

AAUSC 2015 Volume—Issues in Language Program Direction

Integrating the Arts: Creative Thinking about FL Curricula and Language Program Direction

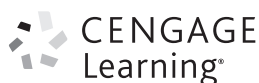
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Chapter 4

Italy at Your Fingertips: Integrating Puppet Theater in the Italian Classroom

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Introduction

The puppet theater has presented a significant educational experience for children and adults throughout the ages. Let us consider, for example, its function in various religious rituals around the globe; its carnivalesque, informative, and political functions as a street art; and its place as a formative game for many young writers and dramatists. The puppet as a ritualistic object has also been the subject of philosophic and aesthetic investigation, while its cognitive ramifications have drawn the interest of engineers and scholars of animation and virtual identities.

Interestingly, the literature during the 20th century on the educational power of the puppet is often characterized by a fervent crusading tone, fueled by primitivism and psychodrama in the first half of the century and by a critical view of modernity in the latter half of the century. Since the 1960s, Western puppetry gradually changed from being a form of entertainment, commonly encountered in the streets, city squares, and theaters, to an art form for theaters and animation festivals. Both in the United States and in Europe, puppetry became a forceful symbol of the premodern world, and at times representative of lost spiritual and social values, which are nostalgically evoked and creatively reinterpreted in the work of historians, practitioners, and educators. For this reason, many scholars of this period were propelled by the idea of puppetry as a primordial experience and a psychological antidote against the ills of modernity. Examples of this perspective are found in Italy in the work of historians such as Roberto Leydi (1958) and of puppeteers/educators such as Maria Signorelli (1961) and, more recently, Gianfranco Zavalloni (2010) and Walter Broggini (1995, 2013). In the United States, one can look at the vibrant resurfacing of the pedagogical debate around the puppet, as expressed by the relentless advocacy of Carol Sterling, and later by national events such as the annual workshop for educators and therapists “Puppets: Education Magic” (held concurrently to the National Puppet Festival and organized by the Puppeteers of America), which spurred several publications of recent years (Bernier & O’Hare, 2005; Crepeau & Richards, 2003; Fisher, 2009).

This chapter makes a case for the integration of the puppet theater in the foreign language (FL) curriculum grounded in an acknowledgment of the art's cathartic effect, its ability to engage and develop multiple intelligences and various skills, and the cultural value and uniqueness of its different traditional forms. The chapter begins with an examination of the literature currently available in support of this creative approach, identifying recurring themes and issues, and evaluating educators' reflections *vis-à-vis* certain historic and cultural dynamics and influences. While the application of puppetry in education has almost always been considered with regard to primary and secondary school levels of teaching, a number of puppet theater techniques translate remarkably well into higher education, especially when teaching languages whose cultures present strong puppetry traditions, such as Italian. Thus, the final section of the chapter addresses the pertinence of puppetry to teacher training and curriculum development, exemplified by the case of Italian, both as a tool in the instructor's lesson and in student-led productions.

From Stage to School: Reflections on the Educational Potential of Puppetry

The puppet theater's efficacy as a teaching tool has not, to my knowledge, been the object of empirical study. Therefore, the present discussion of its educational application rests on the impressions and reflections of educators who have experimented with this technique. Nonetheless, placing such literature within its proper cultural context provides a certain degree of critical distance from the opinions and hypotheses expressed by these educators. For example, upon filtering and organizing the literature, one can easily become suspicious of the overly optimistic tone that often infuses the writing, and that at times clouds theoretical self-awareness. Acknowledgment of the historic reasons for this attitude is important not only to better understand the motives (and limitations) of certain theoretical assumptions recurring in the pedagogical literature at different times in history, but also as a reminder of how culturally entrenched and political this creative methodology can be.

The formal discussion about the application of puppetry in the classroom began in the 1920s and 1930s, primarily in the United States and Britain, well before the approach attracted the attention of educators in Italy. In the United States at this time, enthusiasm for the pedagogical application of this art was ignited by a new interest in the therapeutic application of the dramatic arts and by the boom of activity in puppeteering supported by the government. The early 1900s marked the beginning of modern American puppetry, thanks to the work of pioneers who legitimized the American puppetry tradition as an art form and conveyed the dramatic value of this theater by attracting not only children but also adult audiences. At this time, a number of successful marionette companies began touring the States with several troupes. Most notable was the company of Tony Sarg (1880–1942), which was also responsible for commercializing the puppet as

well as publishing books and manuals explaining puppet construction and manipulation techniques. In the 1930s, as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the U.S. government launched the Federal Theater Project with a particular interest in puppetry as a means to involve youths in theater.¹ Within this context, the government promoted the pedagogical value of puppets, the training of puppeteers (some of the first college puppetry programs opened, including Temple University in 1925 and the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1934), and the organization of educational shows in urban and rural areas.

