Teaching and learning online through performing arts: Puppetry as a pedagogical tool in higher education

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Due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, a Swiss university course called "Psychology and Migration" had to move online over the Spring semester 2021. In this course, Psychology and Education students learn about the sociocultural considerations of migration, through a theoretical, personal and artistic exploration of the subjective experience of migration, based on performing arts. As part of the main pedagogical strategies, students are invited to collectively create a short theatre play based on some selected literary texts. Under the conditions imposed by the pandemic, puppetry arts were chosen as a new tool for distance-learning. Collaborating with theatre professionals, the students created a short play, and performed it online using sock puppets, image theatre or object theatre. Using data collected during the course (video recordings of online sessions and students' diaries), this article explores the critical process of reduction and expansion, and the (potentially) productive tensions that the course creates. It analyses two main appropriation modes for course students: in adaptative appropriation, students aim to reduce these tensions by adapting to the perceived expectations of teachers; in transformative appropriation, students creatively use possibilities offered by the course to conduct a personal exploration, integrating theories with their own experiences and questions.

1   Introduction: case, context and challenges

This article presents a case study wherein the performing arts was used as a resource for university teaching in the field of psychology. Specifically, our discussion is based on experience acquired from a course entitled 'Psychology and Migration', in which theatre is used as a privileged pedagogical tool (Schonmann, 2011). The main aim was not to present one more experience of employing performing arts in the context of higher education, among all those that already exist in the literature, but to discuss its conditions of effectiveness and some of the resulting subjective compromises. In particular, we offer a series of hypotheses about the learning processes facilitated by the use of theatre, as well as different types of engagement observed in the students.

We also focus on the unexpected challenges created by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Indeed, the mandatory migration of most university courses to an online format required a series of substantial transformations, while keeping certain types of interactions which proved efficient in the classroom. Clearly, the online modality created significant

challenges for most teachers around the world, which in each case led to more or less fruitful solutions (Simamora, 2020). In our case, we believe that it provided an opportunity to explore our hypotheses about what theatre can offer in educational terms, as well as what is lost and what is preserved because of a distance-learning modality.

The Psychology and Migration course is part of a University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland bachelor's programme. This course introduces students to the psychological aspects of different forms of migration from a sociocultural perspective. The course syllabus states that:

> Migrants' mental health is affected by many factors related to pre-migratory experiences as well as conditions for adapting to the host country. The interaction between these factors evolves in time, with moments of relative balance or moments of ruptures and crises. To allow students to understand and appropriate as much as possible the content of the course, we use two main pedagogical resources: on one hand, selected readings, on the other hand, theatre games and the collective creation of a short performance, based on fiction books describing the subjective experience of migration.

Although the declared aim is to introduce students into a specific field of problems related to forced mobility, through topics such as integration, health, language learning or schooling, the course also seeks to involve students, at a personal level, in these issues which are strongly related to political and ethical positions. In fact, the idea of using theatre arose from a concern about ethical issues: we believed that it should not be a purely intellectual or *ex cathedra* course, far from the possible implications and participants' lived realities. The course does not intend to present the lives of migrant people in an abstract, purely theoretical and dehumanising way. It aims to inform psychology students about migration in a way that enables them to link the scientific theories, models and concepts with their everyday life and subjectivity, as well as with the ordinary experiences and subjectivity of the migrant people around them.

A short play is constructed as part of the course, based on literary texts, and involving the engagement of students' bodies through a performative activity. The theatre play forces the students to merge their theoretical understanding with the narratives of migration experiences reported in fiction books and with their own biographical experiences in a socio-political context. In other words, in this course, theatrical performance has a bridging function between theoretical notions, somewhat abstract or general, and the concrete, embodied and mobilising experiences to which literature and everyday life can lead (Kloetzer et al., 2020).

All these considerations about the role of theatre within the course were seriously undermined by the requirement of an online modality: how could the same effects produced

by theatre be recreated without live participation in the classroom? This was a question asked in all courses and its general form refers to the possibility of preserving certain intended curricular goals under completely transformed conditions of interaction (Kloetzer et al., 2021). In any case, the problem called for a review of the processes involved in the face-to-face modality: what specifically was effective? In our case, how did the use of theatre promote a good appropriation of topics related to the psychology of migration, as was suggested by students' own personal testimonies from previous years? And, finally, which of these processes could be recreated online to achieve similar results?

