

THE LITERARY EXPERIENCE THROUGH THEATER PRACTICE: AN EXPERIENCE REPORT OF A PRACTICAL PROPOSAL

A EXPERIÊNCIA LITERÁRIA ATRAVÉS DA PRÁTICA TEATRAL: UM RELATO DE EXPERIÊNCIA DE UMA PROPOSTA PRÁTICA

LA EXPERIENCIA LITERARIA A TRAVÉS DE LA PRÁCTICA TEATRAL: UN RELATO DE EXPERIENCIA DE UNA PROPUESTA PRÁCTICA

Rubens Costa Güths¹

Matias Corbett Garcez²

Código DOI

Abstract

This study aims to present an experience report of a workshop offered during three academic events during 2023. Through theater and performative experimentation, the workshop aimed to increase the literary experience of its participants. This increase was done by, firstly, providing participants technical abilities for acting, such as body and voice theatrical training. Secondly, participants underwent a progression of scenic creations and performances based on literary texts, where they should apply the technical abilities previously learned. Having theater games, audience training and literary performance as the three most significant focuses, we present in this study the description of each activity conducted in the workshop as well as the goals and the theoretical bases that supported our choices. A session containing participants' most significant feedback is presented after the workshop description. Lastly, our overall observations, findings and results are presented, and suggestions for future research in this topic is offered.

Keywords: Literary performance. Theater games. Audience training. Language and literature. Theater in education.

Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo apresentar um relato de experiência de um minicurso oferecido durante três eventos acadêmicos em 2023. Através do teatro e da experimentação performática, o minicurso teve como objetivo aumentar a experiência literária de seus participantes. Esse aumento foi feito, primeiramente, fornecendo aos participantes ferramentas técnicas para atuação, como treinamento teatral de corpo e voz. Em segundo lugar, os participantes vivenciaram uma progressão de criações cênicas e performances baseadas em textos literários, onde deveriam aplicar as ferramentas técnicas previamente

¹ Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil Email: guths.rubens@undervocals.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6837-1137>

² Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil Email: matias.corbett@gmail.com Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5346-4587>

adquiridas. Tendo jogos teatrais, formação de plateia e performance literária como três de seus focos mais significativos, apresentamos neste estudo a descrição de cada atividade conduzida no minicurso, bem como as metas e bases teóricas que fundamentaram nossas escolhas. Uma sessão contendo o feedback mais significativo dos participantes é apresentada após a descrição do minicurso. Por último, nossas observações gerais, conclusões e resultados são apresentados e são oferecidas sugestões para pesquisas futuras neste tópico.

Palavras-chave: Performance literária. Jogos teatrais. Formação de plateia. Linguagem e literatura. Teatro educação.

Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo presentar un informe de experiencia de un taller ofrecido durante tres eventos académicos en 2023. A través del teatro y la experimentación performática, el taller tuvo como propósito enriquecer la experiencia literaria de sus participantes. Este enriquecimiento se llevó a cabo, en primer lugar, proporcionando a los participantes herramientas técnicas para la actuación, como entrenamiento teatral corporal y vocal. En segundo lugar, los participantes experimentaron una progresión de creaciones y actuaciones escénicas basadas en textos literarios, aplicando las herramientas técnicas aprendidas previamente. Con los juegos teatrales, la formación de audiencia y la interpretación literaria como los tres enfoques más significativos, presentamos en este estudio la descripción de cada actividad realizada en el taller, así como los objetivos y las bases teóricas que respaldaron nuestras elecciones. Se presenta una sesión con los comentarios más destacados de los participantes después de la descripción del taller. Por último, se exponen nuestras observaciones generales, hallazgos y resultados, y se ofrecen sugerencias para futuras investigaciones en este tema.

Palavras-chave: Performance literaria. Juegos teatrales. Formación de audiencia. Lenguaje y literatura. Teatro educativo.

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to present our experience report in conducting the workshop entitled *Do texto à cena: minicurso prático de corpo, voz e teatro para a performance literária* (From the text to the scene: practical workshop of body, voice, and theater for literary performance), which was offered during three academic events³ that occurred in the second semester of 2023 at the *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina - UFSC* (Federal University of Santa Catarina - Brazil).

³ The events were: (1) 8th edition of the *Experimenta: Semana de Arte* ("Try out: week of art", in a direct translation), on September 19th; (2) 14th edition of the *Semana Acadêmica de Letras da UFSC* ("UFSC's Academic Week of Letters", in a direct translation) on September 21st; and (3) the 20th edition of *Semana de Ensino, Pesquisa, Extensão e Inovação da UFSC - SEPEX* ("UFSC's Week of Education, Research, Extension, and Innovation) on October 24th.

With the aim of providing theatrical/performative experimentation, the workshop offered participants technical abilities to explore creativeness in constructing characters and scenes/performances based on literary texts. The technical abilities encompassed both body and vocal expressions. Although forming professional actresses and actors was not intended, the instructional goal was to present to undergraduate and graduate students of Languages and Literature⁴ a set of skills for them to develop their creative and interpretative potential in the field of literature, having theater as a tool for intervention. Through theater practice, participants were invited to explore certain literary devices, such as tone, humor, imagery and imaginary aspects, as well as textual forms of the literary texts, drama and script, respectively.

By the same token, the social goal of the workshop aimed to provide the stimulation and encouragement of participants' body language expression, general expressiveness and social skills. As Thorkelsdóttir (2016) writes, through drama, students can try out different social roles, and such experiences can broaden social and cultural perspectives (p.1). By the same token, Pascoe *et al.* (2004) documented that participating in drama activities can be a transformative practice, in that it can improve social skills, communication, emotional resilience, as well as collaborative and cooperative skills (p.122). Thus, the abilities experimented could be extended outside the workshop and applied to other academic areas, such as academic presentations, public speaking, creative writing as well as everyday interactions within and beyond the campus.