While an interest in puppetry as a tool for teaching has often developed in tandem with a critical eye on modernity, British and American educators of the 1930s were the first to identify its pedagogical benefits. At this time we find a number of experimental publications and dissertations about the integration of puppet plays in public schools, especially at the elementary school level (Collins & Charlton, 1932; Croft, 1935; Cunningham, 1939; McFie, 1938; Murphy, 1934). The discussion culminated in the creation of the Educational Puppetry Association in Britain in 1942 (named "E.P.A." in 1943).² While in the United States, the manual "Puppetry in the Curriculum" (Wade, 1947) was published on behalf of the Board of Education of the City of New York, advising teachers in elementary and junior high schools to consider the integration of puppets as a teaching technique. The manual presents information about the history of puppets around the world, detailed samples of classroom activities, and generous guidance on how to construct and manipulate different types of puppets. The theoretical underpinnings of this publication are summarized in the introduction by acknowledging the following advantages for the student:

- Discover and develop his special aptitudes and talents.
- Express and use an effective vocabulary, recognize the need for learning and practicing improved speech patterns, and for speaking with poise.
- Extend manipulative skills.
- Gain improved knowledge of manual, industrial, and fine arts.
- Gain increased skill in work-study techniques.
- Experience the feeling of satisfaction and success that accompanies achievement.
- Develop individual security by releasing inner tensions through dramatization of experiences related to personal, family or school problems.
- Share worthwhile information and special skills.
- Develop self-control and consideration for others in the pursuit of a common purpose.
- Participate in vitalized experiences in the various major curriculum areas.
- Understand and practice meaningful and orderly audience listening and participation. (Wade, 1947, p. xi)

¹For an overview of the history of American puppetry, see Mazzarella (2007).

²For more details about the Educational Puppetry Association, see Philpott (1969, pp. 75–76).

This list encompasses various learning objectives, though its emphasis is clearly at the level of psychological development—probably already reflecting the influence of psychodrama, which had started circulating in the United States with the arrival in New York City of its major practitioner Jacob Moreno in 1925. Among the various benefits listed is the student's ability to “express and use an effective vocabulary, recognize the need for learning and practicing improved speech patterns, and for speaking with poise.” Such outcomes open the prospects of the puppet's application at the level of the teaching of lexicon and grammar, the illustration and practice of structures, and the development of oral (interpersonal and/or presentational) communication and “poise” (namely self-motivation and confidence).

The manual by the Board of Education contains one of the earliest examples of forceful institutional acknowledgment of the connection existing between puppetry and learning, but with only brief mention to language learning. One of the first discussions focusing solely on the presentation of the puppet as an instrument for FL instruction at the elementary level was authored in 1944 by Marjorie Batchelder (later McPharlin), one of the founders of the association called *Puppeteers of America*, and subsequently vice president of UNIMA (*Union Internationale de la Marionnette*, founded in Prague in 1929). This short yet trustworthy handbook, titled *The Use of Puppets in the Teaching of Languages* (Batchelder, 1944),³ brims with practical suggestions originating from the author's expertise in theater and puppeteering. Batchelder centers the suitability of the puppet as a teaching tool to overcome self-consciousness, which translates into spontaneous and natural conversation in the classroom, especially from the less extroverted students who are harder to reach. A similar observation is also contained in the introduction of David Rowlands's informative pamphlet *A Puppet Theatre for Language Teaching* (1965), which also includes the scripts of puppet plays for the French high school classroom. Indeed, the disinhibiting and cathartic effect of puppets, which was in line with the revival of drama as a tool for psychological liberation and expression, was from early on also the central argument for bringing puppets into the elementary, middle, and high school classrooms in general.