2   Conditions for effectiveness and pedagogical reformulation

Much has been written about the use of performing arts in education. In this respect, there are multiple theories about their function of semiotic mediation, of alternative representation of certain contents, of corporal and emotional engagement, and of their capacity to generate cognitive dissonances, contradictions or to simply introduce a dimension of funny and playful freedom (Abed, 2016; Bale, 2020; García, 2004; Gravey et al., 2017; Lilliedahl, 2018; Read, 1943; Rooney, 2004; Taylor, 2008; Xu et al., 2021). According to Aden et al., quoting Varela, performing arts also ground language understanding and communication in the history of repeated interactions of the subject in one's environment : "what makes a word relevant is not its form but the coordination of actions that it provokes" (Maturana & Varela, 1994, p.203, original in French, quoted in Aden, Clark & Potapushkina-Delfosse, 2019). Learning (a new language, or new academic field) therefore requires a "weaving of affectivity with knowledge" (Aden, 2018). Considering all these dimensions, we would like to emphasise a process that we consider decisive in our course. This process can be described as the integration of the abstract, theoretical knowledge provided by the course with the concrete knowledge available to the subject or constructed in the course through the collective creation of a play, which we describe as a double movement of descent and ascent, or of reduction and expansion. This process requires, in turn, a specific pedagogical design.

2.1   Reduction, expansion, and productive tensions

In this course, students are confronted with the challenge of dealing with certain abstract and general conceptual theories or definitions about the psychology of migration. On the basis of scientific articles, mainly concerning cultural, social and psychological phenomena, abstract processes are analysed, and models, typologies, dynamics and other transposable forms of knowledge are offered. However, from this starting point, a process of concretisation begins, triggered by the appeal to theatre.

The task of staging a play based on a literary text thematically related to migration requires, initially, to cut out a vast and diverse field of subjects, based on the selection of a single non-scientific text. There is a productive tension between the theoretical knowledge, selected by the teacher and collectively discussed, and the artistic piece, selected by each student from a range of possible texts because it corresponds with their own taste or experience. There is another productive tension between what touches each student and what touches others, which arises when collaborating in small groups to create a unique short performance. Therefore, based on the chosen literary text, a phase of group negotiations (Berland & Hammer, 2012) begins to narrow down the main concepts, ideas and images that the students consider to be fundamental in the text they read, and to identify which emotions, impressions and ideas they would like to express in their final performance.

On this path towards reduction, students must agree on how to represent, in a few minutes, those elements considered most relevant. This involves a series of choices, but mainly a series of eliminations, cuts and rejections, which lead to a brief and simplified stage-based representation, but which remain connected to some of the initial theoretical abstractions, to their personal life and migration experience, and to their individual and collective reception of the literary text. In other words, moving from the scientific theories studied to the planning of a brief theatrical performance necessarily implies an effort of reduction, concretion and anchoring. This is the first downward selection movement to which we refer (Figure 1), and its ultimate point is the theatrical performance in public, the materialisation in words and the presentation of images, culminating from the previous negotiations of meanings.

The reduction-expansion process does not consist only of the group work that allows the passage from texts and theories to the sketch itself. Rather, following the presentation of the play, a new upward movement begins (Figure 1), which is generated by the plenary discussions triggered by the theatrical performance. This moment gives rise to new readings, interpretations, and multiple affective and conceptual resonances. The perspectives of different students and teachers are exposed in an instance of reflection *viva voce*. In other words, a phase of openness begins, of widening towards new ideas, of unforeseen connections and echoes of all kinds, with these being biographical, political and theoretical. At this point, the emerging ideas result in new interpretations of the initial theoretical material learned in the course. That is to say, the theory is "charged" and enriched through biographical and emotional reverberations, diffractions in a more Vygotskian lexicon, promoted by the performance (Kozulin, 1998).

This new level of abstraction is reflected in the final activity required in the course: the production of a learning diary. In this diary, students report on the final considerations and insights reached, through writing or the use of other physical means of representation.