Through a biopsychosocial (Taukeni, 2019) lens, participants were encouraged to carefully observe the environment around them throughout the workshop. In order to focus their attention on unnoticed behaviors of everyday life, they were asked to observe other participants' body movements, voice quality (the general vocal aesthetic) and cultural variations present in speech (varieties of accents). By looking at theater and performance as a manner of intervention and teaching-learning tools, we aimed to increase participants' awareness about how to use body and voice as a form of language, empowering them to speak, act, and —why not?— learn by observing critically and creatively these features in different daily

⁴ The Department of Foreign Language and Literature of the respective university offers undergraduate programs in seven different languages —Brazilian Sign Language (*LIBRAS*), English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish—, in both Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education (*Licenciatura*) degrees. Additionally, several graduate degrees —including master and doctoral programs— are offered at the university for all the languages mentioned in the fields of Linguistics, Teaching, Literature and Translation Studies.

situations of their lives and professions, providing them with several resources to reflect and "pronounce themselves in the world" (Freire, 1987).

In the following session, we describe the theoretical foundations which guided us when planning the workshop. Later, we offer a description of how the workshop was structured as well as the approached contents. The structure and the contents are described in detail to provide enough information for other researchers and instructors to replicate the workshop futurely. Finally, we comment on participants' feedback.

Following the analysis of the workshop, we discuss the relevance of its model for the literary development of participants. To do so, we focus on the importance of theater games, audience training, and literary performance, key elements of the workshop, and how they can function as a tool of investigation of certain literary devices, aforementioned. Finally, we present our considerations about what will be discussed in this paper, as well as suggestions for future research.

2. Planning the Workshop

This workshop was inspired by three projects in the field of theater-education developed and directed by the Master in Drama in Education, Nara Micaela Wedekin, from 2004 to 2018. These projects are the *Projeto Shakespeare no Rio Vermelho*⁵ (from 2004 to 2012), the *Procurando Riso Companhia Teatral*⁶ (from 2008 to 2010), and the *Segue Reto Toda Cena*⁷ group (from 2015 to 2018). The three projects⁸ aimed to produce annual comedy spectacles based on theater games⁹ and improvisations. The classes were held weekly, typically lasting around 3 hours. The structure included an initial period for

⁵ The name *Rio Vermelho* refers to the name of a neighborhood located in the east zone of the city of *Florianópolis* island, which is the capital of the state of *Santa Catarina* in the south zone of Brazil.

⁶ A theater company, founded by post-participants of the *Projeto Shakespeare no Rio Vermelho*, consisted of under eighteen students who wished to continue their theater-education classes after completing school. For more information about this project, refer to Thomaz (2012).

⁷ The name of the group *Segue Reto Toda Cena* is a wordplay with a famous saying from natives of *Florianópolis* island when they give information about directions. The saying says *segue reto toda vida* ("go forward all your life", in a direct translation) and means "keep going ahead". The wordplay *segue reto toda cena* brings the connection with direction information to the theater game and means "keep on making scenes" or also "keep on acting".

⁸ The first two projects were offered at the *Escola Básica Municipal Maria Conceição Nunes*, located in the neighborhood of *Rio Vermelho*, and the third project was offered at the *Colégio de Aplicação da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*, located at the university campus of the Federal University of Santa Catarina.

⁹ The term *theater games* we use in this study refers to the theoretical proposals of Koudela (1984).

physical warm-up and socialization among the members, followed by individual theater games, and concluding with the creation of scenes based on themes chosen by the director. Theater techniques training and stage performance were integrated into most of the theater games and scenes. At the end of each class, after the scenes were presented, the group often organized a circle discussion to share and debate insights gained during the session.

Unlike the three projects mentioned, which had year-long classes, our workshop was designed for a single 4-hour session. Also, while those projects focused on comedy performances, our workshop centered around performing literary texts. Furthermore, due to its single-class format, producing a full spectacle was unfeasible, leading us to shift the focus to creating only theatrical scenes. Consequently, adaptations to the structure of those projects were necessary for the development of our workshop.

Regarding the structure of the classes, since the workshop was planned to be a single session, the class activities were organized to encompass the main activities proposed by the three reference projects. To achieve this, the workshop was subdivided into two content blocks. The first block was called the **technical block** and consisted of warm-up activities, social integration, body acting techniques, vocal acting techniques, and isolated theater games aimed at providing context for the practical experimentation of the techniques learned. The second block was called the **scenic block** and consisted of the creation of three theatrical scenes with progressively increasing technical difficulty and social exposure demands. A 15-minute break was provided between the two blocks to allow participants to eat and recharge. At the end of both blocks, after all scenes had been presented, the group organized a circle discussion to share and debate insights gained during the session.

As pedagogical choices, some rules were non-negotiable so that participants could extract the maximum benefit from the workshop. The first of these was to completely veto the presence of an external audience during the workshop. Thus, anyone in the room should either participate in all activities or leave the room. This rule was established as a strategy to increase social comfort and interaction among participants, as well as avoiding external mockery or ridicule, which could create an intimidating environment for participants. This rule was kept even during the presentation of scenes in the second block, with only participants allowed to watch each other's presentations. By doing this, we were also able

to offer both the experience of acting and the experience of appreciating a theatrical scene, or audience training, discussed afterwards.

Another rule that seemed necessary to us for the significant benefit of the theatrical experience was for participants to engage in the workshop barefoot. This requirement seemed necessary to practically immerse themselves in a theatrical experience closely aligned with theatrical traditions. Furthermore, the direct contact of their feet with the ground encouraged participants to explore a wide range of distinct footsteps and walks, as there were no shoes restricting the movement of their feet.

