

Taking the cloth off the telescope

Reflections on a paradigm shift in language education

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Introduction

The Drama/Foreign Language Summer School 2017 was held in Padua, Italy. Manfred Schewe gave the opening keynote speech titled *The State of the Art* and started the address with an examination of the actual phrase *The State of the Art*. The expression originally comes from engineering, dating back to 1910, when it was first recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary. It was quickly endorsed by the marketing industry and by the mid-80s had already become overused – with a connotation of false praise to it. By 1994, using *State of the Art* was considered a cliché to be avoided in advertising (Zweig 1994).

To steer clear of this cliché, Schewe proposed a modification of the title of his talk, namely *The State of the Art(s)*, with the sub-title: *Going Performative in (Foreign) Language Education* and spoke on the foundations of performative language teaching, learning and research. It was a particularly inspirational address, so much so that in this paper I will quote from it in some detail, using it as a spring board to reflect on the implications of changing the paradigm in language education, moving towards a performative epistemology of practice.

“When teachers themselves are taught to learn”

Introducing the topic of innovation in education, Schewe quoted the following lines from Brecht’s *Life of Galileo* (1939):

In the year sixteen hundred and nine
Science’s light began to shine.
At Padua City, in a modest house
Galileo Galilei set out to prove
The sun is still, the earth is on the move
(Scene 1)

This was followed by another quote:

The world of teachers¹ takes a crazy turn
when teachers themselves are taught to learn
(Scene 6)

The quotes had been chosen well: By referencing this play in particular, Schewe showed awareness of the local context: *Life of Galileo*'s first scene is set in Padua and so was the 2017 Summer School. The connection is not just geographical, but also historical: Galileo Galilei actually held a professorship in mathematics at the University of Padua between 1564 and 1642, and the University still preserves the lectern where he taught in the *Aula Magna* (Great Hall).

Furthermore, the quotes were very much aligned with the audience of the Summer School: Schewe was addressing a group of teachers with an interest in theatre and drama who were there to deepen their own knowledge of the art form and examine its applicability to language education. This community of teachers had congregated in Padua from different parts of the world with the intention to be "taught to learn". By drawing on Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, and speaking at the University of Padua, Schewe's choice was astute. But then, in a surprising twist, Schewe presented us with his own variation:

In the year two thousand and seventeen
The leading light of the Arts was seen
At Padua City, in a summer school
The participants set out to prove
Education will go performative, is all ready now to move.
(Schewe 2017)

This playful adaptation suggested that the time was ripe for education to go performative. Referring to Eisner (1985; 2003), Schewe advocated a change of paradigm that places the arts at the centre of a performative curriculum.

Schewe's gesture held a 'performative' intention, in Austin's (1962) original sense. For Austin, "performatives" are those utterances that are not just describing, but actually doing, or performing an action: "The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act" (ibid. 8). To appreciate Schewe's performative intention in the creative appropriation of this particular play, let us go back, once again, to Brecht's figure of Galileo. In discussing the consequences of a paradigm shift, Kuhn (1962), the well-known contemporary epistemologist, reflects on the innovation

1 I am using Manfred Schewe's translation here as he used it in his presentation. For all other references, I used John Willett's translation (2012).

in Galileo's work. Galileo was interpreting his reality from a different paradigm, leaving behind the Aristotelian conception, chartering towards unexplored territories. Questioning the Ptolemaic system and the centrality of God was an inconvenient truth, which not many authorities were ready to concede. Kuhn's philosophical investigation brings forth the concept of a *revolution*, implicit in any change of paradigm. Schewe obviously made this connection too, as after introducing the opening of the play, he reflected that, just like the earth being on the move was a revolutionary concept at the time, calling for a performative move in the language curriculum was also revolutionary – and that is what brought him to the play.

