any scene, two comic characters came on stage to comment on what had just happened in the story using the Venetian dialect. It was greatly appreciated by the audience and the pupils derived much enjoyment both playing these characters or watching them as spectators.



FIGURES 7 & 8: The comic characters of the cook and the gardener in Cinderella 2022 (author's photos)

Fonio (2012) goes on to affirm that staging full-scale plays with foreign language students is an effective way to enjoy an intercultural experience, which is useful for them to enhance their linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences (Council of Europe, 2001: 13-14). The main advantage of a process-oriented approach to foreign language drama teaching is that of an "open learning environment" (Council of Europe, 2001: 138), which is not based primarily on literacy and text-related activities. As regards the product-oriented approach to foreign language learning through theatre practice, its main goal is to stage sketches or full-scale plays with students for public performance. Those who favour process-oriented drama teaching claim that public performances partially obscure the goals of teaching and learning through drama, because the learners' attention tends to focus on the final performance.

Fonio's (2012) experience so far has persuaded him that public performances are, on the contrary, a powerful stimulus for students to maintain their attention and concentration. Moreover, activities related to the various practical aspects of the staging process – from the playwriting or play adaptation to costumes and props, set and lightning design- correspond closely to the communicative and action-oriented approach of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), upon which many foreign language syllabi are now based (Fonio & Genicot 2011).

Fonio and Genicot (2011) argue that the action-oriented approach of the CEFR demands strongly task-oriented language teaching and learning activities, and the different steps of the staging process offer the teacher the opportunity to propose to students simple task-divisions; in my personal experience this is particularly true with primary or middle school learners. Fonio (2012) writes that almost every teacher practicing the staging of comic plays or sketches with students would agree with the paradox that the strong desire, and sometimes the anxiousness that students feel in their yearning to make the future audience laugh, introduces a high degree of seriousness in classroom activities from the beginning of the staging project, and I can personally confirm the truth of what the author has stated, based on my direct experience.

Timing, moreover, is one of the most important parameters not only in the comic, but for all kinds of plays as well, and this is particularly evident while performing for the first time in front of a large audience, because seeing and/or hearing the audience laugh when one is telling a joke or making funny movements on stage or seeing the audience be moved by particular touching scenes, gives the performers immediate proof of efficacy. My students have always reacted in a very positive way to “warm” audiences and to the strong emotions they feel every time the show becomes somehow interactive. They even experienced situations where they had to stop acting until the audience stopped laughing or applauding. When staging comic or more serious plays with a strong textual component, seriousness and concentration have to be maintained throughout the whole staging project, and not only during public performances. All thorough work on text-centred theatre, in particular in a foreign language, begins with a meticulous close reading

of the script, because a deep understanding of the text is necessary in order to perform it with accuracy both on a literal and expressive level (Fonio, 2012).

In addition, Cangià (1998) affirms that in educational practice, a distinction is made following the British tradition: “theatre” is typically an extracurricular activity emphasizing the final product (product-oriented approach), providing the audience with the experience of young actors. On the other hand, “drama” (process-oriented approach) is typically a curricular activity that highlights the learning subjects and the creative process (Holden, 1981 cited in Cangià, 1998).

In dramatization, the pleasure associated with the performance is intended to be independent of audience appreciation. However, to what extent is spontaneity affected or damaged by the presence of an audience? She would argue, like me, that the experience of performing for an audience adds an extra dimension to the entire activity. Conducting theatre in a foreign language, differs from simulation, role-playing, and dramatization. It is an almost always repeated dramatic event intended to be presented in front of an audience. “Theatre” and “Drama” are two educational resources that can be simultaneously utilized in the foreign language teaching and learning context.

Cangià (1998) acknowledges that initiating a dramatization project differs from working on a text-based script. In a dramatization project, the obligation to use a lexical/phrasal and structural repertoire is minimal, while the demand for communication is maximal. The opposite occurs when working with a pre-prepared script. However, there are intermediate situations where the components of “prescriptiveness of language” and “demand for communication” are balanced. In her theatrical approach, Cangià (1998) links the first component to the presence of a pre-prepared script, and the second to the actual staging (spontaneous communication for director’s notes, execution of scenography, etc.).

In the context of all this, what can be the role of the teacher in a learning/teaching environment based on theatre? The response that aligns most with my approach to working with students in my classes is that of Cangià (1998), who states that approaches

that focus on communication through non-directive pedagogy see the teacher engaged in facilitating the learning endeavour. In this dialogical teaching context, the teacher serves as an organizer of resources and orchestrator of activities. In the methodological approach based on “doing theatre”, the teacher’s role is not dominant; instead, the central element is the master-apprentice relationship. The teacher is the director who proposes the script-textbook and all activities leading to the theatrical performance. The teacher-director facilitates communication among the apprentice-actors regarding decisions about task division and roles, ensuring that each group member has a role suitable for their linguistic and personality abilities. The teacher ensures that each participant gives their best to achieve learning objectives, a true mentor, role model, and liberator of energies.

The teacher provides warmth, approval, praise, and even a stern look in instances of indiscipline. Growth in apprentices is induced not through directiveness but through encouragement, not by prescribing but by demonstrating actions. Teaching occurs through emanation: not just through words but through being and doing. The teacher has patience, expertise in intersubjectivity, and stays attuned to emerging research trends for continuous professional development (Cangià, 1998).

2.3 Improvisation as a Component of Drama in Education at Primary School

As already seen in the previous section, Process-Oriented and Product-Oriented approaches can be considered complementary within a broader perspective of using drama in the teaching and learning of a foreign language and are both an important part of Drama in Education. Despite this, it is undeniable that improvisation is a particularly prevalent activity in Process Drama. Haseman (1991 in Piazzoli 2023:25) defines it as “a form of theatrical improvisation aimed at eliciting artistic engagement through collaboration between teachers and participants”.

In *Il Teatro nella Glottodidattica* (Piazzoli, 2023: 27-33), the author asserts that the practice of Process Drama is situated within the paradigm of the "Embodiment" enactive theory by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991 in Piazzoli, 2023). This theory is based on

experiential learning that involves both the body and the mind, action, and perception. From this perspective, the purpose is not to stage a performance but to engage participants in a theatrical workshop to live and reflect on an imagined experience. This experience is conveyed by the teacher and agreed upon by the participants, creating a story viewed from multiple perspectives. To facilitate this shared experience, the teacher can resort to a wide range of activities, known as “dramatic conventions”, which I will explore further later in this chapter. In these activities, improvisation can be considered the common denominator.

Special consideration is given here to the theory of embodiment and the enactive paradigm, as particularly suitable for primary school children. According to Piazzoli (2023: 41-45), this theory is rooted in the common notion that sees the mind and body interconnected in a close interrelation between cognition, action, and perception. This stands in contrast to the Cartesian division of mind and body, advanced in the 17th century with the principle of "cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am). The Cartesian perspective has its origins in a sedentary and passive conception of learning, where the body is relegated to a secondary role compared to the mind (Piazzoli, 2023). Unfortunately, I would argue, this conception still prevails in the Italian school system, including primary schools.

On the other hand, the enactive matrix rejects the mind-body subordination, emphasizing the "unity of brain-body-environment" (Ceruti and Damiano, 2013 in Piazzoli 2023). In this light, the profile of "body pedagogy" by Gamelli (2009, 2011, 2016 in Piazzoli 2023) is particularly relevant. This pedagogical orientation, viewed enactively, focuses on the role of the body in cognition: “The body constitutes the fundamental node of all knowledge. Knowledge is always a knowledge of the body. The educational relationship is a relationship between bodies. Words have a body; language is a motor act” (Gamelli, 2016 in Piazzoli 2023: 43).

Gamelli (2016 in Piazzoli, 2023: 43-44) continues:

Body pedagogy presents itself as a framework of meaning, within which theatrical practice, symbolic play, and voice relaxation techniques are positioned, reworked in an educational context for the purpose of transversal educational competence and attitude.

In this context, we recall the transversal competencies promoted by the World Economic Forum, namely Communication, Collaboration, Critical thinking, and Creativity, known as the 4Cs and their affinity with the practice of Process Drama and the enactive paradigm, which anchors itself in the will to act and create.

In light of the considerations made so far, it is valuable to ponder how to integrate Process Drama and, more broadly, Drama in Education within the various levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Piazzoli (2023:33) rightly asserts that teachers should refer to the CEFR to consider the language proficiency level achieved by their students in the target language. This is because the use of Process Drama is linked to the ability to express abstract concepts in the L2, which typically emerges in learners from an intermediate level onwards.

In primary school, the proficiency level usually reached at the end of the academic cycle is A1, which may not enable students to understand all instructions or express abstract concepts in the L2. However, children in this age range (6-10) are perfectly capable of doing so in their L1 or through the use of non-verbal language. Therefore, Piazzoli (2023) suggests introducing the practice of Process Drama from the lower levels but in a simplified manner, gradually introducing one dramatic convention at a time (e.g., the teacher-in-role). This process begins with a script, preceded by a warm-up phase involving improvisation and movement, followed by a meta-reflection. If needed, the L1 can be used to facilitate metalinguistic reflection. Piazzoli (2023) further states that improvisation, based on action, serves as the hook that allows young students to experience being actors, showcasing their linguistic and communicative skills while attempting to complete a task. The key concept of ‘task’ is easily recognizable in theatrical practice (Fonio and Genicot, 2011), where each workshop comprises different phases

requiring the accomplishment of various communicative tasks (see section 1.2.5 of this thesis).

I will now turn to the core of this section, which is improvisation in Drama in Education. One might naturally wonder “What is Improvisation?” According to Piazzoli (2023:55-62), the concept of improvisation can be interpreted from different perspectives: as a theatrical technique, as the teacher's expertise, and as a student's production activity (Torresan, 2014 in Piazzoli, 2023). Improvisational theatre, when seen through an enactive lens, presupposes that it is the body and movement that provoke action, not the other way around. By using gesture before words, doors to unknown possibilities open, inviting students to operate in the realm of imagination. I agree with the author's perspective, and I argue that the enactive approach is precisely the magical tool capable of making Drama in Education achievable, engaging, and motivating, especially in primary school.

Piazzoli (2023) further states that accepting proposals from other participants during improvisation is crucial, highlighting the importance of listening, observing, and understanding others for this to occur (Piazzoli, 2023:57). The concept of listening, respecting, and accepting others is a highly important theme for today's youth, both young and old. Young people have an extreme need to be heard, respected, and accepted for who they are and what they do. When this does not happen, they express their discomfort in various ways depending on their age. In primary school, this may manifest itself as a rejection of studying, effort, and, in more severe cases, total surrender, with all the resulting consequences, especially regarding self-esteem. Therefore, Drama in Education, through improvisation, plays a fundamental role in the “social” as well as personal growth of young students and should be given great consideration in all schools.

Another question that Piazzoli (2023) raises is what theatrical language teaching owes to improvisation. On a language teaching level, theatrical improvisation ensures a primary role for verbal and non-verbal communicative motivation. Moreover, improvisation works on paralinguistic, sociolinguistic, and extralinguistic competencies, employing paraverbal and proxemic elements. Therefore, the emotional sphere is crucial: education

in spontaneity, typical of theatrical improvisation, allows for work on expressiveness but also on accepting oneself, one's mistakes, and the criticisms of others within a playful and protected environment (Piazzoli, 2023:58).

One could say, therefore, that integrating Improvisational Drama Techniques (IDTs) is a potential solution to create positive affective conditions and stimulate verbal interaction. IDTs may lower anxiety, promote self-confidence, stimulate enjoyment, engage students, foster creativity and enhance group bonding (Goodnight et al., 2021). Yet which types of IDTs, or dramatic conventions, induce positive affective reactions and have the potential to stimulate verbal interaction in foreign language classroom? First of all we need to say that dramatic conventions stem from the work of Dorothy Heathcote, a key figure in Drama in Education and the originator of the “teacher-in-role” strategy. This first appeared in one of her writings published by Johnson and O'Neill in 1984. Since then, dramatic conventions, as initially presented in the original document titled “Signs and Portents” have been experimented with, explored, and catalogued by various authors, including Neelands and Goode (2015, in Piazzoli 2023).

As already mentioned above, improvisation is the common denominator of many dramatic conventions. At primary school, in my view, it is necessary to start drama with some warm-up activities, “to prepare the young learners for the physicality of drama as well as to forge the climate of confidence and cooperation essential to the risk taking involved in acting” (Serrurier-Zucker and Gobbé-Mévellec 2014 in Bland 2015). Total Physical Response (TPR), a well-known language teaching method, can fulfil this function flexibly. Nevertheless, TPR can extend beyond warm-up activities; it can be used to reinforce language acquisition through salience and repetition. The teacher incorporates comparisons into commands, encouraging engagement. TPR can focus on specific themes like transport, where students pretend to steer a ship or ride a bike, fostering imaginative participation. It also adds an element of fun and relaxation, allowing children to perform various actions. TPR is versatile, accommodating both thematic language practice and spontaneous, enjoyable activities in the classroom, demonstrating its adaptability for reinforcing language skills (Bland 2015).

It is not the purpose of this thesis to list and delve into the numerous improvisation activities, but it may be helpful for our discussion to examine some more closely. ‘Story drama’ is a dramatic convention that fits well with the language level of primary school children, as it is based on the narration of a short story, which can be read by the teacher or by a child, while other children simultaneously mime what they hear without speaking. I experimented this technique with a third-grade class in the primary school where I currently teach, with 8-year-old children. Divided into groups, they had to choose who would read the short text and mime the story by improvising and interacting with each other. All the groups managed to complete the task, had fun, and worked with great motivation.