The maximum number of subscriptions was defined as 25 because a greater group would result in a greater number of scenes in the scenic block. Consequently, the workshop would extend for more than a 4-hour class, which was not our intention because participants would get too exhausted. Although 25 subscriptions were open, we expected around 10 to 20 participants per workshop. Close to our expectations, on September 19th we had 10 participants, on September 21st we had 17 participants and on October 24th we had 8 participants. Thus, a total of 35 participants took part of this workshop.

Each workshop was conducted in a different place of the university due to the distinct events in which we enrolled the proposal. Consequently, we had to adjust the workshop for each place as well. The first workshop was conducted on the stage of the Garapuvu auditorium, which is a large auditorium located in the Center for Culture and Events of the university. Due to its large proportions, voice projection was the most challenging task for participants. Both second and third workshops were conducted in the Center for Communication and Expression (CCE) of the university. The second workshop was conducted in a spacious room with wooden tiles, suited for theater and dance classes. The third workshop was in a regular classroom with a parquet floor and full of chairs, but after disposing of the chairs to the sides of the classroom, we had enough space. Although each classroom we used was different, they were close in dimensions. In the three workshops, all the scenarios were done using the chairs and tables available in each place the workshops were conducted.

Below, it is described how each block of the workshop was conducted along the three workshops.

2.1 Technical Block

Participants were not required to bring any materials for the workshop and all the texts were provided by us. In the first 30 minutes, activities were conducted with participants arranged in a circle so they could see and hear each other. This disposition intended to increase sociability during the proposals. Then, firstly, instructors introduced themselves and, later, invited each participant to introduce themselves to the group and tell us why they were there. After that, the workshop dynamics and objectives were briefly explained.

Afterwards, the first dynamic took place. We call the first exercise conducted “The Arrow”. This exercise consists of an instructor introducing an imaginary arrow in the circle and inviting everyone to pass it around. To pass the arrow, however, some steps were needed. Firstly, the possessor of the arrow should make eye contact with the target participant to whom the arrow was intended to be thrown. Then, to show the arrow was being passed, the possessor should clap the hands¹⁰ while throwing the imaginary arrow. The movement should end with one hand pointing directly to the target participant whom the arrow was thrown at. The goal of this exercise was to warm-up and socially integrate participants. We observed that, after a few rounds, participants started to act the way they threw and received the arrow in several ways. For instance, receiving the arrow as if it had hit them straight in their heart, as commonly seen in medieval-themed movie scenes. No instructions were needed to introduce these acting intentions in the exercise. The acting was sometimes introduced by one of the instructors and sometimes by participants themselves. In both cases, they became more frequent in the exercise after someone had introduced the idea to the group.

We call the second exercise conducted “Good Morning”. This exercise consists of walking around the room space and greeting other participants by saying “good morning”. Although very simple, participants were encouraged to vary the way of saying “good morning” by creatively using different intonations, tones, dialects, gestural expressions, and other performative elements they find interesting to explore. For instance, raising an imaginary hat while saying “good morning” with a Cockney accent, or saying “what’s up?” with a foreign or regional accent rather than simply “good morning” with a standard

¹⁰ Different from a Happy Birthday-like hand clap, this clap was done with the hands simulating the gesture of shooting an arrow. Thus, both hands were positioned with fingers extended. Then, the clap was made moving one hand forward and the other backwards horizontally.

accent¹¹. Additionally, eye contact was necessary during the exercise so a target participant should say “good morning” to someone else rather than to no one or for an imaginary character. Thus, the goal of this exercise was to increase social integration, making participants familiarized with each other, and to slightly introduce practical character experimentation as well. In the same manner of “The Arrow” exercise, participants started to act in several ways after a few rounds.

With the goal to make participants know each other's names, a third exercise was conducted for social integration. We call this exercise “Name and Gesture”. In it, participants were disposed of in a circle again. This exercise consists of presenting your name out loud and creating a body gesture to accompany/symbolize the name. For instance, a woman presents her name —“Catherine!”— and then bangs her foot on the floor. After someone has presented his/her own name and gesture, all other participants should repeat that name out loud and reproduce the gesture. The exercise ends when everyone in the circle has presented the name and gesture.

After conducting these first three exercises, we moved to the technical session of the block. The technical session lasted around 1 hour and consisted of two main moments: instruction and experimentation. The instructional approach was intended to provide the abilities for acting. Based on Oida and Marshall (2001), our goal was to instruct participants that the actor/actress should be skillful enough to completely replace his/her own habitual behaviors for the character's behaviors, i.e. to make his/her self completely invisible to the audience. Consequently, their body language, rhythm, voice, speech, emotions, gaze, social circle, hobbies, expressions, and identity should entirely reflect that of the character during the scenes, and not their real-life ones. In other words, participants are encouraged to become another person during the scenes.

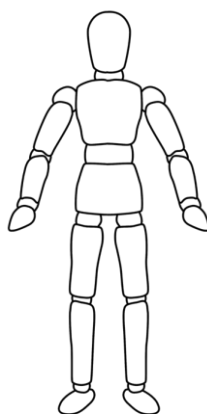
To reach this goal, we based the body instruction in biomechanics of body movements¹². Participants were invited to think of their bodies as an articulated wooden mannequin (image 1), so that any movement became a matter of positioning the body parts in target manners. For instance, to show how foot movements impact the way of walking, we divided the sole of the foot into four quadrants: the frontal (head of metatarsals), the posterior (heel), the medial face (pronation) and the external face

¹¹ English accents are set here just to make examples feasible for readers. The workshop was conducted entirely in Brazilian Portuguese and its non-standard varieties.

¹² For further reading on this topic see Hall (2012) and Hamill; Knutzen; Derrick (2015).

