

German instructor introduces performative pedagogy to UNC

Meagan Crews, UNC College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Bringing inspiration, collaboration, and a new approach to teaching, the recent 5th *SCENARIO* Forum Symposium on Performative Pedagogy hosted at the University of Northern Colorado brought together more than 35 current and future educators and five speakers and workshop leaders to highlight performance pedagogy.

With participants ranging from UNC faculty and students to other faculty and middle and high school teachers from around Colorado, the *SCENARIO* Forum Symposium focused on the idea of “performance pedagogy” – an approach that works in conjunction with other teaching methods to engage students through performance, including drama and music, in learning. This approach to teaching is often utilized in language education – though not exclusively – which was highlighted by the participants, including students and faculty representing all of the world languages offered at UNC (Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish) as well as American Sign Language.

Organized by German language and pedagogy instructor at UNC, Erin Noelliste, Ph.D., the planning for the symposium began before she even started teaching officially at UNC last August. Noelliste, a recent Ph.D. graduate from the University of Indiana, began formulating the idea of hosting the symposium after attending and presenting at the *SCENARIO* Forum international conference at University College Cork in Ireland last May. *SCENARIO* is an online, bilingual academic journal founded 10 years ago, and has grown to include associated international conferences every three years in Cork and symposia at host universities around the world. The fifth symposium hosted at UNC in January was only the second event of its kind held in the U.S. (the other was in 2015 at Indiana University).

The symposium, held Jan. 19-20, kicked off on Friday, Jan. 19 with an evening Schulze speaker and symposium keynote, Susanne Evens, Ph.D., with the talk, “Performative– Crossroads of the Arts, Education, and Foreign Languages.” Evens, a performance pedagogy expert, is a Clinical Associate Professor of Germanic Studies at Indiana University and co-editor of *SCENARIO* Journal. After the 2015 conference, Noelliste approached Evens and *SCENARIO* co-founder Manfred Schewe about organizing a symposium at UNC – of which they were supportive, with Evens agreeing to present.

Not only was UNC an ideal location as she made plans to begin her new position, it was the perfect host university for the forum, said Noelliste. “I got great support here,” said Noelliste. “I thought, since this was a Normal school at one point and it’s still a very teaching-oriented university, that it would be a great place to host something like this, and it turned out to be true.”

The event helped demonstrate a new approach to consider for future educators as they begin their careers, as well as give inspiration to current language or pedagogy educators.

After the event, Noelliste said several people told her how they were planning to implement some of the concepts they had learned into their own classrooms. “That was the ultimate goal. I think that [the event] really inspired people,” said Noelliste. “I heard a lot of feedback from

people who had never been to an event like this, and [performative pedagogy] was new to them, and they really enjoyed it. I think a lot of the time, we [teachers] get in the middle of the semester or the school year, and we're tired and wanting for ideas. So I think this sparked people's interest and gave them ideas of something to liven up their classroom."

In addition to Even's Friday night talk, Saturday was filled with workshops and talks with a variety of approaches and opportunities to put performance pedagogy to practice.

"There isn't really a set definition for performative pedagogy. In my view, performative pedagogy is an approach to teaching, which is very engaging for students and is very student-centered rather than teacher centric," said Noelliste. "It's a means for helping the students to express themselves in the language and embody the language." For example, she said, she organizes an activity where students learn word order in German by representing a particular word in a sentence, and the students physically move around to play with and change the order.

"They're remembering it much better than if I just stand there and lecture," she said. "I like to include a lot of movement in my teaching."

In addition, Noelliste and her husband, Joseph Noelliste, a Ph.D. candidate at Baylor University and Visiting Assistant Professor of Music at Elon University, ran a workshop using musical mnemonics in language teaching to help students with memorization of concepts.

"We outlined essentially how you can write your own lyrics to a song that already exists, and how this can be helpful in a language classroom to help students memorize various concepts," she said. After explaining and giving examples, Noelliste had the participants practice. For example, the German students wrote new lyrics to a popular folk song explaining *falsche freunde* (false friends) in German, and the Japanese students wrote lyrics to help students remember words used for animal sounds in Japanese.

Teaching Associate Professor of German at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Christina Wegel, Ph.D., hosted a talk on how to stage a play in a foreign language classroom in her session, "Break a tongue! Staging Theater Plays in the FL Classroom." Finally, Lane Sorenson, a Ph.D. candidate and Associate Instructor of German and Public Speaking at Indiana University, focused his workshop, "Let Foreign Language Move You with Drama Pedagogy," on implementing the drama pedagogy concepts and theory highlighted at Even's Friday lecture, letting students practice the methods in his workshop.

Finally, the event included help from the Modern Languages department and Schulze Speaker Series administration, including closing remarks from Donald Holman, Chair of the Modern Languages Department. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences and DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) were also sponsors of the event.

Overall, the 5th *SCENERIO* Forum Symposium ran smoothly and had more registrations than expected, and thanks to thorough fundraising, Noelliste was able to pay each speaker's travel expenses and provided an accommodating and welcoming event for participants. Events that bring together professionals from outside the institution or even outside individual departments is

an ideal way to share ideas and build relationships, said Noelliste. She was proud to host such a successful event that had so many people excited and inspired.

“One of the greatest successes was that we were able to welcome people from many different places and backgrounds and created a very positive, collaborative environment,” Noelliste said. “It was amazing how many people were smiling; you could see what a good time they were having while they were learning. That’s exactly what I try to create in my own classroom,” she said. “It’s not just that we’re going to dance around and have fun, but we’re going to learn as well. I love creating an atmosphere where we can have fun and make learning an enjoyable experience.”