The prevalence and validity of the argument presenting the puppet as a tool for overcoming emotional challenges in language learning is attested to not simply by its recurrence in the literature across the span of many years, but also by more recent and specialized publications. For example, one can look at current accounts of the affective benefits of using puppets when teaching language to minority students, where the puppet was observed to “internalize language patterns, enhance listening skills, develop risk-taking skills and student confidence, and provide opportunities for students to work cooperatively as a group” (Lepley,

³I thank Steve Abrams, associate editor of *Puppetry Journal* and past president of *Puppeteers of America*, and Philip Huber, of *The Huber Marionettes*, for providing me with a copy of this publication and generously answering my numerous questions.

2001, p. 1). Likewise, one can look at Elizabeth Freeman's (2005) discussion of the emotional benefits of using puppets in teaching literacy to second language and special education students. The more profound outcomes of psychological development, so often remarked upon in the literature regarding this creative approach, could appear secondary to the more practical needs of FL instruction. Yet, at the same time, they are certainly important and should not be overlooked, especially in the FL classroom, where atmosphere, motivation, and emotions are critical factors for successful acquisition.

The chief benefit of this art form in FL instruction is the ability to engage and develop a large number of learning styles, intelligences, and skills: a puppet show can integrate the study of music, songs, dance, costume design, and craftsmanship. From the standpoint of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory, the puppet theater has been discussed as an opportunity to engage and develop a number of different intelligences, including the linguistic (creation of a script, oral practice), the spatial (creation of three-dimensional puppets and stage), the kinesthetic (the use of the body and in particular the hands during performance), the musical (composition of a song or music accompaniment), and the interpersonal (through collaboration in the creation of a show) (Ginther, 2005). Furthermore, students can be encouraged to create their own puppets, thus bringing to the class the cognitive and learning rewards of manual and craft work. The strongly synesthetic and holistic nature of this art form and the level of individual freedom it encourages can allow students to engage a variety of learning intelligences, while affording them the opportunity for creative expression and development of linguistic ability.

Educators have also observed a significant and positive impact not only on oral and aural language skills, but also on literacy (reading and writing) (Peck, 2005). The widely successful children television series *Sesame Street*, originating from a long tradition of children TV shows (including *Howdy Doody* and *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*) was initially created to teach reading skills, even introducing Latino characters early on with songs in Spanish. The challenges of understanding points of view and characterization, finding the correct voice intonation and expression, and visualizing sets and costumes in order to succeed in the creation of a skit have all been regarded as successful ways of fostering engagement with the text, encouraging re-reading, and promoting confidence and language learning overall. One of the consequences of these observations is that puppetry can be most effectively integrated within a skill-based methodology, including skills such as reading and writing. It has also been noted that the puppet itself can be an effective tool for classroom management as it helps maintain focus and orchestrate transitions (Crepeau & Richards, 2003).

In summary, the typical outcomes of performance-oriented teaching, such as its harmonious relationship with communicative language instruction, the immersion-style learning that it seeks, and fostering an effective collaborative

environment are all present in the application of puppetry to language teaching.⁴ Furthermore, puppets also present the unique opportunity for a simulated classroom guest concurrent to and in conversation with the instructor, and offer a more thorough engagement of multiple intelligences, senses, and skills in the student's management of various aspects of a theatrical production. Furthermore, based on the qualitative literature reviewed, the special emotional and cognitive qualities of the puppet (distance from self and projection of self) appear to make such benefits available even to the less-extroverted students, and to engage those manifesting deficits at the level of confidence and attention.

Integrating Puppetry in the FL Curriculum: Implications for Teacher Training

When training instructors to introduce educational puppetry into the FL classroom, the supervisor needs to have teachers understand the benefits of this approach, but also to guide them in developing knowledge of different puppeteering techniques and about the specific connections the teachers' target culture has with puppetry. For example, beyond the cases of Italy and the United States, one should consider examples such as the traditional Wayang theater of Indonesia or Punch in Japan. Wayang puppetry represents social hierarchies and characters similar to *commedia dell'arte* stock characters, serves as a vehicle for Hinduism through the staging of epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and performs a crucial religious ritual during important occasions (Hartley, 1971, pp. 88–89). Bunraku puppetry represents one of the classic theatrical traditions of Japan and, in its expression of the “contrasts between immediacy and distancing: between artificial reality and composed artificiality” presents a significant example of Japanese aesthetics (Allan, 1979, p. 7). Furthermore, instructors need guidance in understanding how to prepare for and manage the application of puppetry, both in the case of the puppet being manipulated by the teacher to aid in the lesson, and in the case of the students manipulating puppets in shows created by them. Depending on the level of familiarity teachers might have with puppetry, a short demonstration of the various techniques might be necessary at the onset of their training. Such demonstration can be best arranged by inviting a local puppeteer to give a sample of his/her skills as well as to answer any of the technical questions the instructors might have.