(supination). Thus, a person who wants to walk silently in a room surrounded by sleeping people would use the frontal quadrant of the feet to walk, while someone who has a thorn in their toe would walk with the posterior quadrant of one foot.

Image 1 – Articulated wooden mannequin model.



Source: author's personal archive.

A similar division was followed for all the articulations of the wooden mannequin model. After presenting feet movements, we moved to the ankles, knees, whole legs, hips, waistline, rib cage and back, shoulders, neck and head, arms and, lastly, the hands, which have intrinsic relation with object manipulation and language expression, thus, an infinite number of movement possibilities.

The last part of technical instruction was the vocal instruction. Vocal instruction presented a three-layers disposition of the voice¹³. The first layer referred to the adjustments of the sound source, i.e. the larynx. The abilities included in controlling the sound source included raising and lowering the voice tone, adding breathiness, metallic, tremble, and creaky intentionally to the voice. The second layer referred to the adjustments of the filter, i.e. the vocal tract as a whole. Controlling this layer included manipulating the voice timber by yawning and nasalizing the voice, raising and lowering the larynx or speaking with the tongue backwards. The third layer referred to accents and general pronunciation. Thus, the abilities included in this layer were directly related to phonetics and phonology, as well as to the pronunciation

¹³ An extended version of a Layered Model of speech production can be found in Güths (2024).

quality as a whole. For instance, a participant could speak with a specific accent —a real or a fake one—, simulate a speech pathology such as stuttering or both at the same time. Although some models were presented, the aim of the vocal instruction section was to encourage vocal creativeness.

Once all the technical instructions were finished, we moved to the technical experimentation moment. This moment consisted of experimenting with the previous acting techniques learned by doing theater games. Through the ludic atmospheres created in theater games, participants can enrich the creative potentials of their dramatic imagination, an important stimulus for their literary development. This approach also aligns with Koudela's (1984) statement, that "dramatic imagination, being a fundamental part in the process of development of intelligence, must be cultivated by all modern methods of education."¹⁴ (p. 28).

Theater games were introduced at this moment in combination with an exercise we called "Walking Around the Room". This exercise consists of all participants walking around the room with the aim to occupy the empty spaces evenly. Thus, if they noticed an unoccupied spot in the room, they should walk towards that spot to occupy it. Additionally, if most participants were disposed of on one side of the room, they must reorganize their walk to occupy the other side to evenly fill the room space.

Furthermore, this exercise also encompassed hand clap orders that participants should follow during the walk. The number of claps indicated the order to be done as disposed in Table 1:

| Table 1 – Relation of Hand Claps and Orders | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 Clap | Stop/Freeze |
| 2 Claps | Half-turn around |
| 3 Claps | Jump and crouch touching the Floor |
| 4 Claps | Walk Backwards |
| 5 Claps | Running |

Source: Table developed by the authors.

¹⁴ Original reads: "A imaginação dramática, sendo parte fundamental no processo de desenvolvimento da inteligência, deve ser cultivada por todos os métodos modernos de educação." Our translation.

The introduction of theater games occurred after a few rounds of clap orders so that participants could memorize what each clap indicated. At this moment, the theater games consisted only in acting according to the contexts provided by an instructor who did not participate in the activity.

For instance, during the “Walking Around the Room”, the outside instructor introduces the first context by saying “you are very old people now”. Then, participants should keep occupying the space — and obey the clap orders —, while walking as very old people. Then, the instructor says “you are still very old people, but you are now walking on a very soapy floor”. Participants should, then, keep walking while acting in that context. The instructor could also reset the context and introduce a new one, such as “children walking on a floor full of broken glass” or “drunk people walking on a floor full of lava”. It is worth noting that participants should keep acting even when following the clap orders. That means walking, running, jumping and squatting according to the acting contexts. Additionally, contexts are designed to be unrealistic or fantastic in terms of real life. This is intentionally done to force participants beyond their daily obvious zones and encourage them to think about theater as a place where everything is possible.

Lastly, to increase the difficulty, the outside instructor could gradually reduce the available room space for walking. This was done by surrounding the space with chairs to limit the walking zone. Thus, participants should adapt their acting to the limited space, which gradually gets smaller. Additionally, they should keep following the clap orders. After finishing this exercise, we took a 15-minute break and then moved to the scene block.

2.2 Scene Block

The scene block lasted 2 hours and it was organized into three moments: vocal scene, text-based scene, and improvised scene. The main goal of this block was to make participants act in theater scenes. However, as no previous theater experience was required to participate in the workshop, the scenes were organized as a progression of acting skills. This strategy was thought to make participants gradually explore literary devices such as tone, humor, imagery and other imaginative elements present in literature. Thus, in the vocal scene, participants would only do voice acting, in the text-based scene they would act while reading the text sheet along the scene, and in the improvised scene they would act freely on a given theme with no text to follow.

For the vocal scene, participants were divided into pairs; and occasionally trios were done when there was an odd number of participants. Each group received a printed copy of a fragmented text. The text we used for the vocal scene was Eric Coble's *Baggage Unattended* (2002) translated by Hiago M. Strapazzon from English to Brazilian Portuguese¹⁵. This text was chosen due to its form of dialogue-based short story and because we assumed it was an unfamiliar text for participants and, thus, no external reference of the text would influence their acting performance. After providing the text fragments for each group, participants were instructed to rehearse in a private space with their groups for 10 minutes. For this rehearsal, they were instructed to apply vocal acting techniques covered during the technical block. Thus, they should act the text vocally.

Once the 10 minutes of rehearsing had passed, participants sat on the floor making a big circle. However, different from the other circles we did previously, participants were positioned with their backs to the center of the circle, preventing them from seeing each other. The goal of this disposition was to increase their hearing awareness and to create the complete scene in their minds while listening to each other's voices. Although each group received a fragmented part of the text, each fragment complemented each other to recreate the complete story. Therefore, all groups had access to the complete scene while listening to each other in the circle. To keep the right sequence of the whole scene, an instructor indicated which group should start reading and which should follow during the circular vocal acting.