Schematically, we can represent this process of reduction and expansion as follows:
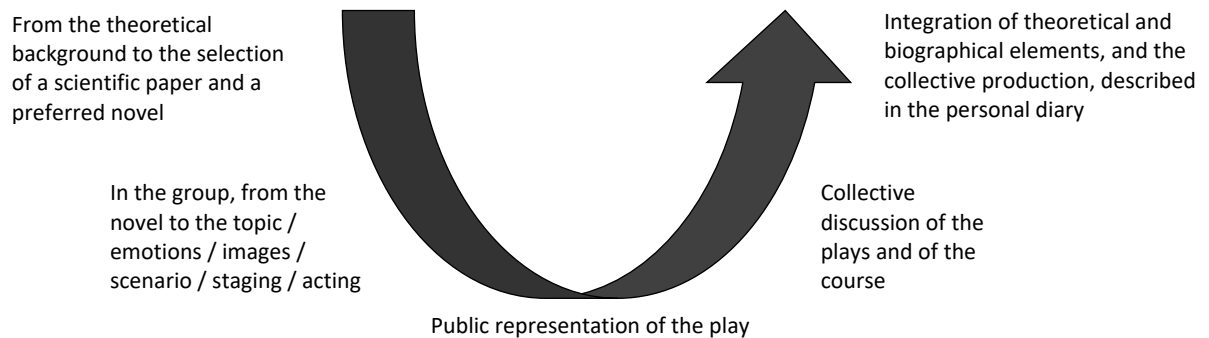
From the theoretical background to the selection of a scientific paper and a preferred novel

In the group, from the novel to the topic / emotions / images / scenario / staging / acting

Integration of theoretical and biographical elements, and the collective production, described in the personal diary

Collective discussion of the plays and of the course

Public representation of the play

Figure 1: U-shape reduction and expansion

It is precisely this double movement that we intended to preserve when moving the course online as a consequence of the pandemic. The online transition had to be able to guarantee this function of reduction and expansion triggered by the use of theatre. For this reason, it was decided to preserve the recourse to the performing arts. Puppetry was selected as an alternative to live theatre for the representation of a literary work. The traditional puppet theatre format seems well-suited to the *in vitro* communication format (Kloetzer et al., 2021), with the screen as a castelet stage. Furthermore, the reduced scale of the puppets allowed for a visual adjustment adequate for transmission using webcams or mobile phones. More importantly, the use of puppets allowed recreation of the reduction-expansion process to which we refer.

2.2   Design and assessment of the course

Under the new conditions associated with the requirement of an online modality, the course adopted the following structure:

– Introduction to the topic and to the use of puppetry online (1 session).
– Playful self-introductions using some of these puppetry techniques (1 session).
– Establishing theoretical understanding, with student presentations and discussions (also building a safe space) (5 sessions).
– Reading of the selected literary texts (novels) in parallel with the course.
– Participation in a puppetry workshop online, and creation of three groups each around one novel (1 session).
– Collective creation of a play in groups (4 sessions).
– First presentation of the full play to the teachers, with discussion (1 session).
– Presentation of the three plays to the whole group, with discussion (1 session).
– Production of a learning diary (completed throughout the course, from day 1)

To evaluate the reduction-expansion process, we asked the students to complete learning diaries throughout the whole semester, in free form (regarding content and format). In other words, diaries could have a classic textual format, be handwritten or typed, but they could also include other semiotic media, such as images, three-dimensional objects or web links to other sources. The only restriction was that students should not delete what they have written before, but to add a new entry.

In this way, the diaries acquired a great diversity of presentations, such as electronic reports and handwritten notebooks, and frequently included non-textual and multimodal material including maps, drawings, pictures, cut-outs, music, and even a small Japanese-style wooden theatre (Figure 2). The function of the diaries was in all cases equivalent. These personal records of the content appropriation process gave an account, week after week, of the reflections, emotions and considerations that emerged. Hence, the diary represented a continuous process of reflection on their experience of the course (Kloetzer et al., 2020; Tau et al., 2021). These diaries provide first-person accounts of students' experiences of the course and allowed us to identify the U-shaped movement of reduction and expansion.

Figure 2: Different types of learning diaries

The whole course took place online during the Spring semester of 2021. Figure 3 shows some of the teachers and students in deep concentration as they watch the creation of one of the groups – an adaptation of the book "Le ventre de l'Atlantique" [the belly of the Atlantic] by Fatou Diome – in a 5-minute live performance combining home-made puppets, live actors and music.

