

‘International Week 2016’ at the University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria (PH NÖ)

International views on Arts, Culture & Education

*Preface by Kurt Allabauer**

During this week 25 renowned pedagogues from three continents met each other in Baden to discuss the major themes: education, monitoring and research in the fields of art, culture and language. We want to give an overview on the activities and proceedings during the five days of this workshop.

The First Day

The first of five days of study was dedicated to the performing arts. After being greeted by Kurt Allabauer (head of the International Office and coordinator of this week) rector Erwin Rauscher started his words of welcome with an important message: In German we only have one and the same word for education and culture: ‘Bildung’. This word is full of magic power that enables us to look beyond the horizon, gains influence over our health, enables us to self-determination and freedom, and that is the anchor of modern societies and connects languages - and the languages connect people. And he asked if his five theses about ‘Bildung’ address education or culture.

The first keynote was a scientifically founded introduction in the topic of this week: Drama in Education by Claudia Mewald and her team Sabine Wallner & Elisabeth Weitz-Polydoros

The second keynote was given by Wendy Mages from Mercy College New York on the use of performing arts in the school system. For three weeks she worked in the past academic year with students from the PH NÖ on this topic. The message of this presentation was that Educational drama engages participants in a multimodal interdisciplinary endeavor that has been shown to foster language development and fluency. She told us also that drama requires the development of sophisticated perspective-taking skills, and can be used to promote cultural awareness, empathy, and interpersonal understanding.

In the afternoon Loes Bastiaansen and Hans v Eerden from the Netherlands showed us that drama is important for the development of social skills and affective, cognitive as well as creative development. In their workshop college the participants got examples how to use drama skills in the primary school.

This presentation was followed by Michael McNulty from the Virginia Wise University, who discussed that the arts afford students the important developmental opportunity to make meaning from their experiences of life by giving form to those experiences. His presentation considered the interdisciplinary value of experiential theater education in the context of a liberal arts curriculum and how these practices of theater vary from approaches in technical or conservatory training.

Heidelinde Balzarek und Monika Blaschke from PH NÖ showed us that shadow play, which is also known as shadow puppetry, is an ancient form of storytelling and entertainment. The cut-out figures are held between a source of light and a translucent screen. They also introduced their project ‘Playing with shadows – shadow puppetry’ which was offered as an optional subject in the last year of special needs teacher training and primary teacher training.

Eva Unterweger introduced her project and three members from the Western Sahara Refugee Camps (Brahim Mohamed-Fadel, Salama Mohamed Lamin, Salek Sidahmed Omar) ‘The Attraction of the Other’ – Cooperation in Teacher Formation.

After the following several specialized presentations the participants were invited to bring typical food from their country in the evening to have dinner together. Particularly impressive was the African tea ceremony of the visitors from the Western Sahara Refugee Camps.

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The Second Day

The second day was devoted to the topic language. After looking at the artistic methods of language teaching in Hungary, Zsuzsanna Szilvási explained efficient language education from the kindergarten to the university. She presented the attitudes (of learners) to languages and language education, the aims and methods of teaching and learning and dealt with the role of play (and role play) in the language education from the kindergarten to the university.

Olga De Jesus from Mercy College, NY drew a comparison of the language teaching in Europe and the US. She demonstrated that the arts as a core content area are integral to a well-rounded education and arts have a profound ability to enrich the lives they touch and can be an invaluable tool for teachers at all levels to enhance instruction for English Language Learners. By integrating the arts into English language teaching and learning students will develop and deepen their understanding of their own and others' human experience; thus finding avenues for communication.

Bernadette Kövérné Nagyházi from Hungary chose the topic 'Language competences in early stages of the learning process – puppet show in the language class' and gave in her presentation an example for an innovative project which provides how the minimum language competence can be used for understanding, reading, memorizing and presenting a story in a foreign language at the very beginning of the learning process.

The topics of the afternoon were mathematics, science and teaching the talents. Alfred S. Posamentier from the Long Island University, NY led us in the world of numbers: mathematics in art, architecture and nature. He told us that unfortunately, mathematics is seen as a discipline apart most of the other subjects taught in schools. His presentation showed a number of surprising appearances of mathematics in the arts, architecture and nature with the hope that teachers will be motivated to incorporate some of these ideas into their teaching.

The day ended musically with a brilliant community concert by students and lecturers of Virginia Wise University and PH NÖ.

The Third Day

Peter C. Hillman and Andrea Coddett from the Mercy College explained vertically articulated professional learning communities. Their qualitative research examined the development of professional learning communities that are orientated to align with vertical progressions of scientific knowledge from Kindergarten through High School. A recent shift in the United States aims to change the way that science is taught and learned in school. One major part of this shift is the emphasis on a progression of scientific knowledge from K-12 (primary and secondary education - kindergarten to 12th class), which is a target of their work.