Another dramatic convention that can be enjoyed by primary school children is what Piazzoli (2023) calls “Coloured Reading”, which is very useful for practicing reading aloud. It emphasizes the playful dimension, shifting the emphasis from pronunciation to intonation, increasing expressiveness in the L2, and focusing on the meaning of the text and subtext. Starting with a simple written text discussed in class, the teacher divides the children into groups, asking them to identify the keywords of the text and match them with specific emotions. The idea, according to Piazzoli, is to “colour” these words with different emotions (Piazzoli 2023: 254-255).

In addition, ‘The Mantel of the Expert’ is a pedagogical strategy developed by Dorothy Heathcote in collaboration with Gavin Bolton (Piazzoli 2023). The strategy involves reversing the roles of teacher and students: the teacher takes on the role of an intermediary, and the students, acting as scientists, archaeologists, gardeners, or whatever is required by the intermediary, work to complete the assigned task, thus solving a mystery or problem of some kind. It may seem like a particularly challenging strategy for primary school children, but with a calibrated simplification and good planning by the teacher, I believe it can be highly engaging and conducive to language communication and reinforcement of curricular learning.

There are many more dramatic conventions and related improvisation techniques that it would be interesting to explore, but as we approach the conclusion, I agree with Piazzoli

(2023), who has guided this extensive reflection on the use of improvisation in drama in education, when she says that by using non-verbal language and opening communication to artistic channels, we broaden the learners' expressive range, giving them the opportunity to express themselves without feeling constrained by language barriers. The use of movement, music, and improvisational theatre stimulates involvement not only on a motoric level but also cognitively, as one is inseparable from the other. All this occurs within an environment of respect, playfulness, and safety capable of fostering intercultural dialogue, collaboration among participants, critical thinking, and creativity—essential values to be included even at the lowest levels of the education system to promote L2 learning and act as interdisciplinary skills in other educational contexts.

CHAPTER 3

Case Study: Primary School Drama Projects

The choice of the thesis topic “Drama in foreign language teaching at Primary School” derives from a deep belief in the value of teaching and learning a foreign language through drama and theatre activities, a belief that I have developed during the last 18 years of teaching. This chapter, the case study of the thesis, represents a personal narrative account of the drama activities that I have organised and conducted as a primary school teacher. I will first provide some background information and then go on to reflect on four theatrical performances, two productions of *Romeo and Juliet* (2010 and 2014), *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (2016) and *The Heart of Africa* (2018).





At present I teach English as a second language in two different primary schools in Piazzola sul Brenta, at the “Comprehensive Institute L. Belludi”. Here I have seven classes and I work with children aged 6 to 11. I have been always interested in drama and many years ago I introduced it into my fifth grade classes to foster my pupils’ speaking and listening abilities and to increase the motivation and the active participation of the shyest children (see for example, section 1.2.1 of Chapter One). The results I obtained had a great impact on me: nothing I had done before appeared to have fostered the same enthusiasm and dedication. I realized that drama could be the key to solving many problems in teaching and learning a second language and so I started to study it in depth.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to visit primary and secondary schools in the UK, Finland, Sweden and Iceland with the ACLE and EDUCO associations.⁵ We were a group of Italian teachers and headteachers eager to know and study new school systems, advanced teaching methods, theories and techniques to learn from and to apply in our classes once back in Italy. We visited buildings which were very different from those of Italian schools, and we realized the importance of the place and the physical spaces where

⁵ The ACLE association (Associazione Culturale Linguistica Educational) bases its activities for teachers and young people on the concept of Rational Emotional Affective Learning (REAL). ACLE has now been substituted by EDUCO, based on the same theory and with the same aims.

students spend so many hours every day. There were colourful classrooms, well-lit areas, recreational rooms, all kinds of labs, parks and gyms, up-to-date computers and multimedia blackboards and everything necessary to make the school a pleasant, stimulating and attractive place for students to spend time in. During these educational trips I noticed that in each school I visited, there was a drama class and very often a real stage. Many teachers explained to me the benefits that their students gained from the study of a foreign language through drama: it encouraged language acquisition (see for example section 1.2.2 of Chapter One) and rewarded learning experiences, stimulating different learning styles, involving multiple intelligences (see for example section 1.2.3 of Chapter One) and arousing strong motivation, especially in young learners.

In that period I was working at the “Comprehensive Institute A.C. Pertile” of Camisano Vicentino. The Institute is quite large and it includes two Infant Schools, three Primary Schools and a Middle School. The Primary Schools are in Camisano and in the two hamlets of Rampazzo and Santa Maria. I had been working at Camisano Primary School since September 1996 and from the school year 2005-2006 I was reflecting on my first theatrical performances with the fifth year classes: I had performed Robin Hood and King Arthur, each of them twice in a period of four years. At the time I was becoming more and more aware of the effects that drama had on learners: they began to work on personal and creative ideas and to discover or improve their different abilities and intelligences (see for example section 1.2.3 of Chapter One). Drama appeared to have the power to enhance the children’s self-esteem, to increase their spontaneity and their capability of risk-taking. The most surprising changes occurred to those children who were usually very reluctant to participate in class activities: shy pupils, international pupils, and even those with different learning difficulties were glad to be involved in the drama class and very often discovered that they had a real talent in acting.

	
<p>FIGURE 1: Computer lab (author’s photo)</p>	<p>FIGURE 2: Classroom (author’s photo)</p>
	
<p>FIGURE 3: Textile lab (author’s photo)</p>	<p>FIGURE 4: Canteen with stage (author’s photo)</p>

3.1 Romeo and Juliet 2010

3.1.1 Description of the Project

In September 2009 I was teaching at Camisano Vicentino Primary School. One night I went to see Cocciantè’s “Romeo and Juliet” at the Arena of Verona: I was struck by the actors, the scenery and the music, in particular, was outstanding. That night I decided to try to go beyond my simple theatrical performances and the day after I told my colleagues that I was planning an English Theatre Lab for my three fifth grade classes to perform “Romeo and Juliet” in June 2010. The language project fitted in well with the “affectivity and emotions” project on which the fifth grade classes would be working during the school year. The children thus started their “inner journey”, deepening the knowledge of their feelings, emotions and fears with the help and guidance of a psychologist (see for example section 1.2.4 of Chapter One). There was a boundless variety of feelings,

emotions and fears in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and thus the two projects went together perfectly.

I started with my drama lab in October 2009, working with the boys and girls of the fifth grade classes once a week. I had three hours of English per week in each class and I decided to devote one of them to the project. I presented it to the students and their parents and they were all very enthusiastic. In the first lesson I told them briefly the story of Romeo and Juliet in Italian, to be sure that they could understand clearly the main facts that led to the final tragic destiny of the lovers. We then watched Zeffirelli's 1968 film and I asked the children to observe how the actors and actresses used body language to express their feelings and emotions. At the end of the film, we tried to point out these emotions and I noticed that the children had found a large number of them: hate, love, wisdom, passion, rebellion, sacrifice, sympathy, fury, anger, sadness and happiness. I asked the pupils to divide themselves into groups and try to represent the emotion I was to tell to them, only with facial expressions and body language (see for example section 2.3 of Chapter Two). It was challenging because the children were very shy and did not know how to react.

I subsequently decided to devote the first part of every lesson to "warm-up" drama activities such as individual miming, group miming, speaking to people in different social positions using different registers, acting brief scenes of the story in small groups and practicing role-plays. In the following weeks, we read, listened and studied the story with the help of the book *Romeo and Juliet* in the Black Cat Publishing Edition (2007). This book was ideal for my aim, also because it gave many performing activities, ideas and suggestions; moreover it had exercises for the comprehension of the text, information on Shakespeare's historical period and topics for conversation.

During this period I observed the students in an attentive way with the purpose of knowing their nature and mood better, in order to identify which character of the story each of them would be able to represent, one of the most difficult decisions to take in every theatrical performance. Once the roles had been assigned, we were ready to start with the rehearsals: we rehearsed in each class once a week and I took the classes

separately until April 2010 for practical reasons. In the first week of April 2010 I decided it was time to join the three classes together to rehearse all the play and we met every Monday at school. I had nearly sixty children to motivate, to control and to support, all on my own. Yet they reacted extremely well: the children devoted themselves completely to the study of their lines. In the meantime I had to organize the work of another important group: the parents' group. When I presented the project in September 2009, I asked whether some parents would like to help with the scenery, props and costumes. Many of them agreed and created a kind of "staff group": there were wardrobe mistresses, parents who were very good at painting and drawing, parents looking for props, parents working for us as light, sound and video technicians. We met one evening a week at school to create the scenery and organize all the materials needed.

As regards the costumes, in Camisano every summer there is a medieval historical performance called 'The Palio', in which six 'contradas' play against each other to win an embroidered tapestry given as a prize. Each *contrada* has its own medieval costumes with different colours and so I asked two of them to lend me some of their costumes. They agreed and were very happy to help the school: that is how we had the Capulets and the Montagues with their own clothes and colours.



FIGURE 5: The Ball (author's photo)



FIGURE 6: Paris asking for Juliet's hand in marriage (author's photo)



FIGURE 7: The marriage (author's photo)



FIGURE 8: Romeo takes leave (author's photo)



FIGURE 9: Benvolio and the Prince (author's photo)



FIGURE 10: Narrators introduce Romeo and Juliet in Italian (author's photo)

One of the goals of this drama lab was also to collaborate with other teachers of the school and I found two colleagues interested in my project: the Italian teacher and the PE teacher. Together we planned a short Italian adaptation of the story set in the present day and with a happy ending. The Italian teacher wrote the new version, while the PE teacher taught the pupils a typical medieval dance for the famous fancy-dress ball scene. Some pupils had the role of narrators and translators to connect the English play to the Italian one and to explain to the Italian audience what was going to happen. All the main characters were interpreted by two or three students, as I had nearly sixty children and each of them wanted to have a role. This device, then, was very useful to shorten the lines that the

protagonists had to learn by heart. Towards the end of May, everything was ready for the show, which was staged on the 28th of May 2010. It was such a great success that we had to repeat the performance a week later.

3.1.2 Role and Goals

In this first drama lab, my role was that of “director” since I planned the exercises, the activities, I chose the story to perform, I gave specific instructions, organizing, monitoring and helping my pupils during the study period and the rehearsals. I tried every day we met to stimulate them to become aware of themselves and of the language they were attempting to use. At the same time I tried also to limit my interventions, where possible, to let the children use their imagination, their knowledge of the language, their own personality. I wanted to be a guide for them, someone who led the way; however every single child had to walk along this path respecting his/her own pace. I was also the director of the staff group: parents relied on me for all the decisions we had to take about the scenery, the costumes, the props, the music and everything concerning the performing of the play. In all, my role was that of the director: I had to imagine a scene and then to see it created on stage, which provided great teacher satisfaction.

With regard to the goals I wanted to achieve with this drama lab, I have to say that they were of different kinds. The most important goal was that of creating a real and exciting motivation (see for example section 1.2.1 of Chapter One) in which my students could find enough strength and energy to face the difficulties they would find in this new experience and in the study of a higher level of English. It is known, in fact, that good motivation is one of the factors necessary for efficient learning. Harmer (2007:51) defines motivation as “some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something”. Learning a foreign language can be a marvellous journey, full of magic and adventures through which the child broadens his/her cultural horizons, discovers new aspects of his/her character, fosters abilities he/she was not aware of possessing and develops different intelligences to learn, remember, perform and understand the world. Having fun is the focal point with children, and what is more amusing, involving, exciting, motivating and educative than teaching English through drama?

As Maley and Duff (1982:13) affirm “enjoyment comes from imaginative, personal involvement”, that is to say that motivation and drama are closely connected. The students were very motivated and were able to perform a Shakespearian play to the best of their abilities. My second goal was, of course, to improve my students English level, with particular attention to their speaking and listening abilities. Thanks to all the drama exercises we carried out, the listening of the story with English native-speaker actors, the study of the text, the months of rehearsals and the pronunciation and drama lessons with the native-speaker teacher Katherine Armstrong, it was possible for students to achieve a higher level of knowledge in the English language. Most of them also achieved an improvement of their English marks at school and all of them revealed a better attitude towards the study of the language.

3.2 Romeo and Juliet 2014

3.2.1 Description of the New Context

28th May 2010 was not important only for the staging of my first *Romeo and Juliet*, but above all because it marked the end of my experience as an English Teacher in Camisano Primary School: I had been assigned to Piazzola sul Brenta, a small city very close to Camisano, and in September 2010 I started my job as English teacher in two new schools. The situation I found was extremely challenging: both students and colleagues were accustomed to changing English teachers two or three times during the school year, and no one considered English as an important subject to study. I was the teacher from the first to the fifth grade in one school and from the third to the fifth grade in the other school and all my classes had a low level of competence. I started from the beginning in each single class and followed more or less the same syllabus from grade 1 to grade 5. I remember how the students were not used to a clear approach to language teaching: they had to work hard on the four communicative skills and in class and autonomously. As a teacher, I did my best to motivate and amuse them: lessons were full of songs, chants, sketches, role plays, music and art work together with grammar and written exercises (of course only from grade 3 to grade 5), listening to simple texts and reading easy short stories. Finally, there was a large change: the students started to love English and it soon

became their favourite school subject; their progress in English was constant and their parents were happy and grateful.