Figure 3: Screen capture of one session

2.3   Introduction of puppetry in the course

Using puppetry as a new pedagogical tool required specific skills and knowledge (Syafii et al., 2021). For this, we called on the expertise of two artists in the field of puppetry and object theatre, Emilie Bender[1] and Julie Burnier[2]. The instructions given to the artists were: (a) to introduce us – students and teachers – to the field of puppetry; and (b) to identify some techniques that teachers could use online with students.

We initially held a training workshop for the teachers, led by the two artists, to help us understand the basic principles of puppetry, including rhythm and some necessary techniques to "give life" to inanimate objects. Moving puppetry online proved more difficult than expected but was very stimulating. Difficulties arose at a fundamental, ontological level: this invitation driven by our pedagogical goals challenged the two artists, who were resistant to moving their artistic practice online, as playing on the screen seemed contradictory to the very idea of performing arts as living arts. There were further difficulties at a practical level: we had to experiment with ways of playing in the frame defined by the camera on the computer, so that the performance appears clearly on the shared screen. For example, looking "through the eyes" of the puppet to animate it is a basic puppetry technique, but it does not translate well online, as playing with the computer screen means that the puppeteer's body should remain out of screen, below the screen or aside the screen, preventing this way of looking through. Some puppetry techniques were tested – like string puppets or shadow play, for example – but were considered too complex for complete novices.

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[1] Emilie Bender, Productions Hors Cases https://www.horscases.ch/
[2] Julie Brunier, Compagnie Pied de Biche http://pied-de-biche.ch/

After this preliminary exploration, we decided to keep three basic techniques for the course (see Figure 4): (a) socks puppets; (b) image theatre; and (c) object theatre. However, in their performance, the students mixed these technics.

Figure 4: Socks puppets, image theatre and object theatre on the topic of migration.

Sock puppets are operated by inserting one's hand inside the sock, with the opening and closing of the hand simulating the movement of the puppet's "mouth"; they are mostly speaking characters, not well suited for action. Image theatre uses a succession of images, created by the puppeteer, to narrate a story by evoking associations of ideas and emotions. Object theatre makes use of material, everyday objects – like forks, spoons, shoes, small toys, etc. – transformed into characters; it is quite an intuitive modality, close to the pretend play of children. These techniques could be merged during the performance. A dedicated workshop was designed in order to introduce students to these methods in a playful way.

3   Results and discussion

Here, we discuss the students' appropriation of the course content. We highlight two main appropriation modes: *adaptative appropriation* and *transformative appropriation*. These modes are illustrated below in excerpts from the learning diaries of three students. For example, in Case A, a low-profile adaptative appropriation mode was adopted; in Case B, a reflective, integrative and personal appropriation mode was employed – keeping a text-based format; and in Case C, a highly personal and creative appropriation mode was utilised. The latter two cases demonstrate examples of transformative appropriation.

Clearly, one of the first questions we asked ourselves when analysing the diaries relating to the online course was whether it was possible to retrace the movement of reduction and its complementary expansion and integration. For us, this is an indicator of pedagogical success, as it reveals the integration of theory and personal experiences promoted by the passage through the arts – literary and performative. This expansion was verified in real time during

the course, based on students' own interventions. In many cases, the efforts made to coordinate biographical aspects and their experiences of current daily life with the political and theoretical dimensions related to migration were evident. The learning diaries thus acted to confirm our perception as teachers and provided us with detailed insights into this process.

However, not all students achieve the same level of integration, and it is not always possible to agree on an equivalent appropriation of the thematic contents taught. We might wonder: what kinds of strategies promote better integration of theoretical contents and personal experiences? Conversely, what conditions might hinder this integration and why?

The diaries and previous interviews with the students revealed a systematic initial resistance to the format of the course. Indeed, the use of theatre, and ultimate use of puppets, raised suspicions and doubts about the seriousness of the course. These reactions can essentially be seen as a form of conflict between what students expect from the university and what they find. This is a long-discussed phenomenon of student *ethos*, promoted by a school biography that institutionalises a set of expectations and practices that are considered acceptable and functional (Branda & Porta, 2012; Cirelli & Vital, 2018; Feldman, 1997). In a similar sense, the passage through educational institutions not only promotes an *ethos*, a way of doing, but also a specific way of succeeding. This way of effectively navigating educational institutions, the "student's job", is nothing more than the internalisation of a series of expectations concerning the microcosm of the school institution, in its different levels (Coulon, 1997).