⁴For an overview of the benefits of teaching foreign language and culture through theater see Marini-Maio and Ryan-Scheutz (2010, pp. 1–9). Since puppetry is a form of theater, teaching with puppets is directly related to teaching through theater. This relationship is addressed in the second part of this essay. In terms of teaching culture, puppets invite the integration of numerous possible topics such as: *commedia dell'arte* masks, political satire, regional differences, nomadism and folk arts, the *pupi*'s role in Sicilian ritualism and identity, urban development, and industrialization.

The variety of puppeteering techniques available provides the instructor with a number of possible ways to integrate puppets into the curriculum with varying degrees of artistic complexity. Batchelder's handbook lists the techniques from the least to the most complex as follows:

- shadow puppets (flat cardboard silhouettes behind a lighted muslin or paper screen),
- rod puppets (flat cut-out figures moved from below),
- handheld puppets (operated by forefinger, little finger, and thumb),
- finger puppets (small figurine with index and third finger as legs),
- hand and rod puppet (like the handheld puppet, but with an articulated arm moved by a rod),
- more complex rod puppets (where the number of articulations grows with combination of rods and strings), and
- marionettes (string-held from above of varying complexity).

The emotive effect of the puppet also seems to be related to the type of puppet selected for teaching. Batchelder observes that students begin speaking quickly with rod or hand puppets, while the same does not happen with string-held puppets, which instead incite curiosity more at the level of manipulation. The reasons for this, which Batchelder does not explain, might rest in the fact that hand puppets are more directly an extension of the puppeteer's body and therefore appear more organic and real. It is no coincidence that hand and rod puppets have been more commonly employed for satirical repertoires, while marionettes have been used for more highbrow and literary shows, which are distinguished by their magnificent and graceful movements. Consider for example the nomadic *commedia dell'arte* glove puppet tradition of the Po valley in Italy, with its satirical puppets characterized by large and expressive sculpted wooden heads, as opposed to the elegant and poised string-held puppets used in the magnificent marionette theaters of Rome, Milan, Turin, and Venice adapting literary texts and historical events.

Different forms of puppetry can prove effective in engaging learners in different ways, and each of them presents unique and fascinating cultural and aesthetic characteristics. Psychologists and cognitive scientists have recently demonstrated the ease and spontaneity with which the human mind ascribes agency to inanimate objects, where simple geometrical figures interacting with one another or a crumpled brown bag can suddenly be interpreted as having feelings and desires.⁵ This psychological dynamic has attracted the interests of engineers working with artificial intelligence, as they have been attempting to understand humans' reaction to human-like robots, beginning with Mori's famous study on the "The Uncanny Valley" (1970) and continuing with the recent work of scholars in digital animation and special effects (North, 2008; Tinwell & Sloan, 2014). Nonetheless, because the

⁵For a recent overview of the theories describing the transition or oscillation between the perception of an object as animate and inanimate (and vice versa) see Banzhaf (2014).

glove puppet directly reflects and amplifies the movements of the hand, thereby evoking a “warmer,” more affective (as opposed to “cold” and mechanical) presence, it should remain the preferred choice among FL instructors. Even though, to my knowledge, there are no scientific studies that show that this form of puppet can directly promote linguistic expression, it seems that, due to its physical qualities, the glove puppet is the form that will most likely lead to more immediate and spontaneous results in student engagement at the level of communication.

As in most aspects of teaching, the success of using puppets in the classroom relies in large part on the degree of preparation, comfort, and enthusiasm of the instructor. During teacher training, it is thus important to guide instructors in choosing a puppet that inspires them and that is also appropriate for their class(es). Shari Lewis, the accomplished American puppeteer, reminds us that in order to have good puppetry, the puppeteer must find aspects of his/her own self reflected in the puppet, rather than forcing a character without personal connections (Mazzarella, 2007). While the puppet should have a connection to the target culture (through a traditional costume, a historical figure, a literary character, and so on), it should also speak to the instructor’s own interests and unique relationship to the subject matter. Therefore, in connection with an overview of the different types of puppets, instructors should be invited to explore the various manifestations of the puppet within their target culture. When reporting back their findings to the workshop, the group will generate a more complete idea of the cultural identity of this art form. For example, an Italian instructor will quickly discover that the puppet theater in Italy is an unique, varied, and influential expression of the artistic patrimony of the country, ranging from the Southern shows of *pupi* (recently acknowledged as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO), the Neapolitan *guarattelle* theater of Pulcinella, the various types of glove and rod puppet theaters based on *Commedia dell’arte* masks throughout the Padanian plain, and the prestigious marionette enterprises of Rome, Milan, and Turin.