Schewe's re-interpretation of the opening of *Life of Galileo*, in the context of a Drama/Language Summer School opening keynote, was a performative hint to make us question the epistemology of practice. It was also, in itself, an illustration of the essence of performative teaching: choosing aesthetic material that resonates with the teacher (it is no secret that Schewe is fond of Brecht's work); demonstrating attention to the local context (a play set in Padua); hinting at the current state of affairs in education, and at the potential consequences of a paradigm shift ("the world ... takes a crazy turn"); highlighting the importance of reflective practice ("when teachers themselves are taught to learn"); denoting a playful attitude and, importantly, exercising agency by re-arranging the opening of the play to advance a potent metaphor that suited the here-and-now of the context. Schewe remarked that learning is an endeavour that never ends for a teacher – highlighting the importance of flexibility for teachers to be open to new things. Such openness to flexibility, he added, is what characterises teachers working in a performative way.

In closing, Schewe advocated for teachers to develop teacher/artist identities that allow for the emergence of aesthetic spaces in the curriculum. This raises several questions: in light of such a paradigm shift, what does a teacher/artist identity mean in (foreign) language teacher education? What do aesthetic spaces look like in the language classroom? And what would be learners' perceptions of such a change? Inspired by Schewe's points above, I will reflect on these issues and contemplate some possibilities in the areas of teacher education and teacher identity.

Identity formation and the teacher/artist

In a research project on a teacher/artist initiative in Ireland, six primary teachers and six artists formed teacher-artist partnership as a model for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The partnerships extended over a year, with the aim of creating arts projects in the schools where the teachers were

working. The study looked at the creation of a partnership, its development, challenges and benefits (Kenny & Morrissey 2016). Inevitably, the boundaries between the teachers' identities and the artists' identities were re-negotiated as the partnerships progressed. While all teachers were experienced in one or more art forms, and had self-selected for the study, only one of the six teachers initially identified herself as an artist. At the end of the project, each pair in the partnership recognised that there was a sense of mutual ownership and a sense of co-teaching.

However, something very interesting emerged: the artists' cohort reported to have learnt a lot about teaching, while the teachers' cohort tended to down-play their own expertise. In the researchers' words: "While the artists in this initiative clearly identified a role for themselves in 'teaching' the teachers, the teachers neither recognized, nor acknowledged that they might, in turn, 'teach' the artists" (2016: 58). Why would the teachers be less confident than the artists about their impact on the partnership? Are artists more wired for flexibility, for soaking up those skills they have been exposed to?

This may be especially true, as Anderson and Jefferson (2016) argue, when teachers abide to the false expectation that they are not creative and have not been gifted by the Muses' creative juices, as if still subscribing to the Socratic paradigm of creativity as a godly gift of Divine Madness.

My response to these findings is to suggest a different perspective, looking not so much at teacher/artist partnerships, but at the construct of identity formation in the teacher *as* artist, and the artist *as* teacher. Identity can be defined as a fluctuating, contradictory construct involving not one, but multiple sub-identities (Akkerman & Meijer 2011). This view moves beyond a tradition that focuses on the acquisition of 'assets' (knowledge, competencies, and beliefs) as the basis for professional development. On the contrary, professional development and identity are interconnected, as professional development can be part of a teacher's identity. This aligns with a view in which teachers are *active agents* in the creation of their own professional development. In a dialogical self theory framework (Hermans 1996), teacher identity can be described, "as *both* unitary and multiple; *both* continuous and discontinuous and *both* individual and social" (Akkerman & Meijer 2011: 309). Identity formation in teacher education thus emerges as a multifaceted and non-linear, with several sub-identities, sometimes conflicting or disagreeing with each other, in an ongoing process of negotiation of multiple I-positions.

Looking through these lenses at identity formation in the teacher/artist, we have one individual, engaged in an ever-morphing identity balancing act, drawing on sometimes aligned, sometimes conflicting, sub-identities. In his keynote, Schewe (2017) alluded to the issue of identity construction in the teacher

as artist, and artist as teacher, proposing an identity continuum encompassing the teacher and the artist (see Fig. 1).