The conflicts or contradictions between what is expected and what is found generate a tension (Gutierrez et al., 1995), which, according to our hypothesis, plays a productive role (Prentice & Kramer, 2006). More precisely, the course relies on a series of potentially productive tensions: tension between what is proposed – playing together, creating a collective performance – and the *habitus* and usual pedagogy of the academic setting; tension between the almost free form of the personal report – the learning diary – and the traditional norms of academic writing at the university; tension between dialogical teaching and collective creation of knowledge, and the usual forms of knowledge transmission in higher education; tension between teachers as facilitators of a dialogical frame engaged in collective reflection, and the classical view of teachers as authoritative topic experts; and tension between individual receptions of theories and of the chosen literary text.

The reduction/expansion process, triggered by the materialisation into a concrete group performance and learning diary entries, requires that these tensions are solved. As this is a university course, with ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) validation requirements, the students must resolve these tensions somehow in order to succeed. We argue that the multiple tensions enabled by the course, based on the appeal to art for teaching

a particular disciplinary content, opens a field of possibilities for students' action. Given this situation, it is feasible to consider, as a derived hypothesis, that this type of tension is certainly desirable, as it is the condition for a creative resolution, as we shall see below.

We now introduce three cases of students who resolved these tensions in quite different ways, but with two main appropriation modes evident. On the one hand, there are those students who adapt their behaviour according to their perception of teachers' expectations. That is, some students have an idea about what is expected of them, and will adjust their behaviour to meet these expectations, with minimal creativity. Here, the appropriation of the course contents is made through a tight adjustment to what are perceived to be the teachers' expectations. The students participate on a regular basis – as this is one of the stated requirements – and document it in their learning diary. However, in these cases, the result is a poor integration of biographical and theoretical contents, resulting in minimal or collage-type answers that do not reflect a synthetic effort. We call this first kind of mode "the adaptative appropriation mode".

3.1 Excerpt 1. Case A – learning diary extract. [Original text in French, our translation.]

> Today's session was a bit complicated for our group. Unfortunately, S1 and S2 caught the virus, and were forced to quarantine themselves. However, we were well organised to overcome this problem. We decided to film our assigned scene and send it to S1 for editing. We opted for a candle instead of a match to represent hope, as the match is consumed too quickly, and we are too likely to get burnt. But, to keep consistency, each of us would have to film our scene using the same candle. As for my part, my puppets are operational. I still have to film the scene but for that I need the help of two people, one holding the candle and the other holding the camera. We are really happy with ourselves because despite some worries about the epidemic, we were able to adapt. Moreover, on a personal level, I am delighted to have met S1 and S2 because they are serious, very organised and very open.

The extract from the learning diary of Student A (Excerpt 1) shows a commitment to the process of collective creation, and a precise documentation of their experiences. The latter are mainly described as difficulties to be overcome, including collaboration difficulties due to the pandemic, and logistical difficulties related to the concrete implementation of the play's scenario. Adaptation to difficulties is thematised as such. The main outcome of the course in this case, besides acquiring the theoretical knowledge presented and discussed, is social: getting to know reliable fellow students, possibly making new friends. In short, completion of

the diary in this case does not reflect an effort to produce, but rather to give an account of the activities carried out, in a more or less journalistic way. We might assume that the diary is not used as a genuine instrument of reflection, but as a record of task fulfilment. This "well adapted" profile, with limited further personal reflection and a focus on the social and pragmatical dimensions of the activity, is not rare. In fact, we estimate that around one-third of the course participants will adopt this "low profile" position.

On the other hand, it is possible to recognise a completely different way of dealing with the tensions offered by the pedagogical setting, and the challenges posed by the performance and production of a free-form diary, which we call the "transformative appropriation mode". Despite the diversity of types within this general group, it is possible to clearly distinguish it from the previous adaptative solution. This is mainly because it is not characterised by "dictated answers" that reveal effort to discover the teacher's expectations. It is instead characterised by a real exploration that leads to the creative construction of knowledge.

