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Performative approaches across the curriculum: A field report

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Eva Göksel and Marcel Felder have facilitated the elective module 'Learning through Play – Drama in Education and Applying Theatre in Schools' at the University of Teacher Education Zurich since 2021. In this article, they open the doors to their course. Using a single student case study as an example, they demonstrate how an experiential drama in education course can empower student teachers to apply performative teaching and learning methods across different school subjects. Finally, the authors discuss the requirements for the integration of performative methods in teacher education, guided by the question: What do teachers need to effectively and confidently design their own performative teaching?

1 Advocating for performative methods in teacher education

> "The first thing I remember is the beginning of the lesson. I knocked on the door and a child came to open it. I then entered as a researcher, already feeling very nervous, since I had never made such an appearance before."
>
> (Sarina, student at the University of Teacher Education Zurich)

In the quotation above, Sarina, a prospective teacher, describes her first attempt at using the drama technique "Teacher in Role" in a primary school practicum. In the biology lesson described in this article, the students were expecting a special guest: a frog expert. What they did not know: their teacher would herself slip into this role. Standing on the threshold, Sarina prepares to enter her grade 5 classroom, not as herself, but as a researcher in need of help.

In writing this article, we, like Sarina, find ourselves standing at a threshold, willing new doors to open. As long-time lecturers in drama and theatre pedagogy, we seek to further encourage professional discourse around applying performative pedagogies in higher education—particularly in teacher education, and especially in Switzerland. First, because we believe that networking can strengthen and improve our pedagogical craft; and second, because in comparison with countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom, student teachers in Switzerland have relatively limited opportunities during their training to engage with performative methods such as drama-based pedagogies (Göksel, 2025). Convinced that

networking can significantly enrich pedagogical practice, we wish to use this article to step across disciplinary and institutional thresholds to foster conversation and collaboration[1].

By sharing our practices and ideas, we continually open doors for one another: documenting teaching more systematically; engaging deeply with theoretical foundations; reflecting with students on their experiences and learning; and networking more effectively within professional communities, both nationally and internationally—for example, through organizing events such as the Drama in Education Days[2] (DiE Days).

The "house of education", of course, has many doors, and its rooms contain a wide variety of approaches, concepts, and theories: "there is therefore no single, universally valid position with regard to schooling and education" (Hoffelner, 2023, p. 16, our translation). Yet, by their very nature, rooms are meant to be entered, used, explored, and shared. This notion resonates with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which in 2017 published the Education for Sustainable Development Goals. These sustainable development goals (SDGs) provide a global framework that addresses central sustainability challenges and they are recognized as a valuable concept for academics and educators alike. They offer guidance and inspiration for shaping education holistically and for ensuring the future viability of society. Strikingly, the eight sustainability competencies defined by UNESCO—such as systems thinking, anticipatory action, collaboration, and critical reflection—align closely with the aims and possibilities of performative approaches, integrating cognitive, experiential, and artistic-performative dimensions of teaching and learning.

Accordingly, in this article we intend to open the door to performative forms of teaching and learning in higher education, to argue for their increased use in teacher education, and to point to the concrete opportunities this offers student teachers.

To this end, we will first clarify our understanding of the term performative teaching and learning. We then present a module at the University of Teacher Education Zurich (PHZH) in which students engage intensively with this approach, offer insight into a student teacher's

[1] Indeed, this strong belief in connecting locally and globally has prompted us to author this paper both in English and in German. See *Performativ-orientierte Lehr- Lernmethoden in verschiedenen Unterrichtsfächern: Ein Erfahrungsbericht*, in this issue.

[2] The Drama in Education Days conference has been organized annually since 2015 by Stefanie Giebert and Eva Göksel (see https://dramapaedagogik.de/de/).

practice, and finally discuss considerations that support the maintenance or expansion of such approaches in teacher education.