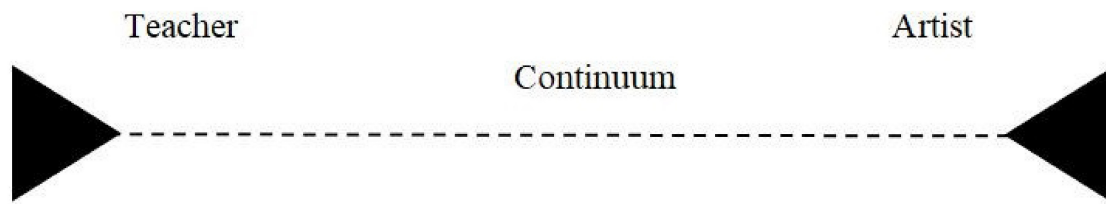


Figure 1: Teacher/Artist Continuum. Schewe (2017)

Within the paradigm of teaching as an art, it is fascinating to delve deeper into the blurred identity boundaries of those of us who identify both as teachers and as artists (Eisner 1985; Lutzker 2007; Crutchfield 2015). As Even and Schewe (2016) argue: “Teachers are – in terms of their professional biography, always at a certain point on a continuum that allows constant movement and new opportunities for growth” (ibid. 175). Where are we presently, on our teacher/artist biographical continuum? And what are the forces that push us in either direction, at different times of our lives? This continuum is flexible and open to constant renegotiation. Several factors influence where we are in our biography. We may be shifting across the continuum at different points in our lives, starting as teachers, and gradually being drawn into the arts – learning about the arts as we teach. Or vice versa, we may be starting as artists and then gravitate towards the teaching profession. Schewe made the point that both teachers and artists can learn from each other as they fluctuate across the teacher/artist continuum.

Creative doing

In his keynote, Schewe argued that ‘going performative’ means to put *creative doing* at the centre of education. He de-mystified the notion of the artist as the gifted genius, a myth perpetuated throughout history from Plato onward. And it is still in great need of being debunked as seen in the Irish teacher/artist partnership project discussed above.

For Schewe, *creative doing* is as at the core of performative practices. Sound, voice, image, movement, space and embodied action all facilitate aesthetic learning processes (see Fig. 2).

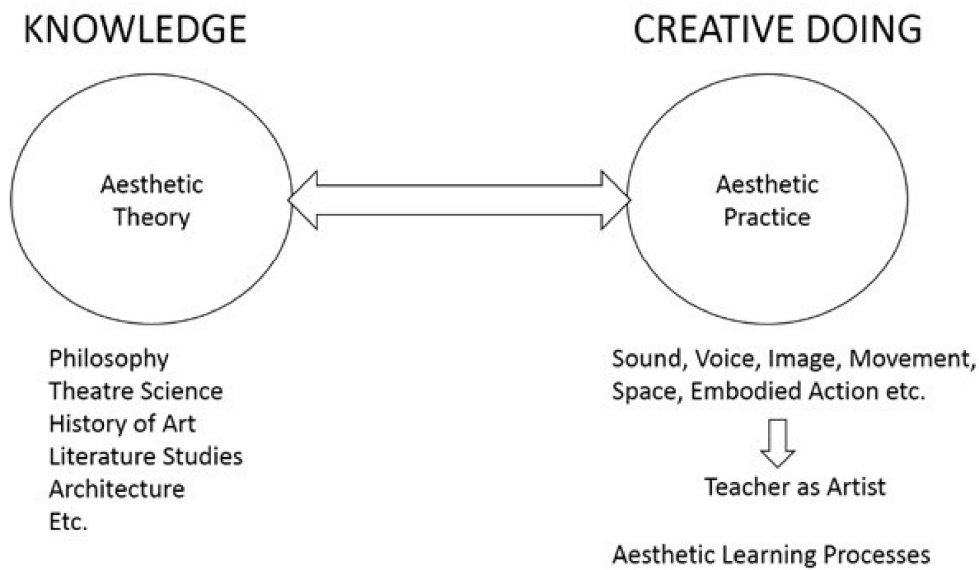


Figure 2: Knowledge and Creative Doing. Schewe (2017)