Two aspects, clearly present in the diaries, reveal this creative dimension. First, there is the integration of the different levels referred to above, which provide a means of "transfer" (Konkola et al., 2007). The links between different spheres of experience (Franklin, 2000; Werner, 1980) are neither obvious nor direct. A coordination activity is necessary for integration to occur (Samaras, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). It is this effort of synthesis that sheds new light on the theoretical contents, anchoring them in a real and known social context. Second, this search for integration is also revealed in the form and content chosen to produce the record. The use of the diary as an extension of the course, but in a more intimate sphere, facilitates the integration of biographical elements. References to one's own experiences, to give an account of theoretical notions or concepts dealt with during the course, represent a strategy that contrasts clearly with the adaptative solution.

3.2 Except 2. Case B – first learning diary extract. [Original text in English.]

2.03.2021

Starting the lesson with 'tour de table' was so interesting. There was so much creativity in everyone's presentation. I prepared my script in advance to avoid making errors while speaking in French, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. I was so comfortable while presenting in front of students and colleagues alike, but once you take a break for 2 years, you have to build that rhythm and confidence again. I was nervous before presenting – don't know if it was me or the idea of talking in French (which I avoid, but should not). Anyway, it was interesting to share my story with others and listen to theirs – especially those who are attracted to the course without any experience of working with migrants, or being a migrant themselves. Ice breakers, such as these, are the best thing to get a group talking.

The second part of the lesson was about discussing the article 'Mental Health in International Migration'. I really wanted to participate as I found the article interesting, but there were two things which held me back: I did not have a question to pose, and I read it in English. For next time, I will prepare my points in advance – in French.

Since I couldn't participate in the discussion, I will use this journal as a platform to share my reflections on the article:

• The idea of how culture affects PTSD and shapes experiences of trauma was thought-provoking. The example of the Cambodian refugees attributing their hardships and suffering to the Buddhist belief in karma as a stage of life was something I could understand as in India, my country of origin, there are many people who believe in ancient scriptures and consult priests, fortune tellers who make them believe that suffering is a part of their life. Coming from an Asian country, but having studied Western ideas, I could understand the psychologist's, cultural mediator's, and the refugee's point of view.

• I was drawn by the description of the cultural mediator; I found their role particularly interesting as they have to translate not just languages but 'worlds'. They have to defend the psychologist's approach to mental health and at the same time be interested in the content and form of discussion with the refugees, remaining neutral; pay attention to interpersonal relationships; engage with the respondent at a personal level, but be emotionally detached and firm. All of this is extremely demanding and challenging.

• I agree that the singular construction of PTSD is insufficient to capture the inherent complexity of how different humans from different worlds respond to terrifying events. Their memories of the past, struggles of the present, and worries for the future are varied and have to be perceived and addressed from various angles.

Student B has a history of migration and previous professional experience in India as an English teacher in an international school. She is resuming her studies in Psychology and Education after moving to Switzerland from India for family reasons. Excerpt 2 (above) shows an extract from the beginning of her learning diary; it reports her experience of the second session of the course, in which students were invited to introduce themselves in a playful way, using images, puppets or objects, inspired by the puppetry techniques presented in the first session of the course.

Student B uses the diary in different ways. At the beginning of the course, the diary allowed her to share – in English – the reflections that she did not dare share in French during the

course because of perceived language limitations (as described in the first excerpt from March 2nd, 2021). Later in the course, she begins integrating more tightly some biographical elements and the concepts studied in the theoretical part of the course (as demonstrated in Excerpt 3, written two weeks later, on March 17th, 2021).