2 Approaching the terminology

We use the term performative teaching and learning to refer to pedagogical approaches that emphasise both teachers' and learners' active, embodied and creatively shaped engagement with curricular topics (see van de Water, 2021; Göksel, 2019, 2025; Schewe, 2013, 2020; Gebhard et al., 2019). Learners are thus brought into contact with the curriculum in a deliberate, practice-based way through scenic, aesthetic and other performative elements and methods. Personal knowledge, individual perception and the learners' own experiential horizons are purposefully activated and concretely integrated into collaboratively and co-constructively designed teaching–learning phases. In this way, "a reciprocal intensification and complementarity of content learning and aesthetic learning can occur: engagement with a (e.g., scientific) topic is experienced, explored, embodied and shown not only on a cognitive level but also on a subjective and arts-based performative level" (Gebhard et al., 2019, p. 13, our translation). We would like to emphasise that this process is equally valuable for both learners and teachers. This immersive and varied approach additionally invites a more holistic approach to learning, where "not just our heads go to school" (Göksel, 2024, p.1). The learning is embodied and thus offers participants a richer experience.

UNESCO likewise understands learning as an integrative process moving along three channels: the cognitive domain conveys knowledge and thinking skills required to understand sustainable development goals (SDGs) and associated challenges; the socio-emotional domain fosters social competencies such as cooperation, communication and self-reflection essential for jointly advancing the SDGs; and the behavioural domain encompasses the action competencies necessary to implement sustainable measures. Integrating SDGs into performative approaches enables complex sustainability challenges to be grasped holistically and complex educational processes can be initiated. Linking the curriculum with the values, norms and action competencies of the SDGs, addresses not only cognitive goals but also fosters the development of social and behavioural competencies, thus contributing to a more sustainable future.

In the 'Recommendations for Promoting a Performative Teaching, Learning and Research Culture in Higher Education' (Jogschies, Schewe, & Stöver-Blahak, 2018, translated by Göksel), which were developed at the 6th Scenario Forum Symposium in Hanover, the participants formulated their understanding of a performative teaching–learning culture at

universities as follows: performative processes emphasise enacting and staging actions in educational contexts and draw inspiration from the performing arts. Learners use additional expressive means in creative classroom processes; learning processes are designed democratically and participatively. Attention in performative teaching–learning processes is directed to concrete actions, not exclusively to results. Competence is fully acquired through application in practice, with performative approaches allowing action to be simulated in practice. Indeed, these recommendations clearly highlight that the capacity for empathy, enabled by perspective-taking and role change, must hold a central place in the classroom.

It is hardly surprising that, in such teaching–learning processes, the integral art form of theatre/drama must be discussed and considered as a methodological–didactic avenue. In the professional discourse on terminological trends, however, the concept of the performative is debated and sometimes contested. Concerns include that, in the wake of the 'performative turn', a single method might claim primacy within a discipline, or that the concept of performativity might be diluted—given that social action can always, and social realities can in principle, be understood as performative (see Miladinović & Tureček, 2023).

In this article we adopt Schewe's understanding of performativity, which proposes using 'performative' as an umbrella term for theatre- and drama-pedagogical forms of teaching and learning (Schewe, 2013, 2019, 2020). As Miladinović and Tureček note, Schewe's concept aims for the broadest and most unifying use possible—placing at its centre teaching and learning "with head, heart, hand and foot" (Schewe, 1993, p. 8) (see Miladinović & Tureček, 2023, p. 9; Göksel, 2025, pp. 35-38). With Schewe we emphasise that "in the performative concept, a close connection to the arts is central and the body is regarded as an important medium of communication and knowledge" (Schewe, 2019, p. 343, our translation). Artistic–creative and aesthetic learning must therefore be part of performative-oriented educational processes. Simultaneously, we assume that performative approaches can be applied in all school subjects[3].

The goal of these action- and experience-based methods is to involve learners multisensorially and holistically in the educational process—activating, developing and reflecting on existing knowledge in sensorially creative ways. Through active doing (performance), a lasting learning experience emerges because learning occurs not only by hearing and understanding content but also by experiencing and trying things out. "By

[3] We would like to add, however, that while we strongly advocate for applying drama and theatre in teaching and learning across the curriculum, we are not advocating for 'all drama all the time'.

bringing in their multiple intelligences and activating as many senses as possible, the chances increase that personally meaningful, deep learning will take place" (Schewe, 2019, p. 350, our translation). We feel strongly that this kind of learning humanises pedagogy (see Edmiston & Towler-Evans, 2022) and brings the curriculum to life.