Nancy N. Heilbronner (Mercy College, NY) presented the Schoolwide Enrichment Model in science. Based on decades of research, Joseph Renzulli's SEM has been utilized at thousands of schools to develop the talents of students worldwide. Now, the model has been extended into the field of science. At this informative session, the participants learned how to use Type I, II, and III activities to motivate and engage students in authentic learning practices in science.

Peter Ryan's (Wise Virginia University) theme was: 'Teaching Talent: Reverse Engineering Your Skill'. He told us that music students are often ranked by 'talent', which is a word assigned to those who seem to pick up their instruments easily. But what constitutes talent in music? Are some skills just unteachable? This presentation explored the core components of talent and how one must sometimes carefully dissect their own approach to their field in order to effectively teach.

One of the musical highlights of this week was the concert in the Aula of the PH NÖ. Students and lecturers of Virginia Wise & PH NÖ invited the participants of the international week to a worldwide journey through continents and periods – from America to Europe and from Classic to Jazz and Musical.

The third day brought further cultural highlights of the week and included a guided tour with insights into the history of the Vienna Burgtheater and a visit to the Albertina in Vienna with the exposition 'From Chagall to Malewitsch. The Russian vanguard.'

The Fourth Day

On the fourth day not only art but also new media enthusiasts came on their account. A whole day was dedicated to the connection of these two areas. Loes Bastiaansen and Hans v Eerden demonstrated that music can help children with arithmetic. In a workshop the participants got examples how children learn music and arithmetic (Counting transactions, measure and weight...).

Two lecturers of PH NÖ, Hubert Gruber and Josef Buchner, presented the music education project 'Stairplay – music step by step'. This comprehensive learning offer is for children as well as grown-ups and can easily be played in groups with very few or up to 40 people and more, for example making music with the first seven letters of the alphabet to integrate such short compositions carefully into the presentation and the performance of stories.

Vilmos Vass from Hungary gave a lecture on 'Creative Leadership and the Professional Learning Communities'. His lecture focused on the consistency between the personal components of the creative leadership and the phenomena of the professional learning communities.

Hannah Wunsch Ryan's (Virginia Wise) topic was 'Movement and Music: Kinesthetics and the Choral Classroom'. Her thesis: When engaging students in an active discipline such as music, it is vital to connect with many different aspects of students' learning—not just through seeing or hearing, but through doing. The presentation explored, through live singing demonstrations, how deliberately designed and chosen kinesthetic movements can quickly engage students in concept learning.

Kaarina Marjanen from Laurea University in Finland showed us an iPad app to support interaction: The Carnival of the Animals. In her presentation, the Carnival of the Animals App – a multisensory story book with the music by Saint-Saëns – was observed as a tool for the teacher students to learn how to collect and investigate data, and as a tool to investigate the child's interaction inspired by the app, with the musical-linguistic development connections.

Students of the 6th semester touched with the performance 'The other side of truth' - a young adult novel by Beverly Naidoo, in which the issue of asylum was worked.

The manifold day ended with a hearty cuisine and Austrian hospitality offered to the international guests at a traditional Heurigen in Baden.

The Fifth Day

The highlight and substantive completion of the international days were the presentation and discussion with John Elliott, the 'father' of action research and the presentations of Maria-Luise Braunsteiner and Christine O'Hanlon.

In the keynote John Elliot announced 'Lesson Study in Mentoring and School Development'. He asked if the mentoring process and the lesson study are compatible and clarified the role of novice teachers and experienced mentors. He also explained the rationalist model of learning to teach and discussed the need for teacher training institutions to practice work around the laboratory model.

In the plenary 1 Maria-Luise Braunsteiner from PH NÖ had chosen the topic 'Implementing the Index for Inclusion for Inclusive Schools: A New Paradigm'. After clarifying inclusion she explained the Index for Inclusion and gave three interesting examples of the Index in use: Network building in Wiener Neudorf, Inclusive Development in Austrian Schools and Inclusion in Teacher Education which showed her international research using the Index.

In the plenary 2 Christine O'Hanlon from the UK had the last presentation: 'Developing Inclusive Education'. She demanded a new professional orientation: schools and institutions should recognize, value all students and provide for their diversity. The move toward more inclusive schooling requires schools to address professional development on two levels: reculturing of the school to reflect inclusive beliefs and values; and enhancement of teacher skills and knowledge to better address the learning needs of all students.

Kurt Allabauer the promoter of this week thanked all participants for their presentations and their engagement during the discussions. The topic of the week was drama in education and it was a great pleasure for the PH NÖ to spend five days with amazing players/actors.