In this difficult context, drama represented a way out, especially with aggressive children and with those suffering from behavioural problems. These children were in one of my fifth classes and presented numerous problems: they did not pay attention to the lessons, they did not study, they enjoyed making fun of the teacher and of their classmates. I proposed that they work together on a drama project, King Arthur, and with my great surprise they accepted enthusiastically. We gave our theatrical performance at the beginning of June: it was a great success and those difficult children were my biggest pride. I went on for the next three years with drama projects in my fifth classes and the results I obtained were always satisfactory: the students not only improved in their language skills, but they also developed their social and cultural competences, were more tolerant and willing to cooperate and grew in self-consciousness and self-esteem.

Meanwhile I worked to increase the opportunities for my pupils to participate in different English language events: I organized the English Theatrino with the ACLE Association, a visit to the American Primary School at the American military base in Vicenza and I tried to propose five hours of language assistantship from Grade 4 to Grade 5 to the English Language Commission of the Comprehensive Institute. I devoted myself to creating a rich and positive linguistic environment. The Comprehensive Institute “L. Belludi” now has an active Foreign Language Board, of which I am the Coordinator, which organizes many kinds of events and activities in English and Spanish. In 2014, moreover, I founded the ETL (English Theatre Lab) for students aged 11-14, which now can be considered a focal point of the Foreign Language Board.



FIGURE 11: Military Base Primary School, Vicenza, 2014, Music lab (author's photo)



FIGURE 12: Military Base Primary School, Vicenza, 2014, Meeting a local teacher (author's photo)



FIGURE 13: Military Base Primary School, Vicenza, 2014, Gym (author's photo)



FIGURE 14: Military Base Primary School, Vicenza, 2014, Meeting a local teacher (author's photo)

3.2.2 Description of the Project

In June 2014 I decided that my future final classes were ready to face a new and more difficult theatrical challenge: it was time to revive *Romeo and Juliet*, the Shakespearian tragedy that I had performed four years before at Camisano Primary School. During that Summer, I received an interesting invitation from my supervisor Fiona Dalziel: knowing my passion for drama, a passion that we have in common, she asked me to participate with my classes in the 2014 *Shakespeare Festival* that the University of Padua was organizing to celebrate the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. I accepted with enthusiasm, also because I had already in mind to perform *Romeo and Juliet*, and this play was perfect for the occasion. I was excited, honoured and at the same time a little

worried as we were the only primary-middle school company among many high school and university groups. I knew I had to work a great deal to be up to that important event, and I started immediately to work at it. I worked to prepare the project to present to my head teacher: these kinds of projects, in fact, must be approved by the head teacher and by the teaching body. In September it was approved and with it the ETL (English Theatre Lab) was founded. In the following days I entered my classes and the ETL for a regional competition: “Europei non per un solo giorno.

The next step was to distribute the leaflet to all the final classes of the Primary Schools of the Institute and to all the Middle School classes to promote the project among students and families: 47 students enrolled in the drama project. It was a mixed group, with participants of different ages, different English levels, different nationalities and there were also two students with disabilities, one of them was an autistic boy. It was a stimulating group, which with its special and diverse abilities enriched me both humanly and professionally.

We met once a week, after school, starting from November 2013. The students were divided into two groups until February 2014 with an hour of lessons per group, and then in March 2014 the groups were joined to start with the rehearsals. The performance was given on 3 June 2014 at Camisano theatre, and it was such a success that we had to perform the show again a week later. Many people, in fact, came to watch the show from the University of Padua, as it was part of the 2014 Shakespeare Festival, the youngest company and one of the few that acted in English. As regards the regional contest “Europei non per un solo giorno”, the ETL won second prize, outrunning many high schools and middle schools.



FIGURES 15 & 16: Prize-giving ceremony of the contest “Europei non per un solo giorno” (author’s photos)

3.2.3 The Drama Lab: Approach and L2 Development

The approach generally adopted in the drama projects could be described as a “product-oriented approach”, as it is geared towards the final staging of the students’ public performance, which is viewed as one of the primary goals of the learning experience (Moody 2002). Yet one should also mention the process-oriented approach, one which focuses on the dramatic medium itself and, starting from the ideas of the students, arrives at a more informal and in-class performance. Moody (2002) writes of educational drama that includes both process-and product-oriented approaches; he believes that “Process and product approaches are not opposite ends of a spectrum that are mutually exclusive, nor is one approach superior to the other” (Moody 2002: 38). I would argue that my project aligns closely with Moody’s concept of educational drama. I believe that the product-oriented approach is very useful and effective in foreign language teaching and learning with primary school children. It is important, however, for them to work with a text based on their level of English, as this makes them feel safer and able to manage their roles. Children can thus include their personal experiences, emotions and their personality in the process of learning; as highlighted by many scholars (see for example Capra 2015) the emotional involvement of students is of utmost importance in the teaching and learning process.

Studying a text gives children the opportunity to enter another world: it needs to be carefully chosen by the teacher in view of their interests, and will be explored from a

historical, cultural and literary point of view. With *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, the students had the opportunity to learn about Shakespeare, Shakespearian theatre, the Globe, something about the historical period, the clothes of the time, and even some Shakespearian language. As regards the approaches adopted in the drama projects, they are typical of those used in acting training: drama games, role-plays, improvisations, mime games and then group work, pair work and peer tutoring. In *Romeo and Juliet* the lessons started with warm-up activities: imitating the movements proposed by a student, miming an individual (an old lady walking, a baby crying.), miming a group (a film star followed by journalists, cameras and fans); the students derived enjoyment from these activities. It should be noted that drama projects like the one described here require the use of the local language: primary school children, in fact, do not know enough English grammar and vocabulary to be able to propose an idea, to discuss a subject, to express their point of view in the target language.



FIGURES 17 & 18: Examples of warm-up activities (author's photos)



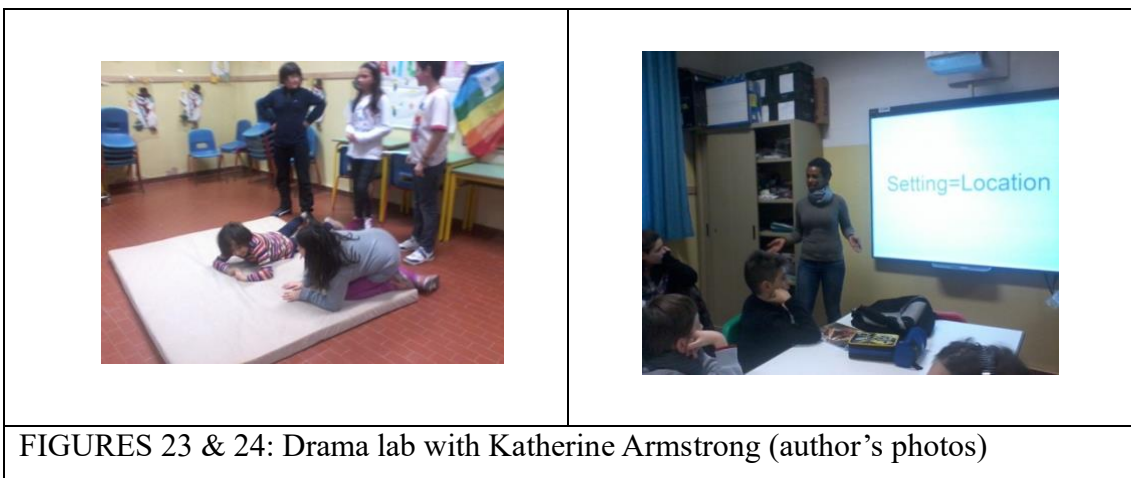
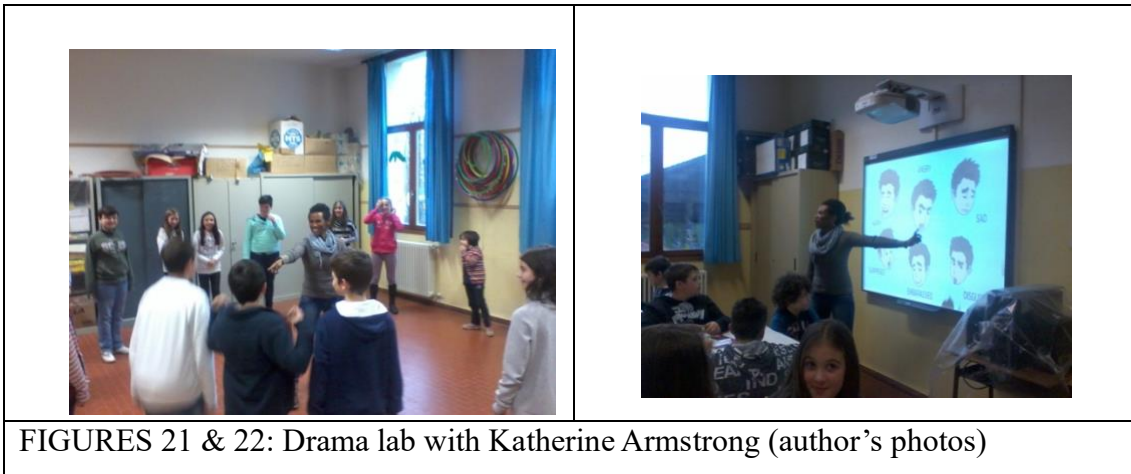
FIGURES 19 & 20: Examples of warm-up activities (author's photos)

After the warm-up activities, there was the study of the text: in the first two months every student was given the book “Romeo and Juliet” in the Black Cat Edition (2007), with the CD and the class listened to the story, read the book, translated the text and focused on the pronunciation. This was challenging especially thinking of the different levels of English of the students. Some of the youngest and the weakest of them found it quite difficult, but before starting the drama lab I had informed the students of these problems and they knew they had to help each other and to collaborate.

We ended the lessons with some games or we sang the songs we had to learn for the show: we were studying, in fact, Coccianti's songs of his *Romeo e Giulietta*. In January we watched Zeffirelli's film, discussed the feelings and emotions they found in it, tried to express them by creating some tableaux vivant or by using images that could convey the meaning the students wanted to give. I accepted the use of their native language when they had to express a difficult concept or a particular idea, because it was important for them not to live through this experience as something so hard as to stop them: there was the possibility they would give up trying to speak in English because of the lack of vocabulary or grammatical structures and I did not want this to happen. Yet I always encouraged them to try and speak in the target language as much as possible.

In February 2014 I gave out the roles for the English part of the performance as well as for the Italian part of the show and, as I explained in the previous chapter, this happened after a period of attentive observation of the students: their mood, their linguistic ability and even their physical appearance. As soon as everyone had a role, we started with the rehearsals: I gave them their script and we met once a week, in the afternoon, all together. This is usually the most amusing period of the year both for me and the participants, but I have to say it is also the most tiring one as I have to manage to keep the participants motivated and enthusiastic, helping them to overcome the difficulties they find in learning their lines or acting their characters.

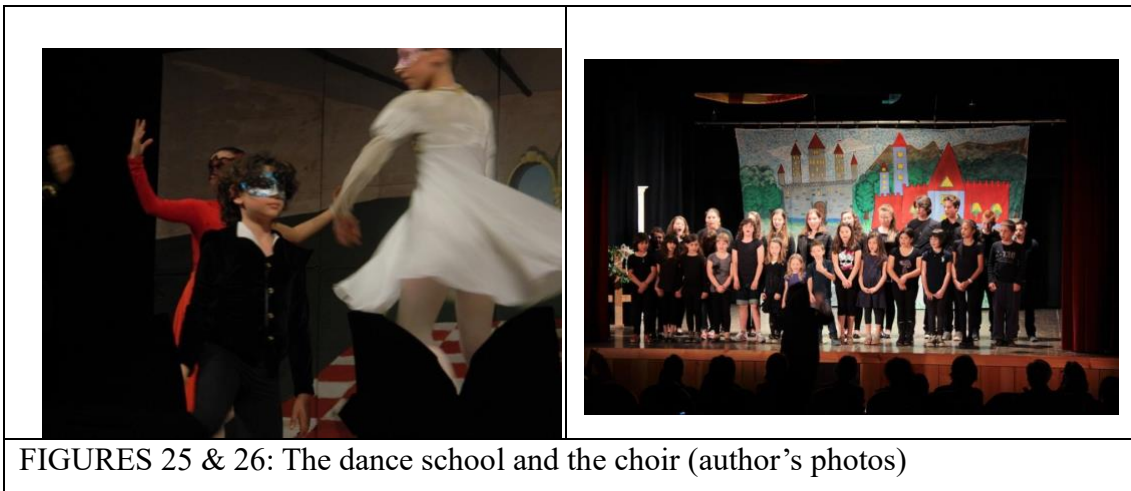
The development and strengthening of the foreign language was assigned to the native-speaker teacher Katherine Armstrong for a total of four hours for each group. She worked on the setting and on the feelings, helping the students to represent them using improvisational drama and role plays. She also worked on the text, focusing on intonation and pronunciation with the use of drama games such as greeting a friend you have not seen for a long time, a friend who is ill, someone you do not like, or someone you meet for the first time.



3.2.4 Involvement Of Parents And Local Artistic Resources

With this second drama lab, I wished to enrich the show with the artistic resources of the area, in particular with the school “Come and Dance” and with the “Little Choir” of the Comprehensive Institute where I work. I involved also the Art teacher of the Middle School for the scenery. The school Come and Dance had the task of representing the first

time Romeo met Juliet at the Capulet Ball and to amuse the audience during the short break before starting with Romeo and Juliet in Italian. The choir, instead, had a medieval song to perform towards the end of the ball. Moreover, both the Come and Dance school and the choir involved students of the schools of the Institute, so it was necessary to manage around a hundred students in all, including the 50 involved in the performance itself. The teachers of the dance school and the director of the choir helped in choosing and organizing their performance in the show and also with the rehearsals. This was to become a model for future drama lab projects, which would involve different artistic resources of the nearby area: dancing, singing and playing instruments add to the success of the show and give a greater number of students the chance to have a memorable experience, which otherwise they could not have had.