Gebhard et al. likewise formulate the fundamental assumption "that learning and educational processes—in and out of school—can gain depth when, in addition to the transmission of knowledge, the performative side of the relationship to (learning) objects is particularly accentuated, rendering it staged, sensorial, embodied or actionably experienceable" (Gebhard et al., 2019, p. 13, our translation). The reciprocal intensification and complementarity of content and aesthetic learning occur not only on a cognitive level but also on a subjective and arts-based performative level (cf. Gebhard et al., 2019, p. 13).

According to Wulf & Zirfas (2006), the educational potential of performative processes lies in their creative and reality-generating moments. "With a performative focus, the concept of Bildung is expanded: the reflective potential of the traditional conception is retained and complemented by educational processes that are understood not only as cognitive, but also as bodily, social, situational and staged processes" (Wulf & Zirfas, 2006, p. 299, our translation). Indeed, in considering the curriculum performatively, learners become agents of the learning object: they explore, experience and embody what they have learned and express it through the arts. Performative forms thus enable dynamic, interactive knowledge transmission and foster a specific bodily and situational link with content—one that is not only content- and object-oriented but also opens an educational space in which personal, social, aesthetic and subject-specific competencies can be fostered equally.

Rosa reminds us that: "Not power over things but entering into resonance with them, bringing them—through one's own capacity, one's self-efficacy—to respond, and responding in turn to that response, is the fundamental mode of living human existence" (2018, p. 38, our translation). This is indeed what performative education facilitates: it brings learners (and teachers) into resonance with the material at hand, so that they do not simply take information at face value nor merely memorise facts, but instead genuinely engage with their learning through inquiry, play, and collaboration. The wide ranging potential of performative processes for teaching and learning can thus be recognised across disciplines.

Others within higher education are also seeking ways to connect performative work with everyday teaching–learning. With her book Theatrale Wege in der Lehrer:innenbildung (Theatrical Paths in Teacher Education), Julia Köhler (2017) began exploring theatre- and drama-pedagogical approaches in the Austrian university landscape, showing the valuable

contribution of theatre-pedagogy within teacher training and emphasising the importance of a basic theoretical understanding of theatre. In their book Barefoot Academic Teaching: Performing arts as a pedagogical tool in higher education, Tau, Kloetzer and Henein (2024) consider the importance of student autonomy in developing and performing their own arts-based projects. They also advise teachers to cooperate with one another and with artists to keep offerings diverse.

There is a growing range of practice-based publications illustrating the many possibilities of performative, theatre- and drama-pedagogical applications in teaching and learning, including specialist journals such as Scenario. Numerous scholars have worked extensively on performative teaching–learning processes for years, engaging the topic theoretically and showing diverse subject-specific pathways. In the German-speaking world we may mention Manfred Schewe, Gerd Koch, Ingo Scheller, Martin Kramer and Ulrike Winkelmann; in the English-speaking world: Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, Jonathan Neelands, Tony Goode, Patrice Baldwin, Cecily O'Neill, John O'Toole, Judith Ackroyd, Susanne Even, and Katie Dawson. These lists are by no means complete, and some scholars cross between disciplines and languages, however, the lists are intended to show the range and number of colleagues working to explore the performative in educational contexts.

Evidence-based indications of positive effects of action- and experience-based learning are also available. Cognitive science studies demonstrate deeper and longer-term anchoring of content through performative methods (see Arndt & Sambanis, 2017), and there are research findings for educational theatre and drama (see Cziboly, 2015; DICE Consortium, 2010). We therefore believe that a number of exciting and important doors have already been opened in recent decades. In the context of higher education in the German-speaking world—particularly in Switzerland—the potential of performative approaches could, in our view, be utilised more deliberately (see Göksel, 2025; Tau et al., 2024; Schewe, 2019; Haack, 2018). It is telling that in a 2019 report on the status of performative pedagogy in Switzerland (Sack, Bürgisser & Pfruender, 2019), "drama" is mentioned only twice: once to note that drama is not a subject in Swiss schools, and once to point out that drama in education (DiE) is not part of Swiss curriculum for higher education. The report does, however, mention that the theatre education programme at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) is coming to "a broader understanding of performative and researching theatre practice" (Sack, Bürgisser & Pfruender, 2019, p. 66). This suggests a softening of divisions between disciplines, further opening the door to exploring the potential of performative pedagogies in higher education.