As Schewe's diagram shows, he sees creative doing related to aesthetic theory, with theory and practice being interconnected. Yet, how can these aesthetic processes be facilitated in sedentary grammar-oriented language classrooms, particularly in a test-oriented culture? Contemporary instructed Second Language Acquisition (SLA) approaches, including task-based, content-based, concept-based (Loewen & Sato 2017), all focus, in their own ways, on teaching language in meaningful social contexts. Similarly, performative language teaching, an action-oriented approach (Even & Schewe 2016), focusses on teaching language in a meaningful, co-created context. What the performative approach adds to the spectrum is the practice of meaning-making through story, metaphor, symbol, imagination – involving movement, voice and the body.

This does not mean, however, that a focus on performative pedagogy precludes the teaching of grammar as it is sometimes erroneously believed. Even's (2011) *drama grammar* and Lapaire's (2014) concept of grammar in motion are two illustrations of the use of drama to facilitate language learning, focussing on grammar. Other practitioners have researched drama and the acquisition of vocabulary (Kalogirou, Beauchamp & Whyte 2017), fluency (Galante & Thomson 2016, Ni Rian 2014) and intercultural competence (Rothwell 2017), just to name a few. The key element that all these studies have in common is a performative stance to second language education.

Schewe (2017) encouraged teachers to allow for performative processes to emerge in the foreign language curriculum. It is not the first time that Schewe has issued such a call; this *Festschrift* is, in its own way, a manifestation of it. In 2003, Schewe called for a performative paradigm shift in foreign language

education (Schewe 2003). Ten years earlier, in 1993, he published a book on drama in the language classroom: *Fremdsprache inszenieren: Zur Fundierung einer dramapädagogischen Lehr- und Lernpraxis*. The book was never translated into English. More than twenty years later, due to popular demand, he wrote an English commentary to it, published in 2016 by the Goethe Institute. The 2016 article *Teaching and Learning with the Head, Heart, Hands and Feet* echoes the 1993 German publication. In it Schewe argues:

Let us imagine that more and more teachers in the next few decades design their classes and seminars with their heads, hearts, hands and feet, trusting in their spontaneity and creative potential and thereby ensuring that (foreign) worlds are created time and time again on the simple boards of seminar rooms and classrooms, generating endless fascination. (Schewe 2016: n.p.)

This quote encapsulates well the potential of performative approach to the language curriculum. Trust in one's spontaneity and creative potential, as Schewe put it, are required by teachers to generate 'endless fascination'.

Learners' experiences and perceptions

In 2014, I worked with a group of international students, aged 20 to 30, investigating their experiences in learning Italian as a second language through a performative approach. On one occasion, I was asked to cover for a colleague in a 12-hour intensive language course. I was bound by a prescribed lesson plan, which I did not choose nor could change, as it was set by the institution. I interpreted the lesson plan through a performative lens, engaging the class in 12 hours of drama – focussing on the main points, but embodying, rather than delivering, the lesson plan. I sought ethical permission to interview five male and female students, who volunteered to take part in interviews – from Mexico, Russia, New Zealand and Germany.