FIGURES 25 & 26: The dance school and the choir (author's photos)

It should be stressed how important it is to involve the parents in this kind of project: they are essential for the success of the show. As in any drama project, I brought together the staff also for this one, made up of very motivated and active members. There were those who were able to create beautiful costumes and adapt the ones we already had, thanks to the *contrada* of Camisano's medieval Palio, which lent us some of their beautiful clothes. Some parents used their free time to help in finding props and all kinds of objects we needed; others helped with the music and the lights; and grandparents created beautiful swords and shields. Moreover, parents help their children mothers to learn their children's scripts and during the rehearsals. The scenery, as mentioned above, was made by the Art teacher of the Middle School, together with her students: it was made of a "wall" of boxes,

each side painted with four different scenarios. During the show, her students, wearing black clothes, came on the stage to turn the boxes every time the location had to be changed. It was very effective, easy and quick. As regards my own roles and goals, they were, and still are, the same as those mentioned in the previous chapter. I will now go on to analyse the differences between the first and the second versions of *Romeo and Juliet*.

3.2.5 *Romeo and Juliet* 2010-2014: Similarities and Differences

There were many similarities and differences between these two performances. The first important point to highlight regards the participants, the students: in RJ10⁶ the actors were 5th-grade students, and I had been their English teacher since the 1st grade. They had, more or less, the same language level, they were of the same age, they knew me well and were used to my teaching approach. In short, I can say it was a homogeneous group. On the contrary, in RJ14 the participants came from my 5th-grade classes, but also from the 5th-grade classes of other schools and from the Middle School; among these Middle School students there were some I knew because I had been their primary school teacher, and some I did not know at all. Moreover they were of different ages (from 11 to 14), they had very different English levels, different learning skills because of their age and they had different social and cultural backgrounds. A significant number of them were not Italian: there were students from the East of Europe, from many African countries and from Albania. I had also an autistic boy and a girl with physical and learning disabilities. This mixed group was a great challenge. I reflected on how to motivate the youngest participants and the oldest ones at the same time, how the students with a very low English level could manage to work on quite a difficult text, how the most capable ones would react to a studying at a rhythm that was too slow for them. Thus there were many questions to answer and problems to solve.

“Respect” and “collaboration” were the two “magic” words I used in the first lesson of both the drama labs, but they were ideal for RJ14: I found a way to make them help each other with respect for the difficulties of the weakest students and they all tried to follow my teaching approach as well as they could. During the first two months of the drama lab, I saw the weakest students increase their English vocabulary at every new lesson, I

⁶To simplify: RJ10 = *Romeo and Juliet* 2010, RJ14 = *Romeo and Juliet* 2014

saw them become more aware of their talents and possibilities and participate in a more active way. The autistic boy was a surprise: he had a talent for the study of foreign languages, as his father was Italian and his mother Russian and he already spoke two languages. Most of the time he looked absent, he spoke to himself, looked out of the windows, sat silently in a corner, but when I called on him to act his role, he was always ready, he knew his part perfectly and was able to understand what he was saying so he tried to act his role properly also with the right gestures and face expressions. His results were a fundamental part of the project in question and reveal much about the use of drama with people with disabilities (see for example Piazzoli and Kubiak, 2019). The other students with disabilities, in spite of the physical difficulties that only allowed her to walk very slowly, dedicated herself to the study of her role with all her heart and all the other actors always helped her with patience. Sometimes she became angry or nervous because of the difficulties in memorizing her lines, but she never gave up. These two students set a good example to all of us: we learnt an important lesson from them and I felt that their participation in my drama lab had been a chance for everybody to grow up in sensitivity and empathy.

In both the drama labs I used the same script, but in RJ14 I worked first with the book “Romeo and Juliet” in the Black Cat Edition (2007) and this had a positive impact on the improvement of the students’ listening and reading skills, as well as their pronunciation, thanks to a full dramatic recording of the text. This book is, moreover, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s famous love story in an appealing cartoon format, and helped the students to understand the plot better and to learn new words and dramatic terms easily. It gave the students a variety of activities to help them to perform the play. This was the second great difference between the two drama labs.

When putting on the performance of RJ10, I did my job without thinking of a particular approach or theatrical strategy: everything came from creativity and spontaneity. In RJ14 the situation was completely different: I had already started my studies for this thesis and I had just learned about the process-oriented approach and the product-oriented approach, which I have already discussed. I had also learned something about improvisational theatre and the dramatic arts in general, so, in this drama lab, I was aware of the approach

I was adopted: predominantly a product-oriented one, but in which the process still played an important part.

The last great difference concerned the management of the staff and of the artistic groups: the presence of the parents was a similarity with the first Romeo and Juliet and also with all the other performances I had put on in previous years, so there were no problems in organizing them, whereas it was not so simple to work with the artistic groups. The biggest difficulty was to find days and times to rehearse together and sometimes they used the stage for a longer period than they were supposed to, giving rise to discontent. I always tried my best to keep harmony among us, also because I kept in mind they were working for the project free, without any kind of payment. The amount of work had doubled in comparison with RJ10 but it was worth the effort.



FIGURES 27 & 28: ROMEO AND JULIET 2014 (author's photos)



FIGURE 29: ROMEO AND JULIET 2014 (author's photo)

3.3 Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone – 2016

3.3.1 A Personal Narrative

In September 2015 I began another challenge: a drama lab based on the first Harry Potter book by J.K. Rowling, “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone”. I had been thinking about this project since the school year before, but I knew well the difficulties of performing a text with such a long plot and one full of action. In the summer of 2015, I wrote an adaptation of the text, trying to make it shorter and easier to study and as soon as I finished it, I presented the project to my head teacher and to the teaching body: it was approved very quickly.

I was somewhat concerned about the complexity of this new drama project: not only did I have to deal with the participants in the lab, but also with the Middle School Orchestra and its teachers. I chose, in fact, to involve the musical department at the Middle School, so as to include the Harry Potter soundtrack. The music teachers agreed with my proposal with enthusiasm and started immediately to teach the most famous tunes of the film to their students. The orchestra consisted of violinists, guitar players, pianists, flute players and a pair of drummers: in all there were around thirty students. As I had done with the drama labs in previous years, I also involved the artistic resources of the area: two dance schools and a secondary school choir, which I will discuss in the next section.

At the end of September 2015, I distributed the leaflet to all the 5th-grade classes of the Primary Schools of the Institute and to all the Middle School classes in order to promote the project among students and families: 49 students enrolled on the drama project. It was a mixed group, with participants of different ages, different English levels, different nationalities and different talents. The organization of the course was the same as that of the previous drama labs: we met once a week in the afternoon, after school, starting from November 2015. The students were divided into two groups until February 2016 with an hour-long lesson per group. In March 2016 the groups were joined to start with the rehearsals. The performance took place on 7th June in Campodarsego Alta Forum Theatre, which was chosen because of its seating capacity and the width of the stage. The search for a suitable theatre was a great problem as, in the area, very few of them were

big enough to host approximately 200 artists including actors, singers, dancers and musicians. Another great difficulty was to find sponsors to pay for the theatre, the services, the materials for the sceneries, the wigs, the costumes and many other props we needed for the show, as we had no funding from the school. Many parents were of great help in finding sponsors and money that enabled us to go on with the project, and moreover the families of my drama lab participants decided to contribute 10 euros per child.

As Armstrong (2019: 40) points out referring to this afterschool English theatre workshop and the previous drama projects: “Some of the weaknesses include that the school administration and local agencies do not finance this initiative and often show little interest in what is being done” . The approach and the techniques adopted in Harry Potter are described below.



FIGURES 30 & 31: Altaforum Theatre in Campodarsego: visiting for the first time; checking the opening video and the sound. (author's photos)

3.3.2 Description of the Drama Course

In the Harry Potter workshop, as in those of previous years, I started my lessons with warm up activities such as drama games and improvisation (see Chapter Two): for example I would improvise a scene and the students would join in one by one in a role, until the whole scene took on a life on its own. Participants also engaged in defining space games, where they had to move while performing an action, taking into account their perception of space and the relationship between context and action. Sometimes we did

warm-up exercises to strengthen the voice and breathing (see Chapter Two). After the warm-up activities we moved on to the study of the text: the students were given a script based on the book by J.K. Rowling, but simplified and shortened, as mentioned above. We read the text together, translated it and focused on the pronunciation. During this phase of the project, I always try to make the students read and translate the text, just to keep them concentrated and “awake”. It is the least active and engaging part of the lesson for most of them, but it is also the phase in which they learn a large number of lexical items and grammatical structures, but in a communicative context (see Chapter One). Students with a low level of English may find themselves in difficulties in this part of the workshop and, usually, two or three of them decide to leave the drama group. When this happens I question whether I have done enough to strengthen their self-confidence or to help them to overcome their difficulties. We concluded the lessons with some games or by trying to act out short parts taken from the text studied during the day. Some scenes were perfect to be used with *tableaux vivants* (see for example, Schewe and Woodhouse, 2018): the zoo scenes were extremely amusing with students miming animals around Harry Potter, who stands still, looking at the snake. Another scene was the one representing the fear of the Dursleys and the surprise of Harry when Hagrid appears on the threshold of the cottage, but there were also many more scenes performed by the children.

At the beginning of the drama lab, in November 2015, we watched the film as there were some students who did not know the story. I asked them to observe carefully the behaviour of the main characters: how they moved, their facial expressions, their use of the voice and so on. We also paid attention to the music of the film able to make us feel a variety of emotions: excitement, fear, anxiety, compassion, joy, hilarity. In February 2016 I distributed the roles for the show: as I have already explained in the previous chapters, this happens after a period of attentive observation of the students, their moods, their linguistic ability and even their physical appearance. As soon as everyone had a role, we started with the rehearsals: I gave them their script and we met once a week, in the afternoon, all together. This is often the phase of the drama project which provides the facilitator with most satisfaction: I see my students working hard week after week; I see them improving their English levels but above all their self-confidence and self-esteem;

I see them blossoming into talented young girls and boys. Of course it is not easy all the way: I have to keep them motivated and enthusiastic, helping them to overcome the difficulties they find in learning their lines or acting their characters, facing the different personalities of other actors; I have to teach them to be tolerant, understanding and respectful towards their schoolmates.



FIGURES 32 & 33: Harry Potter rehearsals (author's photos)

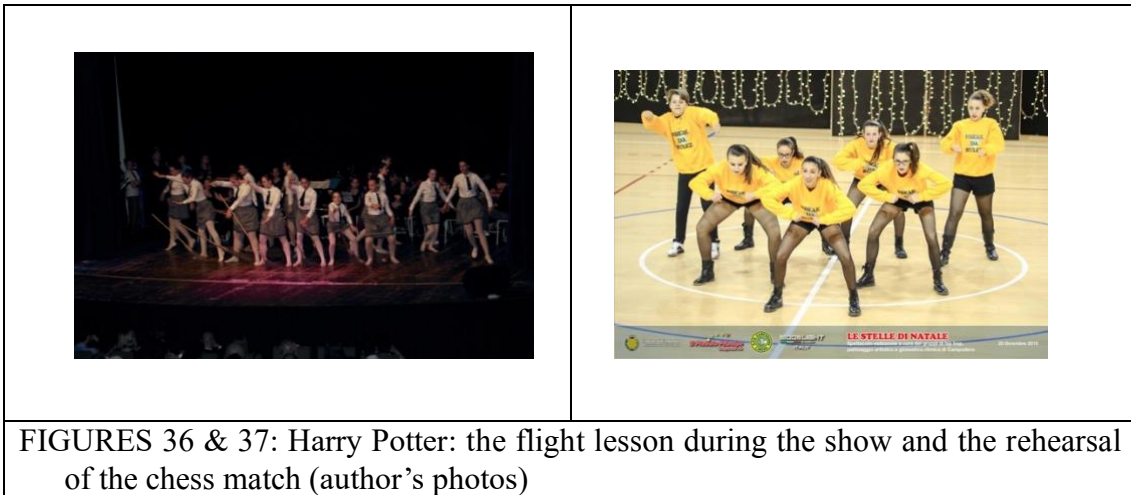


FIGURES 34 & 35: Harry Potter rehearsals (author's photos)

3.3.3 Involvement of Parents and Local Artistic Resources

The artistic resources of the area and the involvement of the parents were key factors in this huge project. After “Romeo and Juliet 2014” I realized the importance of such a contribution for the success of the show and for this reason I chose two dance schools: *Come and Dance* and *Break da Rulez*. The first one is a modern dance school, very famous

in the area of the school and I knew well its value as it also participated in “Romeo and Juliet 2014”. The second one was a small hip hop dance school that I particularly wanted in the show because of the energy and creativity of the dance teacher. I entrusted them with scenes which were very difficult to act and at the same time very important for the plot: the flight lesson, the Quidditch match, the chess match and the final fight between Harry and Voldemort. In the end, the choreography was able to thrill the audience and recreate the magic of the book.