Our work with drama in higher education has strengthened our assumption that personal experience of performative approaches is essential for prospective teachers if they are to design and facilitate learning processes holistically and multisensorially—that is, integrating elements that encourage learners to work cognitively, emotionally and artistically (see van de Water, 2021; Göksel, 2019, 2025; Schewe, 1993).

A teaching–learning understanding that links the cognitive with the artistic–performative level not only poses didactic–methodological challenges for teachers but also prompts reflection on their own conception of education and professional stance. If one evaluates positively the opportunities of a performative-oriented understanding of education and the benefits of performative teaching across the curriculum from primary school to higher education, then extended questions arise for teacher education and curricular design, including: What, concretely, is needed to enable teachers to confidently design and facilitate their own lessons using performative methods?

3 The elective module "Learning through Play – Drama in Education and Applying Theatre in Schools"

We now present the PHZH elective 'Learning through Play – Drama in Education and Applying Theatre in Schools', in which performative teaching–learning forms have been taught since 2021 and student teachers are empowered to apply these methods in subjects across the curriculum.

The PHZH 'Learning Through Play' elective is a specific offering on performative teaching—learning across the curriculum for those studying to be primary school teachers. It offers a practical opportunity to try out performative approaches and methods across a range of subjects (e.g., mathematics, history, science, languages) within a safe space[4] (Hunter, 2008). The nature of the work is collaborative, cross-curricular and interdisciplinary, encouraging participants to cross thresholds into new teaching and learning spaces[5].

The 'Learning Through Play' elective is designed as an intensive week: Over five consecutive days, students explore and test how, through the practical application of theatre- and drama-based games and exercises, content from across the primary curriculum can be

[4] Our understanding of "safe space" includes the important dimension of "brave space" (Arao & Clemens, 2013)—a supportive and creative environment in which participants can express their questions, thoughts, and feelings freely and without judgment.

[5] At PHZH there are further courses in the elective programme focusing on theatre pedagogy. These are not prerequisites for participation in this elective.

conveyed, and which educational potentials lie in a performative-oriented approach. The guiding questions include: How can performative and drama-based pedagogies be used for teaching and learning in primary school? How can performative pedagogies build and extend personal, social and subject-specific competencies?

Alongside theoretical foundations of performative teaching and learning, students gain methodological and didactic knowledge gained by participating in and finally facilitating drama-based and performative lessons and activities. They are immersed in subject-specific examples ranging from mathematics, history, and language education, and they reflect their experiences in a professional discourse with peers (for concrete examples, see Göksel & Meierhans, 2020; Göksel, 2019; Göksel & Nadig, 2018). The reflection focuses, on everything from planning, to everyday implementation of performative elements in the classroom, to the possibilities and limitations of the methodology, as well as the teacher's stance and role when facilitating this type of learning. In small groups, students additionally develop a lesson tailored to a grade level and subject of their choosing. After several intensive days, students apply the drama convention Mantle of the Expert[6] to a stance on performative teaching and learning, thus bringing new knowledge and experiences into play. A written self-reflection and self-assessment provide us, as lecturers, with insights into the students' learning and personal experiences of the course.

At the end of the week, students present their planned performative teaching project to the group and receive professional and personalised feedback.

Showcase

The showcase contains selected quotes[7] from students' self-reflections that illustrate perceived learning gains and evaluations in response to targeted prompts:

[6] Mantle of the Expert refers to a process in which the group takes on roles as characters endowed with expertise relevant to the situation. The situation is usually task-oriented, requiring expert knowledge or skills to accomplish the task (Neelands & Goode, 2015, p. 45).