After all groups presented their fragments, we moved to the text-based scene. For the text-based scene we kept the same groups. In the first two workshops we introduced a new text for the text-based scenes. The text was a translation of *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1995). However, we noted that the introduction of a new text, although interesting, took too much time for participants to become familiar with the text and, then, create the scene. Thus, in the third workshop we kept participants with the same text fragments they used in the vocal scene for the text-based scene as well. The goal of the text-based scenes was for the groups to present a theater scene of their text fragment. This time, they should also include body acting in their scene. We provided 15 minutes for the groups to create and rehearse their scenes. An extra time of 5 minutes was provided when participants asked for more time to prepare their scenes.

¹⁵ This is an unpublished translation done for the educational purposes of our workshop only.

For the text-based scenes additional instruction was needed. The instruction focused on ways of ending a theatrical scene. Three manners of ending a scene were presented. The first refers to the blackout, however, for the classroom context the workshop took place this was an unavailable strategy. The second form refers to freezing the movements at the end. And the third form was to leave the stage. These two latter forms were useful for the contexts in which the workshops took place.

Presentations started when all groups were ready. This time, instead of a circle, scenes were presented to the other groups. In this way, the group that was presenting the scene could experience a real theater performance in front of an audience. Additionally, the groups that were watching the scene as an audience could observe how the presenting group developed the scene. This observation was supported by all the content they learned along the workshop. Therefore, their artistic appreciation was now different from an uninstructed audience. Consequently, as long as they were able to identify the theatrical elements of the scenes, they were also developing the skill of learning theater — and literature — from observation, which is fundamental for acting, literary development, and creativity as a whole.

After all groups had presented, we moved to the last activity of the workshop, which was the improvised scene. For this scene, participants should perform a whole theatrical scene using body and vocal techniques. However, no text was provided. The only thing provided was a general theme from which the groups should create their scenes. The themes were unrelated to the previous text so no connections could be logically established at first sight. The themes we provided were simple sentences such as “an elephant was shot” or “there is someone after me”. No more information than that was provided. For this activity we reorganized them into larger groups. Since the scenes were supposed to be longer than the vocal scene and the text-based scene, participants had 30 minutes to create their scenes in this activity. Although the theme was the same for all groups, the resulting scenes were completely different. Scenes were presented having the other groups as audience in the same style as it was done previously with the text-based scenes.

2.3 Participant's Feedback

In the last 15 minutes of the workshops a discussion circle was formed in which participants were asked to provide their feedback and insights about the workshop proposal. The comments presented in

this section were spontaneously shared by the participants, without the application of any formal data collection method. All mentions preserve anonymity and do not identify specific individuals. Overall feedback was extremely positive, but some of them we considered relevant for this study. As a general comment, participants frequently commented they were unaware of their bodies and voices on a daily routine and becoming aware of these behaviors seemed to be useful to improve social skills as well as creativity.

Along the workshops, after each scene was presented, participants were asked about what they thought about that scene experience. For the vocal scenes, participants reported that being back-to-back to other participants made them comfortable and increased their confidence to vocal perform the scene during presentation. Furthermore, they said that initially it was hard to think about the scene because of their lack of knowledge about the whole story. Thus, it was necessary to concentrate on the story while listening to other participants, but they considered it an enjoyable experience.

For the text-based scenes, participants reported an increase of difficulty in comparison to the vocal scene. This difficulty was related to the number of elements they should pay attention to while acting. For instance, changing the voice and the body behaviors while reading the text dialogues and keeping the performing rhythm constant. This increase in difficulty was expected by us and intentionally planned to occur during the scene block. By the same token, participants reported that, as an audience, it was relevant for them to watch other groups perform as they could have insights on acting while watching the scenes. During this audience experience, they were aware of how other participants changed their voices and body movements to interpret their characters in the scene. According to most of the reports, these elements would go unnoticed before the workshop instructions.

One of the most significant reports for us was related to how participants felt after presenting a theatrical scene without the support of a written text. Before starting the scene block, a common worry participants reported they were concerned about presenting a theatrical scene to an audience. These worries were related to insecurity in presenting a scene to an audience and also with the lack of ability to improvise in a theatrical scene. Curiously, at the end of the workshop, after presenting all the three scenes, they reported they preferred acting without the text because they felt freer to improvise in the scene.

Additionally, they considered the text-based scene to be the most unchallenging scene because they could not improvise due to being stuck to the text.

We consider this last report as the most significant for us because it clearly demonstrates the personal and technical development participants had by taking our workshop. Therefore, all these reports presented in this session show us that the goals we set for the workshop proposal were reached and the class plan of the workshop might be considered well succeeded.

3. The Relevance of The Workshop for Literary Development

After presenting the structure and the procedures applied in our three workshops, we now focus on discussing the relevance of this workshop model for the literary development of the participants.

As part of its objective, as exposed in the introduction of this study, the theatrical experimentation of our workshop model was intended to intensify the contact with literary works. The technical elements taught were intended to facilitate participants in exploring their creative and interpretative potentials within the realm of literature. For instance, by delving into aspects such as tone, humor, imagery, and imaginative elements present in the literary texts. Thus, theater served as a practical route to deeply explore literary texts by performing their content. Considering the positive feedback received from participants, we assume that such objectives were reached, and that theatrical experimentation can be a valid and effective educational tool, especially with regards to approaching and making sense of literature.