Dancing was not the only form of art I decided to include in the drama workshop: I also invited the school choir “Meucci Fanoli” from Cittadella. The choir had to sing two very touching songs: “Double trouble” and “In Noctem”. The main purpose of the songs was to save time for the changing of the scenes, but they had also the aim of entertaining the audience and providing some light relief during the show. The Middle School Orchestra was entrusted with all the musical moments in different parts of the performance and, of course, had the role of accompanying the choir.



FIGURE 38: Harry Potter: The Meucci Fanoli choir and the Belludi orchestra
(author's photo)

Music, dance and theatre are components of Arts Education (see for example Piazzoli and Dalziel, forthcoming), and have the power to enhance self-esteem, to increase the spontaneity of the child and his/her capability of risk-taking. Arts Education celebrates what is “different”, what is able to convey emotions, feelings, creativity. In the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) it is affirmed that “Arts Education is integral to Primary Education” and that arts activity can be considered the following

a focus for social and cultural development and enjoyment in school...Educational drama is a creative process that provides children with a wide range of valuable learning experiences. It is improvisational in nature and involves every aspect of the child's personality: spiritual, moral, emotional, intellectual, imaginative, and physical. The essence of the drama is its imaginative context. In the enactment of a story about characters in certain circumstances, at some particular time and in some particular situation, children can explore conflicts, issues, consequences, attitudes, emotions, concerns and preoccupations in a unique way (Primary School Curriculum, 1999: 54)

I would argue that all of the arts can be used in drama projects: dance and music, the visual arts and literature. The Choir and the dance schools provided dancing and singing, the orchestra music, while I was focused on the literary text and on acting, and the visual arts were all placed in the hands of the parents of the participants.

As in all the previous drama projects, I created my staff for this one with the difference that it was the largest that I had ever had: the show was becoming a colossus and I needed help to manage more than one hundred and fifty boys and girls, dance teachers, music teachers, school colleagues and so on. For this reason I appointed a staff manager, Mrs. Jessica Maggiolo, mother of one of the students, with the task of organizing all the other parents and dealing with my engagements. I placed parents in different working groups: there were seamstresses and model designers, parents looking for props, helping with the music, the lights, the sounds and trying to engage inexpensive technical services, drawing set designs, creating magic wands and every kind of object we needed. I had also a group of parents with the task of studying their children's scripts to help me during the rehearsals: while I was supervising a scene, listening to and looking at the actors, they looked for and prepared the students for the scenes to come. I then decided, with an expert parent, to create an introductory video to play before the performance, while the audience were taking their places. In this video there was a brief presentation of every group and teacher involved in the show. It was very much appreciated.

The staff manager helped in finding a suitable theatre, because we needed a very large one. All this had a price and we had no financial help from the school administration and we had to pay for the theatre, the technical services, the materials we used for the scenery, the wigs, the costumes and many other things. The members of the staff did their best to find sponsors and, in the end, they persuaded a quite number of shops, companies and even one bank.

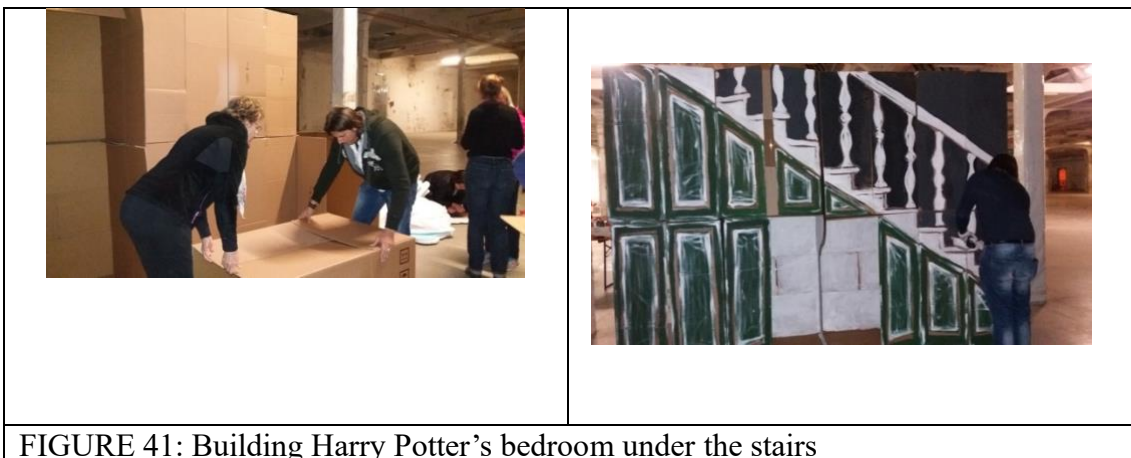


FIGURE 41: Building Harry Potter's bedroom under the stairs

(author's photo)



FIGURES 42 & 43: The Quidditch Tower and the scenery
(author's photo)

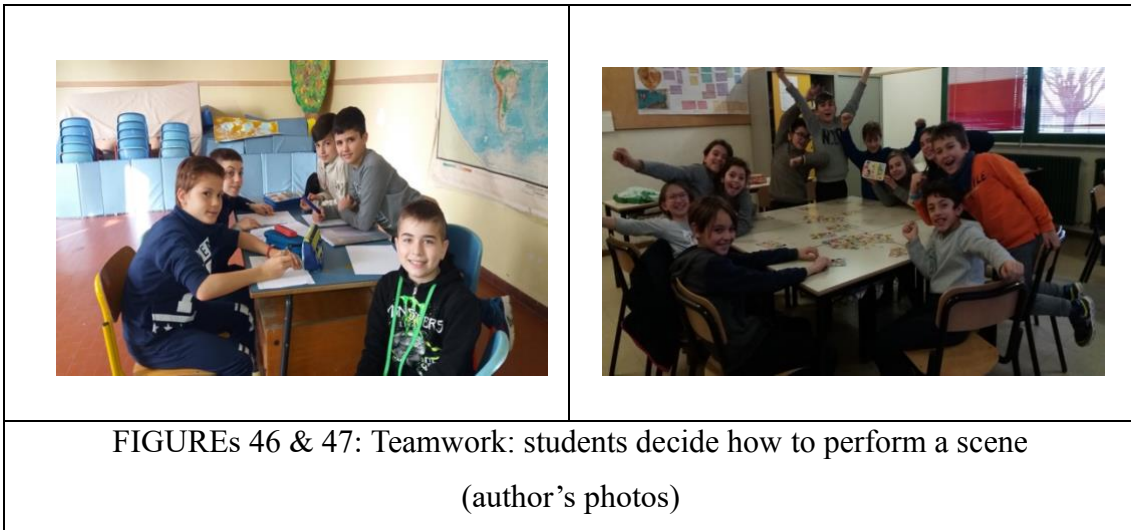


FIGURES 44 & 45: Introductory video and leaflet
(author's photos)

3.3.4 Role and Goals

My role as “director” was put to the test with this drama lab: I had never had so many people to organize, to motivate, to help, and exercises and activities to plan. I was also the director of the staff group with the difference that, this time, I had Mrs. Jessica Maggiolo, my staff manager. She was very helpful all year long: parents knew they had to rely first of all on her, knowing that she could take some decisions on her own and that she was always in contact with me. With regard to the goals I wished to achieve with this theatre lab, I have to say they are the same as those discussed in chapter 2.2 of this thesis: to create motivation, to broaden my pupils’ cultural horizons, to foster their abilities and discover their talents and, of course, to improve their English skills. Team-working and

cooperative learning were important goals I attempted to achieve with my students as well and we carried out many different activities to help them learn how to work together and to respect each other. One of the team working activities they like best were the games in which they had to imagine a situation and think how to play the scene involving all the members of the group. My only role was to give them the context (for instance a magic class, a Quidditch match, the forbidden forest) and to give my help when needed. With this kind of activity the students learn not only to work together, but also to listen carefully, communicate clearly and think creatively. Working in groups gave them the opportunity to get to know each other, to build up trust as a team and, of course, to have fun.



Drama, through team-working and cooperative learning, allows participants to include their personal experiences, emotions and their personality into the process of learning and this is a great advantage. The involvement of students and their participation are essential aspects of the learning process, as seen in previous projects. Harry Potter received a merit award in Venice in 2017 in the “Europeans not for just one day” competition and as with Romeo and Juliet several newspaper articles appeared in the press (Appendix).

3.4 The Heart of Africa – 2018

3.4.1 Description of the Project

The year 2018 was the 50th anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, so I decided to perform something to celebrate this great man and his fight for black people's rights. I

discussed the idea with Dr. Katherine Armstrong, the English native speaker teacher that always collaborates with me, and she was so enthusiastic about this idea that she herself wrote a text for the project. “The Heart of Africa” tells the story of a young boy who lives in a little village in Ghana. One day he is kidnapped by slaveholders and sold in the United States, where he begins his battle for the rights of slaves and their liberation. The descendants of the protagonist will intertwine with the figures of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King.

We were keen to work together one more time and began immediately to plan the activities and to think about the artistic resources of the area to involve. Meanwhile, as usual, I presented the project to my head teacher and to the teaching body: it was approved in September 2017 and at the end of the month I distributed the leaflet to all the final classes of the Primary Schools of the Institute and to all the Middle School classes to promote the project: 43 students enrolled in the drama lab. I then invited the dance school Come and Dance, with which I had achieved a good level of cooperation as it had taken part in all the English Theatre Lab (ETL) projects, while Dr. Armstrong suggested to ask a famous local gospel choir - US United Singers - to participate in the show.

I then divided the students into two groups: each of them had children of different ages, different nationalities and different levels of English. The organization of the course was the same as that of the other drama labs: we met once a week in the afternoon, after school, starting from November 2017. Because of our lack of knowledge of African traditions, games, typical costumes and way of living of the historic period in which the story took place, Katherine Armstrong and I had to dedicate our spare time to the research and study of all the material we could find about Ghana. Singing Zimbolè, a typical African song, became our routine at the beginning of every lesson, but we also found games to play with the students, typical African stories, activities about costumes and face painting and the meaning of colours for African people.

During the period of the study of the text, the students attended a four-hour workshop with Katherine Armstrong about African stories and traditions. She told them two stories: “Anansi and the pot of beans” and “Anansi goes to lunch”. They listened to the stories and watched the cartoons and then they were divided into groups to draw different parts

of the stories to build a book. To do this, the students had to read their parts of the story, to understand the global meaning, to discuss what to draw, how to colour the drawing and who would explain it in front of their classmates. They created two beautiful books, which I still use at school. Katherine Armstrong, during another workshop, asked the students to join different groups and they had to choose a name for each group , also drawing a symbol. She had previously explained the different meaning of each colour, so that the students paid attention to the colours they had to choose for their logo. We then distributed among the groups some African costumes we had borrowed from friends and the students had to wear them and to paint their faces using their logos. It was very interesting to observe how creative they were and how much they enjoyed this activity. After that, one boy or girl per group had to illustrate and explain the name and the logo they had invented. These two experiences were of great impact on the enrichment of the students' cultural horizons and the strengthening of their English levels, demonstrating once again how, as argued in Chapter One, Arts Education is an indispensable and complementary teaching tool in Primary foreign language learning.



FIGURES 48 & 49: Drawings for the Anansi books of, created by students during Mrs. Katherine Armstrong's workshop.
(author's photos)



FIGURES 50 & 51: Katherine Armstrong's cultural workshop
(author's photos)



FIGURES 52 & 53: Katherine Armstrong's cultural workshop
(author's photos)

In March 2018 the groups were joined to start with the rehearsals. This period of the year is the one students like the best because they finally have the chance to test themselves, to gain self-esteem, to create bonds of friendship and, of course, to have fun. More or less it is the same for me and my staff, but it is also a very tiring period, as we have to find sponsors and organize all we need for the performance. The show was staged on the 6th June 2018 in Camisano Teatro Cinema Lux, which was big enough to host the actors, the dancers and the singers.

In the end, I would like to highlight that “The Heart of Africa” received a European recognition in the context of “Educitizen”, an Erasmus + partnership among Portugal, Poland, Finland, Germany, Turkey and Italy. The focus of the program, financed by the European Commission, was to explore “smart practices” in the use of participatory methods and in citizenship in teaching activities in order to create a European best

practices manual: “Transferring participation into education means to educate self-aware citizens, who are open to new ideas, cultures and concepts and who are willing to form and influence actively their society. Therefore it was beneficially to create curricula, which had a European perspective on citizenship and participation” (Educitizen, S.M.A.R.T. Practices for Civic Education, 2019: 5). Katherine Armstrong presented our theatre project in Finland, for Italy, achieving great success: our project is now included in the European manual (2019 : 37-41).

3.4.2 Description of the Drama Course

As argued in Chapter One, the involvement of the students and their participation are essential aspects of the learning process, and they can be involved at many levels, through their bodies, minds, emotions, language and social interaction. For this reason, each lesson of the drama labs included warm-up activities, the reading and translation of the text in groups, theatre games and songs. The different personalities of the students, and the previous experiences some of them had had with past drama labs are always of great help in creating a lively, interesting and fruitful learning environment.

As already described above, the organization of this course followed the same pattern as the other ones: we started with the study of the text, and after having assigned the roles, with the rehearsals. The groups were very heterogeneous: there were 10-year old children and many teens from the middle school, there were very different levels of English and participants from Africa countries, China and eastern European countries such as Romania and Albania. We met once a week in the theatre room of the middle school, in the afternoon. In this phase of the project, students were engaged in a variety of drama activities and techniques, through which they explored their skills and ideas, often facing important social issues such as slavery and racism for the first time. “The Heart of Africa” proved to be a challenging text for them and provided opportunities for the development of critical thinking and deep learning.