[7] We have translated these quotes from German into English. To see the original quotations, see the German version of this article: "Performativ orientierte Lehr- Lernmethoden in den Unterrichtsfächern: Ein Erfahrungsbericht"

What drew you to this form of teaching?
• I once participated in a camp that focused on theatre sports. That already fascinated me at the time, and now I wanted to learn more about drama pedagogy and its teaching forms. • I had already tried out this form of teaching in practice without knowing that it was Drama in Education. I found the description of 'playful learning' very exciting. • I find it impressive how subject knowledge can be conveyed to students through lived experience, and I want to learn the techniques for doing so. • This form of teaching was new to me. I was immediately interested, since I am very much in favor of playful learning. This approach combines play with subject knowledge and socio-emotional learning. It also strengthens class cohesion. • The term 'learning through play' interested me. During my practicums and at the teacher education program, it was often mentioned that this was important and great, but then we only looked at one or two examples. I had no idea how to incorporate it into my own teaching or how to come up with ideas myself.
What excites you (or not) about this form?
• I find it exciting that subject-specific content can be conveyed without the teacher being at the centre of things. It does require more preparation time, but I think it's worth it if one considers that one otherwise has to repeat things several times until everyone understands it. • Through the roles they play, dealing with emotions and the characters' thoughts, children gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. • I'm excited by how versatile it is and how it can make school days special and distinctive. Sometimes it takes an example or a prompt to spark creative ideas. • I love that lessons can remain so open-ended. I like that teaching is action-oriented, active and exploratory. • It enables experiencing subject content in connection with movement, story and/or feeling. It makes learning more tangible and interesting. It also requires a lot of cooperation.

What advice would you give to teachers new to this method?
• Read up on the method and seek help from experienced practitioners—but definitely try it! You can't do much "wrong"; you can only learn. It's important to be genuinely convinced by the idea and the planning—otherwise it won't impact the class. • Approach it bravely and try everything to make lessons as engaging and active as possible: be open and experiment! • Choose a maximum of three games or techniques and implement them until you master them. Then build from there—step by step—so you don't overload yourself. • Learning by doing: you have to try to understand what is possible with a class and what isn't. Of course, plan well so that a successful experience is possible—but without trying you won't know. • Start slowly with small elements and then build up. Dare yourself to join in—the modelling effect matters.
Do you now feel prepared to integrate DiE/theatrical forms into your practice? Why/why not?
• I think I have sufficient material to implement DiE and more concrete ideas on using these methods across subjects. • I feel more competent and have learned various methods that I will definitely try. • If more training were offered, I'd attend that first. But since things are 'back to normal' now, I'll try to make the best of what I learned this week (which is already a lot). • I'd say I now have the tools and examples, though it will take practice and time to prepare such lessons. • I feel very good. I've filled my backpack this week and am confident I'll use some methods in my qualifying practicum. • We have enough material and are well prepared to integrate these forms into school practice. • Yes—because I have access to the game collections, because we tried and played so much ourselves, and because we collected so much on the flipcharts.

As our students' end-of-week self-reflections show, the experiences and knowledge they gained enabled them to plan and conduct small performative projects with their own classes. Indeed, following the elective week, many of our students reported implementing small-scale (see Schewe, 2013) performative activities in their practicum teaching—e.g., designing performative thematic introductions, structuring the rhythm of lessons with

drama games, and using drama conventions to link and structure content across subjects, thereby fostering social competencies and subject-specific knowledge and skills.

After completing her several-week practicum, for instance, one student reported implementing various performative elements in her language and Nature/Humans/Society lessons. She reports that her experiences with her students were highly positive:

In general I have had only positive experiences with DiE. I regularly refer to the activities we collected during the module week. At times I find it challenging not to get lost in the playful aspects but to still plumb the depth of subject-specific knowledge. I'm convinced this has more to do with me as a teacher: I need to instruct and guide the students precisely so they don't drift. In any case I will continue to integrate small sequences—the reception has always been very positive!

This particular quotation points to two important aspects of learning to teach performatively: The power of play, as well as the experience and knowledge a facilitator requires to teach well through play and performative pedagogy. This second aspect has interested us for some time, as we pondered how much guidance and support student teachers need to be ready to develop and facilitate their own drama-based/performative lessons.