Integrating the puppet theater in the curriculum presents various opportunities to raise the students’ awareness of important cultural and artistic topics. For example, playing a short video clip of a *guarattelle* show by Bruno Leone or Paolo Comentale, or a traditional show by the Ferrari of Parma or by Romano Danielli of Bologna is an effective way to help the class gain an understanding of *Commedia dell’arte*-style theater as well as of different regional accents and dialects. Alternatively, the instructor can easily find video clips online of the marionette shows of Vittorio Podrecca’s Teatro dei Piccoli, the most well-known Italian theatrical phenomenon outside of Italy during the 1920s. These show not only the technical mastery achieved by this art form in Italy at the time, but also its capacity to faithfully reproduce humans’ and animals’ behaviors in a miniaturized form (inspiring, for example, Italian Futurists such as Fortunato Depero). Furthermore, the ritualistic qualities (realistic armor, lengthy cyclical narrative, and tragic tone) of the chivalric repertoire of the *pupi*—which can also be showcased with video clips by puppeteers such as Mimmo Cuticchio or by the Fratelli Napoli—exemplify the

Sicilians' need for rituals that would strengthen local identity, dignity, and shared values especially after the Unification.⁶

The instructor's research could extend in depth and range, even bringing to light the broader cultural significance and influence of the puppet theater in their respective cultures. For the sake of exemplifying the cultural pervasiveness of this art form, let us elaborate on the illuminating case of Italy. In spite of the change in its social function, the puppet theater continues to evolve culturally and aesthetically, as it is influenced by new arts and media and radiates its own influence in various ways. One has only to think of the impact that this tradition has had on 20th-century Italian literature and theater, from Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1883) to Pirandello's writings (e.g. *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, 1904), from the Futurist imagination (e.g., Fortunato Depero's *Plastic Dances*, 1917) to the plays of Dario Fo (e.g., *Death and Resurrection of a Puppet*, 1971); of its influence on cinema through animation techniques and special effects; or its employment as a tool for ideological positioning, as can be seen in films by Vittorio DeSica (*The Children Are Watching Us*, 1944), Roberto Rossellini (*Paisan*, 1946), Bernardo Bertolucci (*1900*, 1976), and Pier Paolo Pasolini (*What Are the Clouds?* 1968). The influence of Italy's puppet theater tradition has even reached beyond national borders, inspiring, for example, Italian American filmmakers who have used it as a tool to reinterpret immigrant identity—for example, Helen DeMichiel's *Tarantella* (1996) and John Turturro's *Rehearsal for a Sicilian Tragedy* (2009).

Appropriate contextualization and extended reflection on the cultural relevance of the puppet is an important component in the integration of this creative approach to FL instruction in order to avert any prejudices that American audiences (and college-level young adults in particular) might have about the puppet being a childish form of entertainment. It is essential that the more practical decisions, in terms of curricular applications and lesson planning, emanate from the individual instructor's own relationship to puppetry, both as an art form and as an element of the target culture. In addition to guiding FL instructors through the cultural and artistic preparatory work, the supervisor should also present instructors with some general didactic options and strategies for each. In what follows, I outline some of the best practices on integrating the puppet effectively both as a teaching tool and in performances in the Italian classroom.

Puppets as Pedagogical Aid

When in the hands of the teacher as a pedagogical tool, however, the puppet can be used as a “guest” to engage the students in a variety of activities. For example, it can serve as a lively substitute for the instructor in asking questions (on the

⁶For a thorough introduction to the history of Italian puppetry in English, I suggest McCormick (2010). Among the many sources available in Italian, I recommend beginning with the edited volume by Allegri and Bambozzi (2012).

identity of objects, people, the weather, time, students' interests and hobbies, etc.). Students can also be invited to wear the puppet and respond to other classmates' questions.⁷ When introduced as an occasional guest, the puppet allows the instructor to interact with it as if it were another expert in the language and culture. In this way, the instructor can enrich the lesson and introduce a variety of cultural and linguistic topics in the way he/she might do with a "native informant" visiting the class. The use of the puppet as a sort of instructor's assistant has been effective in encouraging less extroverted students to speak, especially when the puppet makes obvious and comedic mistakes that students can then correct.⁸ In comparison to other types of props, the puppet is perceived as an animate character with personal traits; therefore language structures and cultural topics can be presented within the global context of the character's needs, desires, fears, and so on, heightening the communicative value and interactive potential of the presentation.