FIGURES 54 & 55: The Heart of Africa – rehearsals (author’s photos)

3.4.3 Social Issues: Slavery and Racism in the Eyes of Young Learners

Young people’s awareness of cultural differences and racism begins quite early in their life, and parents or caregivers should begin talking about issues such as racism before a child enters primary school. Schools, in collaboration with families, have an important role to play in fostering young children’s positive identities. “The Heart of Africa” turned out to be an important source of information on racism and slavery and gave students the opportunity to discuss these social issues, still so present in our society today. The cultural and artistic lab they attended in Katherine Armstrong’s class was a first step to understand that knowing diverse cultural resources can be an important enrichment in our lives and can reduce the distance between people of different cultures. As we proceeded with the study of the text, the children had the opportunity to talk about slavery and racism in a deeper way, asking questions and explaining their points of view. Some of them were reluctant to talk about these issues and it was clear they had many prejudices against black people, but they did not have the courage to discuss this issue openly.

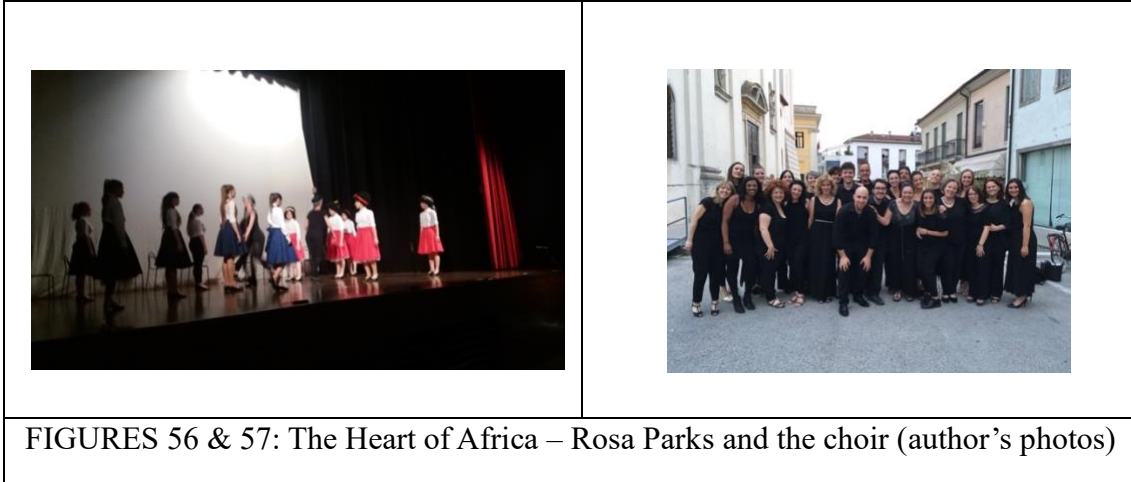
Having noticed this, we tried to help them understand the tragedy and extreme cruelty of slavery and racism by asking all the students to act the role of the slave during the rehearsals. As soon as they finished acting the new role, I asked the group to disclose their emotions and to explain what they were feeling in the role of a slave. The students were taught that the transatlantic slave trade was the largest example of forced migration in history and undeniably one of the most inhumane. This highlights an important role of drama in relation to social justice issues. By stepping into a role, the impact can be far

greater than simply learning about something, and can enhance feelings of empathy. As Aiden (2010: 93) stresses: “Changing a point of view leads to empathy, as we must put ourselves in someone else’s place, whilst consciously remaining ourselves”. The extensive exodus of Africans spread to many areas of the world over a 400 year period and was unprecedented in the annals of recorded human history. We watched also two videos : Martin Luther King “I have a dream” and “Razzismo: la storia di Rosa Parks”, as they were two of our characters.

At the end of this impactful educational path, I found that some of the students had made a personal journey through their prejudices and had changed their mind and their attitude: this was a great achievement. In this period, more than ever, it is important to raise awareness among young people about social inclusion and intercultural dialogue. Only in this way, can they act as agents of social change, learning to accept and include every type of diversity. As Freebody and Finneran (2013: 47) underline, drama is a powerful means of “teaching for and about social justice”.

3.4.4 Involvement of Parents and Artistic Resources

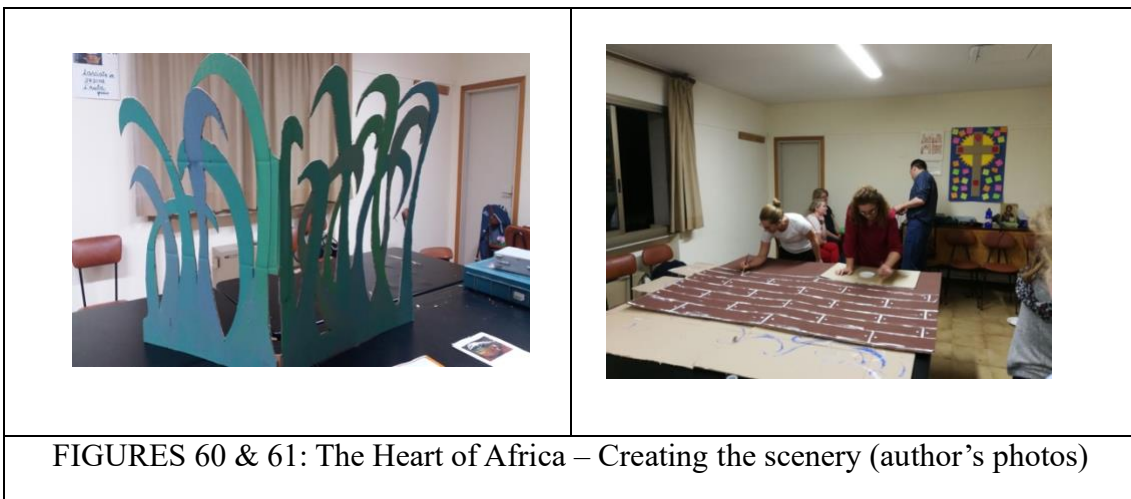
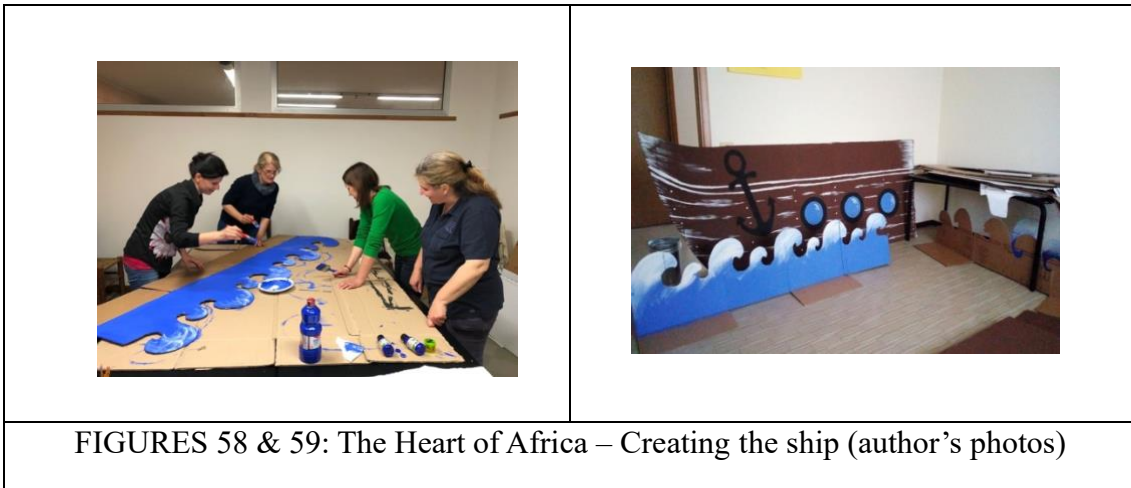
As already mentioned above, the school dance Come and Dance and the Gospel choir US United Singers were the artistic resources involved in this drama lab. The dance school performed three dances: the capture of the young people in the African village; the hard work of the slaves in the cotton plantations; and the scene with Rosa Parks in the bus. As usual, their contribution was of great impact for the audience, lightening the show and helping to represent the most difficult scenes. The same happened with the choir: it performed five Gospel and African songs, with great success due to the high professionalism of its singers, managing to move people to tears or inviting the audience to clap their hands keeping the rhythm. Once again, the artistic resources of the area proved to be of great enrichment and help in the realization of a theatrical performance, which attempted to include as many forms of the arts as possible: acting, singing and dancing. In addition, everything was aimed at the learning and strengthening of the target language.



The involvement of parents plays an indispensable role for the success of a primary school drama lab for many different reasons: first of all the school does not have enough funds to invest in this kind of activity and the parents are often the only resource to ask for help with the costumes, the props, the lights, the sound and all that is necessary to produce a theatrical performance. Another important advantage is that the participants are usually secretly proud and happy of the involvement of their parents, because it is a special way to spend time of great value together. This may be difficult nowadays and children need emotional experiences of great impact with their parents and carers to imprint memories in life and grow harmoniously and self-confident. Being involved at school allows parents, then, to obtain first-hand information about the learning environment and demonstrate to their children that education is important: this can lead to an improvement of students’ behaviour, attendance and achievement.

As with the past drama labs described above, I created a group of staff and enrolled parents in different working groups. I also helped an expert parent in creating the introductory video, to play before the performance, to present the ETL drama lab and the artistic resources involved in the show. I had some difficulties in finding the right place for the rehearsals but, above all, we needed a place where parents could work in groups on the biggest scenery, such as the ship or the market stalls. The staff was decisive in finding the right place: they obtained the help of Tremignon, a small village near Piazzola, thanks to the concession of the parish priest. Every day, from the end of April till June 2018, this place became a creative forge and full of life: in the evenings there were parents

drawing and painting, others cutting and sewing, building the main structure of the ship and the market stalls or organizing the lights and the sounds, helping in the search for the most appropriate music and videos to use in the show. In the afternoons there were the rehearsals with the children and the dancers, which required great effort to have all under control, but also here the staff revealed itself to be indispensable! In conclusion, I can say that the parents, who helped with this drama lab, as well all the other drama labs I directed, totally devoted themselves to this experience of collaboration between the school and the families, so that the show and the theatrical experience of their children could succeed in the best possible way.



3.5 Concluding remarks

In conclusion to this chapter, some final considerations can be made, especially regarding the social and personal growth of the students through theatre, as observed in the performances described. The details will be analyzed in the conclusion of this thesis, but can be briefly mentioned here. As Aden (2010) affirms, the projects' objectives, which are also present in my workshops, can be interpreted from a dual perspective: the use of theatre for personal development; and the use of theatre for social development. While the first point primarily concerns the students, the second is more the responsibility of the teacher, who must be capable of analyzing theatrical techniques and effective methods for integrating new immigrants, or students arriving from different schools, knowing nobody. This involves recognizing and analyzing good practices applicable to both formal and informal education. In my case, there has never been a need to integrate new immigrants, as the foreign-origin students who participated in the courses were already well integrated both in school and in the community. To say the truth I definitely agree with Aden (2010) when she says that the language of theatre, transcending physical, emotional and mental boundaries, emerges as an ideal tool to address these challenges and provide answers to such issues, if necessary, and should always be kept in mind. On the other hand, the personal and social development of my students during my theatrical workshops has been significant and closely resembles what Aden (2010) describes. The students, in fact, were able to enhance their communication skills and autonomy within a diversified society, such as that of a mixed theatrical group. They could recognize and seek to understand the diverse cultural identities of their peers, coming from Africa or Eastern European countries, as seen in *The Heart of Africa*. The use of theatrical language allowed them to explore relationships with the surrounding environment and others, fostering self-esteem and a positive attitude towards learning a foreign language.

Moreover, we have seen how important cooperation during theatre workshops is: here the goal is not to find the right answer but to examine, assess and agree upon the most suitable response as a group. This attitude leads to the formation of personal opinions, learning to make decisions, to take risks and to react in improvised situations. Learners also develop the ability to control their own emotions and feelings, accepting the emotions of their peers, and communicating with empathy (Aden, 2010). They learn to recognize new

emotions, such as those encountered in *Romeo and Juliet*, some of which they can identify with, while others may be distant from their own feelings.

Through theatre, the young participants have a valuable opportunity for personal growth within a community that, while protected, is rich in diversity and presents small challenges. This experience helps them become conscious of their role in real life, fostering not only individual development but, more importantly, the ability to collaborate as citizens, embracing diversity and empathizing with others. In summary, dramatization becomes a means to understand and face life.

Conclusion

In light of what has emerged from the description and evaluations of my drama workshops, I will try, in this concluding section, to outline the strengths and weaknesses of my work, highlighting not only the educational value of using theatre in teaching and learning a foreign language but, above all, its value in terms of personal and social growth of the students. I will delve into two issues that are particularly important to me and that have almost always emerged during my workshops, namely: the presence of mixed groups concerning linguistic skills and the age of the participants, the inclusion of students with disabilities or learning and behavioral problems; the cultural issues that emerged primarily from *The Heart of Africa* and the generational conflict found in *Romeo and Juliet*.

As I have already said in the third section of this thesis, I had many different goals to reach through my drama workshops and the most important one was that of creating a real and exciting motivation towards the study of the language. Harmer (2007:51) defines motivation as “some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something”. I can confidently state that the first objective has been fully achieved because my students consistently maintained high motivation towards the foreign language, feeling engaged in something exhilarating and perhaps beyond individual capabilities, but entirely attainable by working as a group, thanks to drama and its ability to entertain, engage, evoke emotions, and educate.