4 An example in action: a student teacher's field report

We now present a lesson developed and facilitated in a grade 5 practicum class by student teacher Sarina Gerber. At the start of the elective week at PHZH she had no prior theatre experience and enrolled because she found the idea of integrating drama and performative approaches into lessons compelling. At the end of the week, asked whether she felt sufficiently prepared to implement performative forms in future lessons, she wrote: "Because we tried out so much, I feel well prepared." This aligns with other statements gathered from our elective weeks over the years. Göksel's dissertation (2025) similarly found that four prospective teachers felt able, within a relatively short time, to develop their own drama lessons and trial them in practicums.

Although we present a single case here, many students voiced similar sentiments in their reflections: they reported feeling enabled, within a short time, to design lessons using performative methods. Because Sarina's case is, in our experience, representative of many, we take a closer look—also in relation to our guiding question: "What, concretely, is needed

to enable teachers to confidently design and facilitate their own lessons using performative methods?"

Sarina carried out her lesson during the multi-week practicum in the semester following the elective week—her fourth semester. She planned to try the drama convention Teacher-in-Role[8] to introduce her grade 5 class to a new topic in the subject of Nature/Humans/Society (Natur/Mensch/Gesellschaft: NMG). The convention Teacher-in-Role places the teacher in a specific, clearly defined and active role within the drama. The teacher can assume a leading role, as in Sarina's case, or a smaller supporting role; in either case, she remains active within the fictional world as a co-player.

The class had previously worked intensively on the topic of the pond. Sarina chose to work on frog metamorphosis, focusing on the NMG competencies of being able to observe and describe reproduction, growth, and development in animals. The grade 5 curriculum states that students should understand and be able to describe the development of amphibians from tadpole to frog, and change from gill to lung breathing.

That day, the students sat quietly in class as usual, reading informational texts—by now a ritual in this class. Suddenly there was a knock. When the door was opened, a seemingly nervous young lady in a white lab coat entered. Relieved to have found class 5a, she repeatedly pushed up her glasses absent-mindedly. Haltingly she explained her reason for visiting. She was a batrachiologist; a frog researcher. She had heard that the class was researching frog metamorphosis. She had to give a presentation on this topic to the great council of researchers. But she was pressed for time, had kept postponing preparation and was now unprepared. Agitated, she asked whether the students could help her prepare, as the presentation was the very next day. The students responded almost in unison with a clear "yes", smiling and looking around curiously.

The researcher then explained what she needed from the class and promised to give class 5a credit for their help. After the class confirmed this "deal", Sarina asked what they already knew about metamorphosis. Silence at first. She then passed around a diagram of frog metamorphosis for better understanding, which the students studied attentively. Because she was in role, Sarina had to maintain the fiction that she did not know students' names.

[8] Teacher-in-Role refers to the teacher taking responsibility as facilitator for the group. From within the dramatic context, the teacher adopts an appropriate role to guide theatrical possibilities and learning opportunities—stimulating interest, controlling the action, inviting participation, creating tension, developing the narrative, and opening possibilities for the group (Neelands & Goode, 2015, p. 54).

She therefore passed her glasses around: whoever wished to speak put on the glasses and then passed them on.

The excitement in the room was palpable: everyone listened attentively. The researcher provided clarifications where needed and asked follow-up questions. In a brief professional conversation, key terms were clarified. After several contributions, the researcher was reassured. Given the tight schedule, she proposed leaving her materials in the classroom while she continued researching. She pointed to texts and QR codes on the board leading to further information and laid her own materials on a table. She agreed with the students that she would pick up the results that evening. The children confirmed the plan. The researcher thanked them again and prepared to leave, relieved. Then, before the class's eyes, an unexpected role switch occurred: the researcher took off the lab coat and sat down among the students as their teacher Sarina.

Sarina, now as the teacher, asked the students to explain the researcher's request and how they would proceed to help her. Interestingly, everyone played along. They spoke in the third person about the researcher who had just been there, keeping up the "as if" situation with visible amusement. At the end of the afternoon, the students handed in their contributions for the researcher. Two days later, the class received a thank-you letter from her.