I was struck by Lisa (pseudonym), the New Zealander student, when she talked about her language learning experience in the school: "I don't have *the gift of learning languages* [embarrassed laughter], so I guess, the grammar part of it, and the pronunciation... I find it very difficult". While most her classmates spoke more than one language, this was Lisa's first experience as a foreign language learner, and she had studied Italian for five weeks only. Her comment reveals a system of beliefs, according to which learning language is a *gift*, one she was convinced, at the time of the interview, she was not bestowed with. Commenting on the drama-based experience, she stated: "That was a lot easier for me, because there was a group of us, we were working together, and someone'd know this word, someone'd know that word, so we could piece it

together and make a story". She thus identified a key aspect of learning through drama. She reported enjoying the performative approach, feeling social, feeling relaxed, having agency to play and generate laughter, and getting to know her classmates, "rather than asking odd questions".

However, when asked how she rated the usefulness of drama for her language learning, she stated it was neutral, adding: "I wouldn't say I got a huge amount out of it, just because of where I am I'm lower than most people in the class". In other words, her paradigm about language learning (language learning as a *gift* or *talent*) influenced not only her self-esteem as a learner, but also her evaluation of the usefulness of performative approaches. Here is where a shift in paradigm, one advocated by Schewe, can be beneficial for our learners. One may be tempted to encourage Lisa to reconsider her reference point: learning through play, feeling relaxed in the classroom, engaging in a social, dialogic process, getting to know her fellow peers on a more authentic level. All these aspects she identified would also impact on the quality of her language learning experience.

Yet, just as when not everyone was willing to look through Galileo's telescope, an educator cannot force a learner to change their viewpoint. Affording the experience and engaging in meta-reflection on what learning a language is about can be an insightful tool for learners, one through which they can interpret an experience, but it is an individual choice. The role of the educator, then, may be to make the telescope available to the learner, so to speak, but it is up to her to take the cloth off it.

Conclusion

In his *State of the Art(s)* keynote, Schewe (2017) playfully appropriated Brecht's opening of *Life of Galileo* recalling that "the light of the Arts was seen" and positing that "Education will go performative; is all ready now to move." Schewe's offering is more than just a play on words; he is advancing a metaphor for the teacher/artist operating in contemporary society, a reference to Galileo's struggle and crisis. As Kuhn (1962) argues, changes in paradigm have generated periods of crisis. In Brecht's play, Galileo explains to Andrea, his faithful pupil: "For two thousand years people have believed that the sun and all the stars of heaven rotate around mankind." He adds: "But now we are breaking out of it, Andrea, at full speed. Because the old days are over and this is a new time" (Brecht 1939: 6). From a Kuhnian perspective, "breaking out" of something necessarily brings forth a crisis and, history tells us, that was necessary to yield a scientific revolution.

As Kuhn reflects in the preface of his treaty, he gained the insights that brought him to conceive his theories while having to teach physics to non-physics-

icists. He writes about being “greatly surprised” (1962: 7) having to approach his own field from a different angle – and how that threw him into a “crisis” (ibid.) as to his own viewpoint. Having to de-centre, to view his own field from the point of view of the non-specialist, was a catalyst for Kuhn to come to his own theory of epistemology and change. To evoke a paradigm shift, one that places the arts at the centre of the curriculum, we need to be prepared to undergo a time of crisis. That applies to both teachers and learners, as we negotiate expectations related to identity, artistry and education. In drawing on Galileo to call for a performative paradigm, I interpret Schewe’s call as urging us to view instances of crisis as a catalyst for change.

The challenge for us, then, as teacher/artists, is to make ourselves vulnerable for moments of crisis, but to not let that deflate our passion. In contemporary times this is no easy task, with sedentary classes in test-oriented culture being the norm, and the arts struggling to keep its place in the curriculum globally. Just as Galileo provoked a crisis, the legacy of which continues far beyond his existence, we can only hope that a change of paradigm alters future educational and political choices. As Brecht’s (1939: 81) Galileo urged: “Take the cloth off the telescope and point it at the sun!” In doing that, let us not destroy the retina of our passion eye. Let us, instead, use the two lenses² of teacher artistry and creative doing to focus our sight towards a sharp vision.

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2 Telescopes work by using two lenses to focus the light.

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