My second goal was to demonstrate that the learners could improve their English proficiency through a primarily product-oriented drama workshop, incorporating activities that would also enhance their communicative skills through process drama. This improvement was intended to occur within a mixed group of participants with varying ages, different levels of language proficiency, and diverse cognitive abilities, including children with disabilities. Certainly, this was not an insignificant objective, considering that studies conducted in this field, particularly in these situations, involving primary school and early middle school children, are quite limited. The scientific literature in the

theatrical field is much more extensive for high school or university students. I believe I have achieved the goal I set for myself, as the improvement in the students' language skills and beyond has been notable.

As we have already seen in Chapter Two of this thesis, drama-based teaching and learning can be classified into small-scale and large-scale forms, and I firmly believe that they are not in contrast with each other but rather complementary. Their combination in drama pedagogy is an additional strength that suits the age, developmental characteristics, and cognitive abilities of primary and middle school children. Drama pedagogy considers drama-based teaching and learning not only as a science but also as an art, creating unique insights and learning opportunities.

Performative foreign language teaching aims to integrate various forms of art, such as theatre, music, visual art, dance, literature and film into language teaching and learning. It seeks dialogue and exchange between the arts and traditional disciplines associated with language education. The goal is to create a new approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes aesthetic expression, including the pleasure and playfulness of language and the interaction between language, body, sound, word, sentence and movement (Schewe, 2013). This is precisely what I tried to do by involving local artistic forces, incorporating music, singing, visual art and dancing into my performances: these are art forms that have undoubtedly added an extra dimension to the theatrical performance and allowed many more students to have such a highly formative experience, which they still remember with great emotion today. Compared to my early experiences in theatre workshops, where there was no involvement of other art forms, I must say that the positive energy they brought to the group was noteworthy. My students quickly developed a sense of wonder and respect for their peers who were dancers, singers, or musicians, and they felt like active participants, fully engaged in an artistic environment that became a veritable forge of young talents in the making.

Handling such a heterogeneous group, all by myself, was not an easy task. The majority of the participants in the workshops had been my students in primary school. They were familiar with my teaching method, having experienced classroom dramatizations or ETL

workshops in previous instances. However, for other students, I was a new teacher, just as they were new to me. While I was well-acquainted with the linguistic competence of my former students, I knew nothing about the language skills of these new children. They often arrived with significantly limited linguistic abilities, indicating that they would have to exert much more effort to keep up with the majority of the group.

Overcoming the initial two months of the workshop, where the focus was primarily on text study, proved to be the biggest challenge for these learners. I cannot deny that, despite my attempts to lighten the load with the typical dramatic conventions of process drama, there were one or two children in every theatre workshop who withdrew. I perceived their withdrawal as a personal failure, unable to convince them to persist, feeling that I had not engaged them in the right way, and it was always a great disappointment. This often happened because the enrolment in the theatre workshop for these children had been decided by their parents, and it was not a choice shared with them. It was, therefore, likely that they would not continue. As a voluntary extracurricular course, it was crucial for the students to be aware of and agree to undertake this commitment, especially since it was aimed at a final performance in front of an audience. Finding ourselves a month away from the performance without one of the main characters or any other participant meant several role and dialogue changes for many course participants. For this reason, during the course presentation, I insisted on telling parents not to force their children to participate if they did not wish to. Unfortunately, in some cases, this advice was not heeded.

In any case, within a couple of months, even the children with weaker linguistic abilities managed to catch up and made significant progress in both language comprehension and communication. The period of text study consistently improved the participants' reading skills, especially with role readings, where each character had to read their parts, trying to do so with the appropriate expression, indicating a profound understanding of the written text. Moments of text study in mixed groups allowed older students to assist younger ones, who felt more comfortable in a peer-tutoring situation. In summary, I can conclude the analysis of this point by stating that the mixed group within a theatre course,

despite the initial challenges that may arise, should be considered an asset for the young learners. Besides helping each other, they also manage to forge lasting friendships.

However, as seen in the third chapter, within these mixed groups of young aspiring actors, there were also students with cognitive and physical disabilities. Before analysing their presence and the results they were able to achieve, it is important to briefly review the laws that have led to the current situation in Italy. There has always been a situation of discrimination against individuals with intellectual disabilities in education, both in Western and non-Western societies. Traditionally labelled as "non-educable", individuals with intellectual disabilities were often excluded from mainstream education. This exclusionary approach was driven by stereotypes, and such individuals were either kept at home or, in extreme cases, abandoned (Piazzoli and Kubiak, 2019).

In Italy, a pivotal moment occurred with the 1975 Falcucci Document, placing the Italian school system ahead of its time by establishing the right for all children with disabilities to receive education tailored to their abilities. Law 517/1977 further advanced this by eliminating separate classes, requiring the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classes with no more than 20 students, supported by specialized teachers and additional assistance based on state and local competencies. The 1987 C.C. No. 215 extended the right to school integration to all students, including those in high schools. Law 104/1992 was a cornerstone law addressing disability rights and children's right to education. While subsequent guidelines and decrees, including the 2019 update, followed, these were notably significant⁷.

Despite these advances, persistent myths surrounding Second Language (L2) learning and students with disabilities remain. In many educational settings, the practice of exempting pupils with intellectual disabilities from L2 lessons persists, and the discussion extends to the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities, such as dyspraxia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and dyslexia, in the process of learning a foreign language. Contrary to prevailing myths, contemporary research suggests that having a disability does not inherently hinder second language acquisition. The focus shifts to the

⁷ <https://www.disabili.com/>

affective factors associated with learning, which can either impede or facilitate second language acquisition. While most studies involve non-disabled learners, Piazzoli and Kubiak (2019) express interest in how embodiment, or using the body, affects students with intellectual disabilities in learning a second language. Limited research is available on this, but studies on drama's impact on individuals with various disabilities in their first language are considered. For example, drama can benefit individuals with Asperger syndrome, and there have been similar findings with autistic students. These studies use process drama, a method where the outcome is discovered during the exploration (Piazzoli and Kubiak, 2019).

In the 2014 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, I had the opportunity to witness the benefits that theatre can bring to students with disabilities. One of the autistic students, G., enrolled in the course. Despite facing challenges, he was remarkably proficient in foreign languages, as his mother was Russian, and his father was Italian. G., a bright and articulate student, often tended to isolate himself, both at school and in the theatre. He engaged in self-talk, stared out of the window, remained on the side-lines, seemingly unaffected by the noise. However, when it was his turn to practice his part, he was always ready, with a profound understanding of the lines he spoke, displaying great expressiveness. He identified strongly with the character he portrayed, delivering a performance that was both moving and captivating. I assigned him the role of the Prince of Verona, one of the protagonists in Shakespeare's tragedy, and he excelled in the part. G. never missed a class, willingly participated in warm-up exercises and process drama activities, depending on his mood and comfort. I never wanted to push him; instead, I preferred that he felt free to participate when he desired. This approach persisted throughout the course, and his accomplishments remain one of the most significant sources of satisfaction in my teaching career.

In the same production, there was also a girl with physical and cognitive disabilities. She dedicated herself wholeheartedly to studying her part and was delighted with the opportunity given to her. Her classmates offered considerable assistance and support, and in the end, she performed to the best of her abilities. While G. and this girl represent the most notable success stories in terms of educational and linguistic development through

theatre, many other children with dyslexia, behavioural disorders, extreme shyness, and insecurity have benefited from drama. They underwent significant personal and linguistic transformations, blossoming into more confident individuals with unexpected talents.

The second significant issue I would like to reflect on concerns the cultural themes that can emerge through drama, often prompting students to face up to their prejudices or perceptions regarding certain subjects. While not reducing drama practice to a mere political tool, it is emphasized that enabling students to explore other cultures through language and culture is an effective way to foster mutual acceptance and respect, aligning with EU efforts to combat xenophobia. Applied drama techniques offer a valuable means to acquaint language learners with other perspectives and cultures. Drama-based language classes tend to foster group dynamics more effectively than traditional language courses. Additionally, literary texts in foreign languages are rich in linguistic and cultural elements, making them multilingual and multicultural resources for learners.

In the specific context of *The Heart of Africa*, for instance, students had the opportunity to deal with the issue of race, such as the slave trade, racial segregation, and struggles for the rights of the African American population in the United States. They learned about charismatic figures such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. During the theatre course, we worked extensively on tableau vivant reproducing moments of slavery or abduction, focusing on facial and body expressions to make the sensations of pain and fear more vivid. I ensured that all participants experienced both the roles of slaveholders and slaves to empathize with both perspectives. We watched historical videos on Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, among others. Each of these moments was followed by reflections in their native language to allow the students to process what they had experienced and learned without the limitation of the foreign language.

We know how theatre can evoke strong emotions in both the audience and participants, and this is precisely what happened with *The Heart of Africa*. Many students were moved to tears as they deeply understood the plight of these individuals, experiencing it through dramatization. The audience also reacted and participated with great emotion in the performance, which unexpectedly received considerable success. From a cultural

perspective, students benefited from the course conducted by Katherine Armstrong, allowing them to learn about customs, games, songs, and typical stories of Ghana, where the first part of the play is set. Through videos, games, beautiful work on Anansi stories, face painting, and group activities to create the name of their tribe, emblem, and rules, wearing costumes brought by the native language teacher, the students expanded their cultural horizons, appreciating diversity as wealth, and using the foreign language in a real, emotional, and creative context. The contribution of the African participants in the course, added further richness to the context by sharing traditions from their home countries.

All of this cannot be achieved in a course solely based on process drama, due to time constraints, often conducted within school hours and for a limited number of lessons. With a large-scale project lasting eight months, numerous aspects can be addressed. In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, comparisons and reflections focused on generational conflicts, a range of emotions that children were able to recognize and represent through various process drama techniques. Historical and cultural aspects related to medieval customs were revisited several times during the theatre workshop, also thanks to the interventions in the native language by Katherine Armstrong. She had the responsibility for fostering the growth and improvement of the foreign language skills, with a four-hour session per group. Her approach involved delving into both the emotional and contextual aspects. She guided the students in expressing these elements through improvisational drama and role-playing exercises. Additionally, she dedicated attention to the textual aspects, emphasizing intonation and pronunciation through engaging drama games. Examples included scenarios like greeting a long-lost friend, consoling a sick friend, interacting with someone disliked, and meeting someone for the first time.

As regards my role, I have discussed it in depth in the previous sections, but I would like to highlight the concept of “teacher artistry” (Schewe, 2013). I agree with the author of the article when he affirms that this role is crucial in performative foreign language education. Teachers who effectively manage the roles of actor, director, playwright, and

teacher can enhance language outcomes for students. It is also true that the field of foreign language teaching needs to further define and develop the concept of teacher artistry.

In my drama workshops, I always find myself taking on various roles, except that of a playwright, even though I do play a certain part in the creation of the text. When staging foreign language plays with linguistic and cultural complexity, teachers can adapt parts of the text, modify dialogues for specific audiences and, of course, in respect of the age of the participants, and explore related cultural materials (Fonio and Genicote, 2011). I also decide when to use the original language to emphasize particularly important parts, as in Romeo's declaration of love to Juliet at the ball, where the protagonists had to learn the original lines of the text. Depending on the number of participants, in rewriting the adaptation of the chosen text, I also decide whether to add lines to give everyone a role or to cut them. It could be described as careful work to tailor the role that best represents each child, like a custom-made garment.

Reaching the conclusion, I can say that despite the significant benefits that both process and product-oriented theatre courses have on students' personal growth and improvement of their communicative skills in the foreign language, there are still many obstacles that a teacher encounters in proposing this type of work in the Italian public school system. As Armstrong (2019) affirms, some of the weaknesses include the lack of financial support from the school administration and local agencies for this initiatives, coupled with a general lack of interest in the activities. Often, the administration hinders these drama workshops by not responding promptly to requests for space or communication to find participants. Finding volunteers to facilitate this method is challenging due to its time-consuming nature. The only available volunteers are parents of participating students, who play a crucial role in the workshop.

Finding other teachers to collaborate with me is challenging as well, primarily because of the meagre compensation provided by state schools for the arduous 8 months commitment. It must be said that the satisfaction I receive from the students and their families compensates for all the effort and energy spent in promoting theatre in a foreign

language, which I strongly believe in. Passion plays a crucial role, and luckily, I have never been short of it.

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Links to Performances

J 2014

<https://youtu.be/b0k90OsYWqE> (Part 1)

<https://youtu.be/mkpyrwTrJWA> (Part 2)

Harry Potter

<https://youtu.be/wM6Z0XO29QU> (Summary)

The Heart of Africa

<https://youtu.be/AbQuk81vAuQ> (Part 1)

<https://youtu.be/XYenbn1sskU> (Part 2)

RJ 2023

https://youtu.be/4QtNkpUe_KQ (Part 1)

<https://youtu.be/mypRqce5axA> (Part 2)

Cinderella 2021

<https://youtu.be/Xv1hYGYpj4U> (Part 1)

https://youtu.be/8DIyX_bPTBY (Part 2)

<https://youtu.be/HUkOtMpIBDs> (Part 3)

<https://youtu.be/J10avSmuWMI> (Part 4)

Summary in Italian

Nel mio percorso di vita, le lingue straniere hanno svolto un ruolo fondamentale, plasmando e orientando le mie scelte educative e professionali. Nel luglio 1988, ho conseguito il diploma di scuola superiore presso l'Istituto di formazione "Fogazzaro" ad orientamento linguistico a Vicenza, dopo cinque anni di studio che mi hanno portato ad acquisire una certa competenza in inglese e tedesco. Le lingue straniere hanno poi influenzato la mia scelta universitaria e nel 1988 mi sono iscritta al corso di laurea triennale in Lingue e Letterature Straniere presso l'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, seguendo il sistema quadriennale dell'epoca. Le lingue di studio erano l'inglese e il tedesco. Ho affrontato l'inizio del mio percorso educativo con grande entusiasmo e stavo progredendo bene con gli esami fino a quando ho deciso di sostenere il concorso, nel 1990, per ottenere l'abilitazione all'insegnamento nella scuola primaria.