The following phase of the unit had planned for the students to stage and present their knowledge performatively: The students were to depict the individual developmental phases of frog metamorphosis as still images, ensuring that the distinctive features of each assigned cycle step were portrayed clearly and understandably. The still images were to be presented in small groups to the class in a scene carousel and then discussed.

As lecturers we were interested in what Sarina experienced concretely with her in-class performance and which insights she gained. Below are selected highlights from our interview with Sarina, presented as key statements.

Interview snapshots

When you look back, which three situations remain in your memory, and why?

The first thing I remember is the beginning of the unit. I knocked, a child opened, and I entered as the researcher. I was very nervous because I had never made such an entrance.

My second memory is the moment when the students said they definitely wanted to help me—as the researcher. I had been afraid they might not buy into the situation and say they didn't want to. But that didn't happen.

The third memory—and I hadn't considered this beforehand, it occurred to me in the moment—was that I couldn't address the children by name, because as the researcher I didn't know the class. I remember addressing them as "you in the blue T-shirt", for example. That made the situation feel realistic.

Did this playful opening do anything for students' motivation?

Extremely—very much so. They were generally motivated in NMG, but my impression was that in this double period I had all of them with me completely and immediately. Usually there are two or three students who are a bit unfocused or not fully present yet. But when I came in and began the performance, everyone was ready and wanted to be part of it. They wanted to know what was going on with the researcher and what was happening. That was wonderful to experience.

I noticed in the video that you not only used the glasses as part of your character but also passed them around as a sign: "The person with the glasses may speak now." How did that come about?

It occurred to me spontaneously.

Later there was a role switch when you took off the costume. People could suddenly talk about the "other" person. Did you notice anything about that switch?

That was very exciting. I couldn't imagine beforehand exactly what would happen, because it was an unfamiliar situation. So much happened in the moment. I suddenly realised that, as the teacher, I hadn't been present at the encounter with the researcher. So I had to ask what had happened. The children played along unperturbed. I had feared they would say, "But that was you." That didn't happen. Even in retrospect

they said how cool they had found the researcher's visit. They maintained the theatrical agreement and kept playing along.

What did you focus on when preparing for the performance?

I wrote down what I wanted to say and in what order, and I had my notes on a clipboard. I was aware that I would be playing a role and could make use of being scatter-brained and stressed—because I would be nervous anyway. The notes helped me check whether I had said everything, and the clipboard didn't stand out because it fit the character. I rehearsed the scene once at home, even though it wasn't exactly the same with the class. Preparation gave me security.

Looking back, how was the experience for you?

For me it was one of the best experiences in the practicum. First, because the students were very motivated, and second, for me personally. It pushed me. I thought: I did something that actually makes me very nervous—and still I tried it. And it worked very well. It felt good to step out of my comfort zone—and it turned out so well. It was fun and the students enjoyed it. Afterwards they kept talking about it and saying how great they had found the experience.

You had never done theatre before. The elective week was your entry into theatrical learning. In your view, what do teachers need in order to dare to conduct such drama processes and feel comfortable doing so?

I felt comfortable because in the module we had to implement a small lesson as the assessed task. That was great, because we could try out the sequence once in a protected setting and reflect with the lecturers. That way we knew it could work. I would have been much more insecure if I'd had to do something like this without the prior experience. The module made me want to try such a lesson. We also saw our colleagues' drama lessons and experienced that it's not bad at all to show oneself. And because I had accompanied the class for seven weeks already, I knew them well. At the beginning of the practicum it would certainly have been harder. You simply feel safer when you've already built a relationship. That contributed to my daring even more. My mentor teacher later gave me many compliments.

Looking at the programme—the study week—what do students need to be well prepared to try such drama processes in the classroom?

> Exactly what you did with us in the module: generally practising improvisation and allowing oneself to play. It's also important to try out one's own lesson and to receive precise feedback. I thought this assessment was great because you can use it directly in school. It encouraged me to try something myself. I'm very glad to have had this experience.