As part of its methodological approach, this research established dialogical relationships with theoretical approaches, practices, and processes based on three concepts, being them: theater games, audience training, and literary performance. Due to their relevance in the organization, development, and application of our workshop, these three concepts are further discussed below.

3.1 Theater Games

Our workshop methodological approach related to theater games was based on Ingrid Koudela (1984). In her work, Koudela discusses theater games as collective practices which promote a participatory creation of imaginary scenarios (by actors/participants). Additionally, she also underscores that theater games help people develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally (p.38). In that sense, theater games

have pedagogical applications, to critically and creatively enable theatrical practices/experiences, but also impact the individual as a whole. As she writes:

In the [theater] game, the group deals thus with its close reality. The manifest content is worked on through the reality of the stage, being objectivated by the necessity of communicating with the audience. The “technique” [of acting] is substituted by the conquest of this process of communication and the Focus [point of concentration of the actor] is the instrument of discovery of language. Through the relationship of the game, learning is not compartmentalized. The sense of discovery not only envisions the creation of reality on stage, but implies the transposition of the learning process to the total structure of the individual. (p. 64-65)¹⁶

The objective of each theater game, thus, is to create processes of communication. Here, communication means creating meaning and creating things (on stage); giving life to the imagination. Therefore, being able to seem as if you are actually holding a glass, when in fact your hand is empty, means having some sort of technique. Then, in the workshop, the focus of participants when acting should be on making it believable for the audience. When that happens, when both actors — workshop participants, in this case — and audience believe in what is shown in the theatrical scenes, that is when the discovery happens. As a collective and collaborative process, individuals learn through this discovery. “Learning”, then, means learning about oneself and others; learning to communicate.

In that sense, through theater games, participants are stimulated to use their dramatic imagination, which, as previously discussed, plays a fundamental part in the development of intelligence levels. As theater games also promote a collective and collaborative creation of fictional situations, they can make participants feel a sense of ownership of what they create, which is empowering. Additionally, they turn these instances into shared experiences, kindling a sense of collectivity, social cooperation, and shared emotions. Thus, theater games make individuals actively participate in an artistic process, already an invaluable experience for Koudela (see Koudela 1984, chapter two), and while doing these activities, they also develop their sociability and empathy — a pedagogical tool and a transformative experience.

¹⁶ Original reads: “No jogo, o grupo lida portanto com a realidade próxima. O conteúdo manifesto é trabalhado na realidade do palco, sendo objetivado pela necessidade de comunicação com a plateia. A “técnica” é substituída por esse processo de comunicação e o Foco é o instrumento de descoberta de linguagem. A partir da relação de jogo, a aprendizagem não é compartimentada. O sentido da descoberta visa não apenas à criação da realidade no palco, mas implica a transposição do processo de aprendizagem para a estrutura total do indivíduo.” Our translation.

Overall, theater games promote positive and supportive environments, which encourage participants to express themselves by means of mutual collaboration and cooperation. Moreover, research shows that theater games and drama can make the literary world more accessible by enabling participants to turn written words into concrete images, while creating meanings from the text (for further reading, see Thorkelsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2020; Chang 2012). As Chang (2012) writes:

Drama is unique in its creative and symbolic use of space, time and human presence. In drama, time can be altered, space changed and identities shifted. By means of drama conventions, an imagined context can be created (p. 6).

This imagined context means assuming to be someone else, in a different place and time. Furthermore, the transformations that happen through this dramatic imagination, in terms of space, time and identities, enables participants to “try out and experiment with new ideas, concepts, values, roles and language in action.” (Neelands, 1984, p. 6)

Considering the positive feedback we received from participants, we are in agreement that theater games develop effective tools to explore literary devices, as discussed in the previous sessions of this study. As such, theater games are a relevant practice for methods whose objectives are related to critically understanding and/or teaching literature. It is also emphasized that, as much as theater games have significant educational potential, they can also transform individuals in many ways.

3.2 Audience Training

A brief discussion on the experience of acting and appreciating a scene, particularly in terms of audience training, was conducted before the scene block of the workshop. The aim of this initial discussion was to underscore that the audience has an active and significant role in the theatrical experience. Following Jacques Ranciere (2009), one of the objectives of discussing the role of the audience with participants before the activity is to *emancipate* them from the idea of a passive audience, that is there merely to see something. For Ranciere,

[e]mancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting, when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when

we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. (p.13)

The emancipated spectator knows what is happening in the scene, so does not rely on the actor to know things. Therefore, instead of thinking about the theatrical experience as one in which the actor knows about everything beforehand, and gradually reveals it all for the spectator, Ranciere argues that it is also possible to think about the theatrical experience as one in which both spectator and actor know that there is a process of communication happening (drama); they mutually acknowledge it and partake in this collective experience. Furthermore, the emancipated spectator is by no means a passive individual in the theatrical experience. The idea being that while the actor conducts the action, the spectator, in its immobility, passively receives it. Rather, this emancipated spectator is learning from this experience, much like the actor is too, and as they learn they transform themselves (See chapter one). As he writes: "Theatre is the place where an action is taken to its conclusion by bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilized." (p.3)

Moreover, recent studies also discuss how audience members help create meaning of and also co-create the theatrical experience as a whole (Fischer-Lichte 2008; Grehan 2009). Koudela (1984) also discusses how, starting in the 60s, more and more theatrical companies were interested in abolishing the idea of a passive audience, preferring, instead, to focus on the dramatic experience as a collective process. (See chapter 3)

Therefore, the objective of conducting a brief discussion about acting and appreciating a scene was to make participants understand this experience as part of a dynamic interchange in which both performer and audience actively participate in this communicative process.