David Rowlands (1965) recommends that the teacher begin with a clear picture in mind regarding the puppet's characteristics and that he/she possibly select traits that would further elicit students' participation in activities that entail filling information gaps. The puppet could therefore be slightly deft, dim, shortsighted or color-blind.⁹ Or, as an example from the Italian classroom, a puppet like Pinocchio would present unique physical and psychological features that can be used when introducing the verb *essere* (to be), descriptive adjectives, and parts of the body, as the puppet describes the students and is, in turn, described by them. The puppet can also be used to introduce a variety of action verbs as he performs them in front of the students (*parlare, tirare, aprire, chiudere, prendere, baciare, cantare, ballare*, etc.), and to practice the imperative mode as students give him orders, as well as introduce verbs such as *potere* (be able to), *dovere* (to have to), and *volere* (to want to). Together with props such as bandages, articles of clothing, a letter, or food, the puppet can easily help to create skits that introduce new vocabulary and situational phrases (the doctor, the shop, the restaurant, the post office, etc.).

Puppets in Performance

Student-led puppet shows are another way to integrate this art form in intermediate and advanced FL classes. Besides the well-known pedagogical strategies and benefits common among other theatrical methods (see also Chapters 3 and 5 in this volume), puppet plays introduce a few additional benefits. For example, the

⁷For an account of a Spanish teacher's use of the puppet as guest see "Communicative Puppet Play Techniques" (2001).

⁸See, for example, Freudstein (1995), which contains useful observations in the context of teaching English as a foreign language at the elementary level (pp. 54–59).

⁹Even though the choice of a puppet can be perceived as potentially fraught with the dangers of political incorrectness and cultural stereotyping, instructors should be reminded that a puppet character can actually be used comically as a way to point to the very limits of certain stereotypes and to satirically go beyond them.

collaborative complexities of live theater are much reduced in the case of the puppet theater, whose successful performances can rest fully in the hands (or, indeed, fingers!) of one or a few individuals. Students can find their own expression within the context of a show by creating dialogues and plots, constructing puppets and sets, and choosing music. If integrated among curriculum goals, instructors should receive an overview during training of the various aspects and phases of a puppet play (scripting, puppet construction, set construction, soundtrack, rehearsing, etc.) and learn how different aspects of the show and its preparation correlate with different learning styles, different learning goals, and different intelligences. Instructors can encourage students to follow their own interests and inclinations by engaging specific intelligences and learning styles, such as: the linguistic, in writing and rehearsing the script; the spatial, during the creation of puppets and props; the kinesthetic, during performance; the musical, in arranging for sound accompaniment and effects; and the interpersonal, through collaboration with other classmates. Indeed, the multifaceted nature of puppetry provides ample opportunities to bring interdisciplinary breadth into the curriculum, successfully fostering disciplinary connections (the third “C” in ACTFL’s Standards for Learning Languages).

In elementary and intermediate Italian classes, learners can draw from the rewards of this art form while also reviewing and internalizing specific grammar or vocabulary or cultural topics from the current unit. After an overview of the different forms of Italian puppetry, the instructor can begin by creating groups of three and assigning them a structure and/or vocabulary to use in performance. Students will first prepare a script, then revise it as a composition assignment. They can then assemble the material for an actual performance by rehearsing on their own time and finally performing in class.

In comparison to a simple role-play, this performance not only is affectively more manageable due to the projection and distance afforded by the puppet, but it also has the potential for inviting a significantly greater level of motivation and consequentially greater care for linguistic and cultural details. Before the performance, the class can be asked to identify the language structure that it was supposed to exemplify, as well as for clarifications at the end of the show. This activity, which would certainly be an engaging and communicative manner to review material at the end of the semester, can also be adapted to more content-based or advanced courses, including literature and cultural studies courses, wherein students could be asked to adapt a short story, fable, or cultural narrative into a puppet show.