3.3   Excerpt 3. Case B – second learning diary extract. [Original text in English.]

17.03.2021

The articles we discussed yesterday were a gateway to an interesting debate, especially the one about 'Mental health and plural societies.' With increasing globalisation and migration, diversity has become a key feature of most societies, and pushes for the needs to renew the notion of mental health. As the article mentions, mental health is the foundation of both – individual well-being and social functioning. Mental health relies on the following factors (Tribe, 2014): rapid social change, harsh working conditions, discrimination, social exclusion, violent environments, unhealthy lifestyle, poor physical health, and violation of rights. Migration, when forced due to political and economic reasons leads to many of the factors listed above, which in turn cause mental health issues. I agree with Leanza's idea (1999) of the notion of culture being perceived in terms of heterogeneity, permeability and interbreeding.
I would like to discuss these three ideas using my personal experiences:
Heterogeneity: Coming from a country like India which is extremely diverse (Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western parts of the country have different languages, different food, festivals, and rituals), I believe that Indian culture, like all other cultures, is anything but homogenous and all these different social groups participate in the same global culture. Therefore, when an individual- who is already a part of a particular social group in their country of origin, migrates to another country, he/she is able to accept the heterogeneity, thus becoming a member of another social group in the host country.

Permeability: When you migrate to another country, there is always a way to ensure that you maintain links with your culture while imbibing the culture of the host country. A good example are the embassies. The embassy of the country of origin, in the host country, often organises events for the migrants to maintain links with their culture. International schools in every country strive to make their students global citizens by encouraging them to talk about their cultures in discussions, and to broaden their minds at a young age allowing the permeability of cultures. As a migrant in Switzerland, married to a Swiss man, I have already learnt a lot about the Swiss culture, but when I got the opportunity to conduct Indian cooking classes with Université Populaire, it was interesting and welcoming as it gave me the impression that the host country encourages permeability of culture (in this context, through food).

Crossbreeding: In my opinion, crossbreeding is not something one has to organise, but something that happens due to the fact that people from different countries live all around the world, and the everyday interactions between them. For example, Indians borrowed the Western concept of clothing many years ago, and the practice of yoga (which comes from India) is now trending in different parts of the world. Therefore, cultures accept and reject practices which they deem fit.

In this diary entry, Student B clearly discusses the notion of culture through three concepts presented in the course – heterogeneity, permeability and crossbreeding. The extract is based on her experience of Indian culture, of her own migration to Switzerland, and on her observations of the migration of sociocultural practices – regarding clothing or yoga, for example. Writing in the learning diary clearly extends the experience of the course; it supports self-reflection and distancing with a movement in which concepts are enlightened by the personal experience, history and trajectory of the student – and reversely.

Likewise, it is this same kind of exploration and the need to integrate extra-rational elements that lead to an abandonment of the classical narrative format, and the introduction of poetry, three-dimensional physical objects or other resources.

Student C, our final case study, was also strongly engaged in collective creation during the course. He wrote the scenario of the short play for his group (based on their first discussions), contributed to the staging, recorded the voice-over and participated in the final editing of the movie. He appropriated the artistic openings of the course in his learning diary, choosing a poetic form, which allowed him to express his reflections and feelings on those course topics that were important to him, especially the notions of identity, diversity, hybridity, development or "growing" – his term –, i.e., the idea of becoming "other" while being the "same". The first extract from Student C (Excerpt 4) was written, as in Case B, after the first introductory session.

3.4 *Excerpt 4. Case C – first learning diary extract.* [Original text in English, with italics and bold types for emphasis].

Tuesday, March 2nd

There are lessons to be learned

there's violence in wanting to help
when wanting to help becomes selfish.

diversity is a powerful tool
to learn and empathize.

identity is a complicated feeling
when the roots are unseen.

art is an universal language
used to share personal experiences.

Because there's always going to be
subjectivity in **unity**.

In this work, Student C appropriates not only the course topics, but also its artistic proposal. He writes that "art is a universal language used to share personal experiences", and uses it, through poetry, to share personal experiences and reflections that emerged from participating in the course. This is further demonstrated in the following poem (Excerpt 5) written after the course, in which he describes and discusses the challenges for refugees when learning the language of their host country.

3.5 Excerpt 5. Case C – second learning diary extract. [Original text in English, with bold type for emphasis.]

Tuesday, March 23rd

blaBlaBLaBLA

To learn a new language
is to lose bits of the first one
not its vocabulary
or its rhythm
but its story

its past   the past we shared with it
                            the stories that we told

a language is a friend
one that we can always count on
it is a lover when it needs to be
it is part of us
part of who we are
and who we want to become   it is an entity
                                a living being

it moves and flows
changes and remains
it can scare
threaten and pity
or it can love
nurture and cherish

                              To learn a new language
                              is to grow into **somebody else**

In this poem, Student C reflects on the connections between home and host languages; on the links between one's own language and family history and stories; on the complex and intimate nature of language, considered both a "friend" and "a living entity"; and on the power that language has over our lives and emotions. He concludes with issues of development and identity, which are central for him.