3.3 Literary Performance

Literature can engage people with other experiences and life stories. This can generate an idea of being connected through time and space to other people and contexts; a collective experience. On the other hand, the performance of a literary text gives it a particular voice, tone, timber, spoken accent, physical embodiment, and distinct sensuousness; or, as Rastelli (2006) writes, brings it to life (p.82). According to Paul Zumthor (2007), "performance designates an act of communication as such; refers to a

moment taken as present. The word means the concrete presence of participants implied in this act in an *immediate way*¹⁷ (p.47). As he claims (p.28-29), performance is the force-form which gives the written word a body and vivifies it.

The performance of literary texts, thus, connects participants to the present moment through and of the text. In other words, the performance of a literary text connects its participants to their current material surroundings by means of relating to their senses in an immediate way; they are aware of their bodies and voices, other people's bodies and voices, and surrounding space (p. 47-48). Yet, this performance also connects participants to the present moment of the text itself, in that participants (re)live these experiences and life stories, they are (also) happening at that moment. Therefore, the performance of literary texts creates the possibility of magnifying and intensifying the interrelationships which literature stimulates in us individually.

Furthermore, the performance of literary texts also has the potential to create moments and spaces of exceptions and ruptures of real life, similar to the idea of *liminality*, which Victor Turner (1988) writes about. According to him, there are moments created through performance, which he calls *reflexive performativity*, in which sociocultural groups can reflect upon themselves, their conditions, norms, and practices which compose their *public selves*. In these moments and contexts there is a type of free game, of non-structured relationships, in which there is the possibility of individuals assuming the role of transformative agents, as well as being transformed. As he comments: "Cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change" (p. 24). In that sense, by performing a literary text participants had the opportunity to reflect upon themselves, as their bodies and voices, the space they semiotically occupy, with their clothes, objects, actions, and gestures, and also upon literary elements of the scene, as what type of character is being played, who is this person, what does it do, also what is the tone, imagery, and rhythm of the scene, amongst other elements. In that sense, the performance of literary texts intensifies and catalyzes communicative spaces of transformation. Thus, through the performance of literary texts participants can actively co-create meaning, as well as promote interpersonal relationships.

¹⁷ Original reads: "performance designa um ato de comunicação como tal; refere-se a um momento tomado como presente. A palavra significa a presença concreta de participantes implicados nesse ato de maneira *imediata*." Author's italics, our translation.

Therefore, we argue that the performance of literary texts made available during the workshops further enhanced participants' literary development. Utilizing theater as an intervention tool, with the objective of approaching literature creatively and dynamically — whether for pleasure, academic, or work-related purposes — is an effective and relevant method. As Woolland (2008) writes, drama and performance make learners think and behave creatively and imaginatively. Thus, drama and performance can create a space where learners explore ideas by making connections and establishing relationships between things (See Woolland, 2008, sections One and Two).

4. Final Remarks

We consider that each of the three sessions of our workshop *Do Texto à Cena: Minicurso prático de Corpo, Voz e Teatro para a Performance Literária* have fulfilled the goals of increasing the literary experience through theatrical/performative experimentation. Additionally, we were able to offer participants a technical arsenal of abilities for them to explore their creative/interpretive potentials in the field of literature during and after the workshop.

Although most participants did not know each other before the workshop, we observed that they developed a good rapport during the activities, which evidences part of the social development expected for a workshop session. Additionally, participants engaged in exploring body and voice usages during the workshop in order to perform different characters or to improve a chosen character along the activities, such as the ones of the scene block. Thus, it seems for us that the goal of providing technical abilities for performing was also reached.

The general feedback provided by participants reinforced that the workshop was productive and engaging. As participants established several processes of communication with each other, they underwent collaborative processes of artistic creation based on the dynamics of collective interrelationships, as well as self-knowledge and self-transformation.

We acknowledge that our workshop does have some limitations. While other authors have explored drama practices focused on second language learning and pronunciation instruction (See Bora, 2021; Bora, 2022; Galante and Thomson, 2017), we avoided focusing on such issues, and established literary performance as the target goal, even though we approached pronunciation components during

the vocal instructions. For instance, changing phonetic segments in speech to explore different accents as well as exploring features of speech disorders such as stuttering and lisps in order to create the character's speech patterns. Although we opted to focus on literary performance, this workshop might be applied for several other pedagogical purposes in language learning, and we encourage future research to explore these other possibilities.

We also acknowledge that the framework of this workshop, or fragments of its structure, might be applied in different areas of educational practices involving undergraduate or graduate Languages and Literature courses. For instance, creative writing courses, or literary theory or literary studies courses.

Considering the overall results presented in this study, we conclude that the experiences and processes created through the workshops satisfied our expectations. We could observe each of our objectives fulfilled in the activities, and the methods chosen successfully made participants engage and learn throughout the process. Theater practices have shown to be efficient and creative educational tools for approaching and/or teaching literature. Additionally, considering the feedback we received from participants, participating in the workshop seemed to be a positive and transforming overall experience for them.

References

BORA, S. F. Drama pedagogy in foreign language learning: investigating the impact of theatre texts and theatre performance on L2 speaking accuracy and complexity. In: **Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance**, 27(4), p.507-523. 2022. Acesso em: 2 ago. 2024.

BORA, S. F. Curtain up! Enhancing L2 spontaneous and authentic speaking opportunities through play scripts and drama-based approaches. In: **RELJ Journal**, 52(3), p.458-473. 2021. Acesso em: 15 ago. 2024.

CHANG, L.Y. S., 'Dramatic' language learning in the classroom. In: WINSTON, J.; (Org.). **Second language learning through drama**: Practical techniques and applications. New York: Routledge, 2012.

COBLE, E. *Baggage unattended*. New York: William Morris Endeavor, 2002.

FREIRE, P. **Pedagogia do oprimido**. 17. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987.

FISCHER-LICHTE, E. **The transformative power of performance**: a new aesthetics. New York: Routledge, 2008.