Let us assume, for example, that the instructor assigned a set of short folk tales from Italo Calvino’s famous anthology from 1956 as reading practice in an intermediate class or as part of the course bibliography for an advanced Italian cultural course (a sample set of culturally significant stories could be: “Giovannin senza paura,” “Cola Pesce,” “Sfortuna,” and “L’erba dei leoni”). In both settings, the class could be divided into small groups and assigned one of the fables to adapt to a puppet play. The narrative would then be transformed into a script where students are encouraged to expand on dialogues, possibly creating new ones linked

to the situations in the narrative, and to include various notes regarding scenery, props, and special effects.

The instructor should guide the students in researching the puppetry style that best suits their project in order to bring as much artistic texture and cultural depth as possible to all aspects of the project. For example, the group focusing on “Cola Pesce” could draw inspiration from the unique form of papercut puppetry that has been successfully used in connection to folk tales in Italy by Emanuele Luzzati, a technique that can be easily demonstrated by pointing students to one of his many short films such as *Pulcinella e il pesce magico*. This technique could work particularly well with a story such as “Cola Pesce,” a poignant tale about Messina’s tragic history of earthquakes and, more broadly, the sense of political instability that has characterized Sicily across centuries. Cola Pesce, half boy and half fish, is forced by a king to dive in the waters around the island in a series of increasingly dangerous expeditions. After having discovered that three columns support Messina: one whole, one fractured, and one broken, Cola disappears during an attempt to go even deeper down and satisfy the king’s selfish and unquenchable curiosity. This would be best suited as a course-long project, during which the student would report back to the instructor and receive feedback in return at various points throughout the semester, then culminate in a final performance that is based on a script but also allows for improvisation, interaction with the audience, and playfulness.

The complexity, completeness, and length of the puppet show created will, of course, vary according to desired level of curricular integration and the specific objectives of the assignment, which in turn could vary in terms of oral qualities, grammar, and vocabulary as well as cultural or intercultural goals. Students will be guided through phases such as: the writing of a loose script (allowing ample space for improvisation); the creation or purchase of puppets (with materials such as paper, socks, papier-mâché, paper bags, gloves, etc.); the creation of props and scenes and the design of the stage (which can be a desk or a card box frame); and rehearsal and performance. The numerous handbooks that have been produced for early childhood education provide practical suggestions on how to create elements that could be useful for the puppet show, one of the most exhaustive sources being Hunt and Renfro (1982). In any case, it is recommended to strive for simplicity and flexibility in the creation of both the puppets and the sets or small theaters used for performing in class, so as to focus more on the student’s language production. Nonetheless, while the focus should certainly be on dialogue scenes, as it pertains more directly to language work, the visual and material aspects of puppet play can be important in further understanding the culture as well as providing broader aesthetic and semiotic contexts for language acquisition.

Perhaps what is most striking about the integration of puppetry in the FL classroom is the myriad of possibilities for representation that it affords, thanks to the many disciplines and skills it can encompass and the array of repertoire and effects it can easily accommodate. Furthermore, since the puppet expresses a significant portion of a country’s historical, regional, and linguistic identity, this

form of popular theater strikes us as a natural and even necessary component of a FL class. Within this creative methodology, instructors and students are held in a state of balance between the attempt to interpret figures, situations, and scripts, and pure playfulness. While the interpretative work invites critical thinking and research, the more playful aspect of the medium linked to the creation of a miniaturized puppet world invites the individual's humanity and even poetic spirit into the classroom. Rather than confuse the curriculum with dramatic dilettantism, the integration of the puppet can bring deeper texture and order to our teaching, as the puppet merges various skills into a unified, highly experiential, and all-inclusive project.

To close, then, the use of puppetry in the college classroom should incorporate a variety of linguistic, cultural, and artistic criteria that facilitate progress towards an array of learning goals. Therefore, the choice of one type of puppet over another, or the identification/creation of one puppet character rather than another, is clearly important for setting the tone and establishing the value of this teaching method and specific tool, for both instructors and students at the college level. Finally, while empirical investigations of puppetry arts and foreign language learning and puppet pedagogies in general will be extremely useful in the years to come, one cannot help but wonder how much the subtle "magic" of the puppet, so often praised in teachers' narratives, can actually be scientifically reproduced and tested. Perhaps in the case of puppets, as in other examples of arts integration and pedagogical methods based on artistic expression, the educational power largely rests in the motivational impact of a shared moment of collective appreciation, as the teacher discovers a bridge between his/her profession and artistic passions.

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