These snapshots make clear that Sarina experienced her first attempt to use drama in NMG as both a challenge and an encouraging success. She quickly noticed that the children followed her completely—even those who usually seemed less focused in regular lessons. She realised that, despite thorough preparation, much could not be fully controlled and the lesson required improvisation. Ultimately she experienced this challenge as enriching and felt she had been well prepared for it in the module.

The selected interview excerpts shared above suggest that the methodical use of performative pedagogies not only supports and enriches the teaching process but also shapes the person. Lenakakis' qualitative empirical study Paedagogus Ludens (2004) shows that playful creative processes contribute in a decisive way to consolidating and increasing teachers' personal and professional effectiveness. Indeed, several aspects highlighted in this brief excerpt have also been emphasised in Göksel's dissertation (2025). For example, she notes that working with Teacher-in-Role demands high adaptability—the ability to sustain an as-if situation and to credibly adjust to it, as Sarina demonstrated with the "glasses game". Given the unpredictability of the teaching–learning situation, Sarina had to think fast, improvise, and be fully present. Such performative work demands daring and being open to new situations, skills and traits that Göksel highlights as being deepened by working with the performative. Indeed, these skills particularly challenge new and prospective teachers, as they constantly face new situations in class. Much like the student teachers in Göksel's study, Sarina grew to meet challenges, gaining in empathy, self-assurance, and confidence.

5 Opening doors: Outlook

Throughout this article, we have asked what teacher education must provide to ensure that prospective teachers feel well prepared to work with performative methods in class. This question has long preoccupied us and other educators at universities and teacher education institutions (see Göksel, 2025; Tau, Kloetzer & Henein, 2024; Köhler, 2017).

We believe, among other things, that intensive and regular exchange among lecturers and researchers across universities and other educational institutions is needed. We therefore express our wish for increased networking within the German-speaking world, as well as globally, and for more application-oriented research on performative methods in teaching and learning. In this sense it would be beneficial if German- and English-language discourse engaged more with one another on content, methods, and research so that the two traditions could mutually enrich one another. Increased cross-pollination would, without doubt, benefit professional discourse and support the continued development of performative teaching–learning processes in education.

We feel that performative approaches would compliment the diverse palette of methods already offered in higher education, as they offer very specific experiential worlds: they foster cooperative learning, co-construction of knowledge, embodiment of subject content, development of socio-emotional competencies, and motivational pathways that strengthen competence experiences and self-efficacy. With the body and its associated perceptions and creative possibilities poised to take on a stronger role in education, now is the time to usher performative pedagogies more fully into higher education. The didactic quality of performative approaches lies in their low-threshold, practice-based orientation—in the case of student teachers, they allow participants to first gain playful experience and then to lead and critically reflect on their own teaching–learning processes (Dawson & Kiger Lee, 2018). Thus, in the embodied engagement with topics across the curriculum, cognitive processes are stimulated alongside emotional and bodily dimensions—an approach that has particular relevance in current discussions of sustainable education aligned with UNESCO's SDGs.

Reflecting on our practical experiences with performative, theatre- and drama-based approaches in higher education, we see our task as that of signposting diverse doors leading to new spaces for experimenting, collaborating, and learning. We hope this work with performative pedagogies will open spaces not only for students but also for teachers to become more independent, courageous, and flexible in their thinking and action (see Göksel, 2021, 2022, 2025). We thus hope, especially in teacher education, for greater courage to establish and anchor performative pedagogies in initial and continuing education and to make greater didactic–methodological use of such approaches within existing subject-specific modules.

The challenges of the 21st century demand creative, interdisciplinary, and sustainable solutions (see Wall, Hallgren & Österlind, 2025). In our view, this requires more arts-oriented approaches in higher education. Integrating performative elements opens diverse didactic

perspectives that reach far beyond foreign-language teaching and can be applied across all school subjects.

The thoughts sketched here are intended to encourage teachers and teacher educators to explore performative forms in their own teaching and to research them further. Future studies could, for example, examine long-term effects, interdisciplinary applicability, and innovative approaches in teacher education. Above all, we wish to inspire readers to embark on performative paths themselves—as teachers, as researchers and as shapers of a forward-looking, holistic, inter- and transdisciplinary educational landscape.

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