- GREHAN, H. **Performance, ethics, spectatorship in a global age**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- GALANTE, A.; THOMSON, R. I. The effectiveness of drama as an instructional approach for the development of second language oral fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness. In: **Tesol Quarterly**, 51(1), p.115-142. 2017. Acesso em: 7 ago. 2024.
- GÜTHS, R. C. **Going Beyond Standard Accents in L2**: a layered model of accents for speech production. 2024. 57 f. TCC (Graduação) - Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, 2024.
- HALL, S. J. **Basic biomechanics**. 6. ed. New York: Connect Learn Succeed, 2012.
- HAMILL, J.; KNUTZEN, K. M.; DERRICK, Timothy R. **Biomechanical basis of human movement**. 4. ed. United States: Wolters Kluwer, 2015.
- KOUDELA, I. D. **Jogos teatrais**. 4. ed. São Paulo: Perspectiva S.a., 1984.
- NEELANDS, J. **Making sense of drama**: a guide to classroom practice. London: Heinemann Educational, 1984.
- OIDA, Y.; MARSHALL, L. **O ator invisível**. Tradução Marcelo Gomes. São Paulo: Beca Produções Culturais, 2001.
- PASCOE, R., Mel, M., WALKER, P., IFOPO, E., O'FARRELL, L., & KARPININ, T. Drama in the Pacific curriculum. In: *NJ* (Drama Australia Journal), 28(1), Brisbane, p. 121–129, 2004. Acesso em: 22 jul. 2024.
- RAJAGOPALAN, K. The case for intonation teaching: towards a pedagogy of empowerment in EFL teaching. In: **Advanced Research in English Series** (ARES), Florianópolis, p.457-464, 2005. Acesso em: 27 ago. 2024.
- RANCIÈRE, J. **The emancipated spectator**. London: Verso, 2009.
- RASTELLI, L. R. Drama in language learning. In: **Encuentro**: Journal of Research and Innovation in the Language Classroom, 16, Madrid, p. 82–94, 2006. Acesso em: 20 jul. 2024.
- TARANTINO, Q. **Pulp fiction**: tempo de violência. Tradução Joana Mosella. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1995.
- TAUKENI, S. G. Introductory Chapter: bio-psychosocial model of health. *Psychology Of Health - Biopsychosocial Approach*, [S.L.], v. 4, n. 1, 30 out. 2019. IntechOpen. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.85024>.
- THOMAZ, J. F. Uma Experiência com o jogo: relatos e problematizações de teatro-educação. In: 22^a **CONFAEB**, 2012, Universidade Estadual Paulista. São Paulo: Faeb, 2012.

THORKELSDÓTTIR, R. B.; RAGNARSDÓTTIR, A. H.. Learning language through drama. In: RAGNARSDÓTTIR, A. H.; BJÖRNSSON, H. S. (Orgs). **Drama in education**: exploring key research concepts and effective strategies. London: Routledge, p. 5-21, 2020.

THORKELSDÓTTIR, R. B. **Understanding Drama Teaching in Compulsory Education in Iceland**: A micro-ethnographic study of the practices of two drama teachers. 2016. Tese 307 f. (Doutorado em Educação). Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, 2016.

TURNER, V. **The anthropology of performance**. New York: Paj Publications, 1998.

WOOLLAND, B. **Pupils as playwrights**: drama, literacy and playwriting. London: Trentham Books, 2008.

ZUMTHOR, P. **Performance**, recepção, leitura. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007. Tradução de Jerusa Pires Ferreira e Suely Fenerich.

Licença Creative Commons – Atribuição Não Comercial 4.0 Internacional (CCBY-NC4.0)

Como citar este artigo:

GÜTHS, Rubens Costa; GARCEZ, Matias Corbett. The literary experience through theater practice: an experience report of a practical proposal. **Revista Educação e Cultura Contemporânea**, v. 22, 2025. Disponível em: <https://mestradoedoutoradoestacio.periodicoscientificos.com.br/index.php/reeduc/article/view/11457>. Acesso em: dd mmm. aaaa.

Financiamento: O estudo não recebeu financiamento.

Contribuições individuais: Conceituação, Metodologia, Recursos, Software, Visualização, Curadoria dos Dados, Investigação, e Escrita – Primeira Redação: Rubens Costa Güths. Análise Formal, Administração do Projeto, Supervisão, Validação, e Escrita – Revisão e Edição: Matias Corbett Garcez.

Declaração de uso de Inteligência Artificial: Os autores declaram que não utilizaram qualquer ferramenta, modelo ou serviço de Inteligência Artificial na preparação deste trabalho. Todo o conteúdo foi produzido, revisado e organizado pelos próprios autores, que assumem total responsabilidade pela integridade e originalidade da publicação.

Sobre os autores:

RUBENS COSTA GÜTHS é Fonoaudiólogo (CRFa 3 - 10 775) formado pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). Também é Bacharel em *Letras – Inglês* pela UFSC e Bacharel Filosofia pelo Centro Universitário Internacional UNINTER. Possui pós-graduação (especialização) em *Filosofia e Autoconhecimento: uso pessoal e profissional* pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) e é *Especialista em Voz* e *Especialista em Linguagem* certificado pelo Conselho Federal de Fonoaudiologia (CFFa).

MATIAS CORBETT GARCEZ é Professor da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), atuando no Departamento de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras (DLLE) do Centro de Comunicação e Expressão (CCE). É Doutor em *Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários* e Mestre em Literatura pela UFSC. Possui Bacharel em Letras pela Universidade Paulista (UNIP) e Licenciatura em *Educação Artística – Teatro* pela Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC).

Recebido em xx de janeiro de 2025

Versão corrigida recebida em xx de novembro de 2025

Aprovado em xx de dezembro de 2025