For the latter two students, the pedagogical tools do not drive the production of students' subjectivity in a specific direction. Rather, the pedagogical tools create a developmental opportunity for those students who have personal resonance with the course content and can link the course with their own trajectory. In Case B, this personal resonance comes from the student's own trajectory of migration – with its surprises and discoveries. In Case C, the resonance is related to the student's personal questions and explorations around "growing"

and transforming one's identity. In both cases, completion of the learning diary is not only considered as a task performed to fulfil the assignment requests of the course, but also as a psychological tool (Kozulin, 1998; Vygotsky et al., 1994) that helps them transform their own perception, understanding and reflection.

As a psychological tool, the learning diary is dynamic, and its role may change throughout the course. Student B, for example, first uses the diary as a means to say (in English and in written form) what she did not manage to say before (orally in French); subsequently, the diary connects more tightly to her own observations and experiences as a migrant woman.

In our experience during these five last years, around two-thirds of the students appropriate the pedagogical proposal in this second, creative and integrative mode, albeit with very diverse interests.

4   Conclusion

The migration to digital teaching was a challenge and an opportunity to recreate the conditions for teaching and learning referred to above. E-learning seems to offer a field of possibilities to sustain certain key processes, usually recognized in the classroom, even when distance appears as a strong obstacle. The use of puppets online maintained the tensions offered by the previous use of live theatre. In this sense, puppet theatre as an alternative tool has demonstrated its capacity to reproduce the conditions for pedagogical effectiveness. Of course, this pedagogical strategy requires the interdisciplinary collaboration of university and art teachers – in our case, the preparation and the teachers' training workshop with two puppetry experts, and the co-teaching of the course by a psychology teacher, Laure Kloetzer, and an experienced comedian and stage director, Julie Burnier, were critical. This collaboration between teachers and artists can be developmental for both fields, expanding the artistic reflection on online puppetry, and the pedagogical tool-repertory of educators.

Of course, using performing arts for teaching psychology does not automatically lead to well-identified benefits. Both the reduction-expansion process and the integration it entails seem to rest on a fundamental precondition: the provision of (potentially) productive tensions that the student must inevitably face. These tensions, characterised as a conflict between a constructed and institutionalised ethos and what the course offers in terms of ambiguity, body engagement, interactions, multimodality and freedom, seem to provide an opportunity for creative exploration. There are two main solutions to reduce such tension. One involves adapting to the instructions with limited exploration or creation. The other, almost antithetically, involves accepting the challenge of facing a process of reduction and expansion, and the uncertainty that this entails in terms of institutional performance. The chosen

solution, and its outcomes, highly depends on the personal resonance that each student has with the course, connected to ones' current questions and experience. The choice will also depend on each student's availability at a given moment for free and uncertain exploration beyond their usual successful study strategies. However, it might be that the tensions experienced with a pedagogy based on performing arts online are less salient than if the students would physically share the same studio, and might be easier avoided (thus, reducing their developmental potentialities). We can not say if this is really the case, based on our data, as we have only (and hopefully) limited experience (one year and one small group of 16 students) with this online teaching. What we can say is that in that group, moving performing arts online in higher education, and the use of puppetry, allowed unpredictable developmental possibilities for most students, despite the difficulties. Moreover, it was highly appreciated by the students, as it offered a refreshing alternative to their exhausting online studies: playing together with puppetry on the serious topic of migration was an appreciated creative breathing in their forced and monotonous digital learning.

Note

All participants in this study gave their consent for the analysis of the collected data and for the scientific publication of images and text extracts.

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Acknowledgments

Additional video material

Ep(HOPE)ée, is a short video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouCkdPY9mSw) created by one of the students' groups, adapting "Ulysse from Bagdad" by Eric-Emmanuel Schmidt. This 3-minute film, in French, focuses on the topic of hope, personified by a flame: a "bright character called Hope". The students have been creating all aspects of the short play: writing, staging, acting, puppeting, filming and editing.