Ci sono voluti più di sei mesi per prepararmi bene all'esame di Stato, e questo ha portato ad un inevitabile rallentamento della mia progressione universitaria. Nel settembre 1992, all'età di 23 anni, ho iniziato a lavorare nella scuola primaria, segnando l'inizio di un nuovo capitolo della mia vita. Ho cercato di continuare i miei studi, ma allo stesso tempo ero completamente innamorata del mio lavoro, che portavo avanti con grande dedizione ed entusiasmo, riducendo significativamente il tempo libero disponibile per lo studio. Ho avuto la fortuna di iniziare la mia carriera nell'insegnamento durante gli anni in cui l'istruzione delle lingue straniere veniva introdotta nelle scuole primarie. Non appena la mia preside (all'epoca c'erano i Circoli Didattici, i presidi erano chiamati direttori, e le scuole primarie erano chiamate elementari) ha appreso che studiavo lingue, mi ha immediatamente chiesto di sostenere l'esame per accedere al corso metodologico per qualificarmi nell'insegnamento dell'inglese. Così, nel settembre 1993, ho iniziato ad insegnare inglese come "specialista", cioè come insegnante unicamente per questa materia, in otto classi in due sedi diverse. Sono ancora in questa posizione oggi, una delle ultime rimaste, dopo che il governo ha deciso di introdurre insegnanti "specializzate", che insegnano la lingua solo nella loro classe, insieme a tutte le altre materie, e hanno la priorità nell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere rispetto a noi specialiste.

Dopo alcuni anni, mi sono trasferita all'Università di Padova, dove sono stati aggiunti vari esami al mio piano di studi, che ho completato nel 2010. Ho iniziato la mia tesi con la Prof.ssa Dalziel, procedendo lentamente perché nel frattempo la scuola si era completamente trasformata, non lasciando spazio per null'altro. Ero soffocata da riunioni, aggiornamenti continui, infinita burocrazia, questioni di inclusione, sfide di adattamento culturale con sempre più migranti presenti nelle classi senza conoscenza della lingua, curricoli scolastici sempre più complessi, preoccupazioni sulla privacy e gestione di classi sempre più eterogenee nel comportamento con casi sempre più problematici. Insomma, un mondo completamente diverso dalla scuola degli anni '90, senza parlare dell'avvento della tecnologia, delle chat di lavoro, dei registri elettronici e di uno stato costante di connessione. Nonostante ciò, la passione per il mio lavoro non mi ha mai abbandonato.

Nel frattempo, nel 2006 ho iniziato ad interessarmi al teatro, come principiante assoluta, e ho iniziato a mettere in scena spettacoli in inglese con le mie classi quinte. Ho notato come la motivazione, l'entusiasmo e le abilità comunicative si moltiplicassero attraverso il teatro, coinvolgendo positivamente anche gli studenti più restii o con difficoltà di apprendimento. Ciò mi ha convinto ad affrontare più seriamente e consapevolmente l'uso del teatro nell'insegnamento delle lingue, cercando di incorporarlo nelle lezioni quotidiane, non necessariamente mirate a una performance pubblica. La svolta verso la creazione di un laboratorio teatrale è arrivata nel 2010. Con tre classi della quinta elementare, ho messo in scena per la prima volta Romeo e Giulietta in inglese, seguito da una reinterpretazione in italiano con un lieto fine. È stato un evento che ha coinvolto molte persone, tra cui artisti dilettanti per le scenografie, genitori, studenti e alcune colleghe che hanno aiutato con il testo italiano.

L'anno successivo mi sono trasferita a Piazzola sul Brenta, dove ho trovato una situazione piuttosto deprimente per quanto riguarda l'insegnamento dell'inglese. Mi sono messa al lavoro e ho costruito, anno dopo anno, un ambiente più ricettivo e vivace, ricco di eventi e opportunità per gli studenti, dai più piccoli della scuola materna agli studenti delle scuole medie. Ora abbiamo laboratori di storytelling, lettorato con insegnanti madrelingua per rafforzare le abilità orali a partire dalla terza elementare, Theatrino in lingua inglese dell'Associazione EDUCO e il laboratorio teatrale dell'istituto che ho

creato per gli studenti dalla quinta elementare alla seconda/terza media. La seconda svolta è arrivata nel 2014 quando la Prof.ssa Dalziel mi ha coinvolto nel Festival Shakespeariano organizzato dall'Università di Padova. Ho deciso di partecipare con una nuova edizione di Romeo e Giulietta, coinvolgendo le forze artistiche della comunità locale. Allo stesso tempo, abbiamo partecipato al concorso regionale "Europei non per un solo giorno" e abbiamo vinto il secondo premio, secondi solo al Liceo Quadri di Vicenza. A questo sono seguiti "Harry Potter e la Pietra Filosofale" nel 2016 e "Il Cuore dell'Africa" nel 2018. Con l'arrivo della pandemia di Covid-19, ho dovuto sospendere tutto, ma la passione per il teatro non poteva che emergere anche durante la didattica a distanza, attraverso letture mimate, letture a ruoli, piccole parti recitate che gli studenti registravano e condividevano durante le riunioni online o facevano direttamente online. Nel 2021, la scuola non mi ha permesso di riprendere il laboratorio teatrale dell'istituto a causa delle linee guida Covid che vietavano il mescolarsi delle classi e gli incontri negli ambienti scolastici. Il desiderio di riprendere il teatro era forte, quindi, insieme ai genitori della classe quinta, ho deciso di trovare una location all'aperto per il corso di teatro che avrei tenuto gratuitamente. Nel rispetto delle normative anti-Covid, con mascherine e gel disinfettante, siamo riusciti a superare l'inverno e nella primavera del 2022, senza più l'obbligo delle mascherine, abbiamo messo in scena la nostra "Cenerentola" in inglese e dialetto veneto. Nel 2023, c'è stata la terza edizione di Romeo e Giulietta, molto richiesta da famiglie e studenti. Con questa panoramica del mio lavoro, ho descritto ciò che verrà analizzato nel terzo capitolo di questa tesi, in cui alcuni progetti teatrali verranno esaminati più dettagliatamente.

Il lavoro del Consiglio d'Europa e di alcuni linguisti, e l'adozione dei principi comunicativi nei materiali didattici delle lingue, hanno portato all'emergere dell'Approccio Comunicativo, rendendo la competenza comunicativa l'obiettivo dell'istruzione linguistica (Richards e Rodgers, 2001). Le origini dell'Insegnamento Comunicativo delle Lingue (CLT)⁸ risalgono alla fine degli anni '60 e rappresentano una significativa svolta nella metodologia dell'insegnamento. In sintesi, il CLT vede la lingua come uno strumento per la comunicazione e l'interazione: enfatizza non solo la correttezza grammaticale, ma anche la capacità di utilizzarla in modo efficace in

⁸Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

situazioni di vita reale. Questo approccio riconosce l'importanza del contesto e degli aspetti culturali nell'uso della lingua, così come le diverse dimensioni della competenza comunicativa necessarie per una comunicazione di successo. Molti approcci all'insegnamento delle lingue possono essere visti allineati ai principi generali del CLT, compresi gli approcci teatrali, che sono oggetto di questa tesi. Attraverso il mio lavoro cercherò di dimostrare come l'apprendimento basato sul teatro in contesti di L2 possa avere effetti positivi sulle reazioni emotive e sulla comprensione interculturale. Studi hanno dimostrato che il teatro aiuta a migliorare la competenza nella comunicazione orale, l'interazione con la lingua, la collaborazione tra pari e crea un'atmosfera positiva in classe. Migliora anche la comprensione più ampia dei testi da parte degli studenti, stimolando l'analisi culturale e attingendo all'empatia. Progetti di ricerca su larga scala sembrano confermare l'impatto positivo del teatro sullo sviluppo personale e sulle competenze comunicative interculturali e sociali (Belliveau e Kim, 2013).

Nel primo capitolo presenterò una breve panoramica del mondo del teatro e del suo valore nell'insegnamento delle lingue. L'insegnamento dovrebbe mirare a suscitare la curiosità degli studenti e ispirarli a perseguire un apprendimento indipendente, instillando in loro un senso di orgoglio per i successi ottenuti. Per gli insegnanti di lingue straniere, ciò comporta coinvolgere e trattenere gli studenti attraverso lezioni linguistiche dinamiche, creative, significative e piacevoli. In situazioni in cui l'istruzione linguistica avviene al di fuori del paese target, gli insegnanti dovrebbero poter immergere gli studenti nella lingua e nella cultura straniera assegnando compiti che promuovano la produzione linguistica in contesti autentici. Pertanto, discuterò anche dell'importanza e dell'uso del teatro e delle arti nell'educazione. Esplorerò come il teatro potenzi la motivazione degli studenti, incorporando la comunicazione in contesti significativi, consentendo loro di utilizzare le loro molteplici intelligenze attraverso l'apprendimento basato su compiti da portare a termine. Questo approccio può aiutarli a beneficiare dei vantaggi che comporta il teatro nell'istruzione: autostima, fiducia in se stessi, spontaneità, scoperta di nuove abilità e talenti, e miglioramento dell'uso della lingua (vedi ad esempio, Belliveau e Kim, 2013; Maley e Duff, 1982; Kao e O'Neill, 1998).

Nel secondo capitolo cercherò di definire i termini 'Theatre' e 'Drama' nel contesto della pedagogia teatrale e dell'insegnamento espressivo delle lingue straniere, fornendo una breve panoramica dagli anni '80 a oggi. Nella seconda sezione, esplorerò la differenza tra progetti teatrali di piccola e grande scala (Schewe, 2013), confrontandoli per capire se uno possa essere più vantaggioso dell'altro nelle scuole primarie o se entrambi, in modo complementare, possano diventare parte della routine per gli insegnanti di lingue straniere, potenziando l'aspetto comunicativo delle loro lezioni. Investigherò come il teatro orientato al prodotto finale sia in grado di incorporare processi e, attraverso attività come improvvisazione e storytelling, svolga un ruolo cruciale nell'insegnamento. Queste attività, comuni nell'educazione teatrale, promuovono spontaneità, creatività, assunzione di rischi e collaborazione. Specialmente nei bambini delle scuole elementari, la natura collaborativa e umoristica dell'improvvisazione abbassa il filtro affettivo, costruendo la fiducia degli apprendenti sia nelle abilità recitative che nella competenza linguistica (Dalziel e Pennacchi, 2012). Affronterò anche come l'improvvisazione aiuti a familiarizzare gli studenti con testi letterari e l'esplorazione dei personaggi, quando si lavora verso performance teatrali di opere scritte. Hegman Shier (2002, in Dalziel e Pennacchi, 2012) afferma che le innovazioni che emergono durante le prove influenzano spesso la performance finale, sottolineando l'importanza del percorso rispetto al risultato, come avviene di solito nei laboratori teatrali discussi in questa tesi.

Infine, nel Capitolo Tre, come ho già accennato in precedenza, analizzerò quattro dei miei laboratori teatrali, descrivendo l'organizzazione e la realizzazione del "prodotto" finale, evidenziando la collaborazione con le famiglie e le risorse artistiche della comunità locale. Mi concentrerò sui risultati ottenuti con studenti stranieri e con giovani con disabilità di apprendimento, coloro che mi hanno dato le maggiori soddisfazioni. I laboratori sono stati inclusivi da ogni punto di vista e, nonostante fossero orientati al prodotto, sono riusciti a dare ampio spazio al "processo" attraverso le tecniche teatrali, l'improvvisazione e le attività di riscaldamento tipiche del "process drama" (Piazzoli, 2023).

Complessivamente, questa tesi cercherà di dimostrare come l'insegnamento e l'apprendimento di una lingua straniera possano trarre enormi vantaggi dall'uso del teatro

in generale. Si concentrerà sull'idea che un laboratorio teatrale su larga scala, con l'obiettivo di produrre uno spettacolo per un pubblico, non è meno valido di uno che valorizza il processo. Anzi, mira a dimostrare che sono complementari e che la loro combinazione costituisce un punto di forza, specialmente nelle scuole primarie e medie. Vorrei anche sottolineare come, attraverso il teatro, sia possibile condurre laboratori "verticali", coinvolgendo partecipanti di diverse classi e livelli scolastici, con varie competenze linguistiche e spesso abilità e talenti di cui gli studenti non sono consapevoli. In un tale laboratorio, l'insegnante assume vari ruoli, ma la sua principale caratteristica dovrebbe essere quella di una guida. L'insegnante di teatro deve accogliere e sostenere, incoraggiare e diventare un "bambino tra i bambini", trasmettendo la sua passione per il teatro e suscitandola nei discenti. Creando un ambiente positivo ed "affettivo" (Piazzoli 2011), è possibile ridurre l'ansia da prestazione o l'insicurezza. Gli studenti più grandi collaborano con quelli più giovani verso un obiettivo comune, si forma un gruppo, tutti crescono insieme, e la magia del teatro inizia a dispiegarsi.