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2022

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Recommended Citation

Eikel-Pohen, Mona and Dolbier, Sarah, "Fluchtpunkt Magdeburg: Documentation of an Integration-Oriented Theater Project from the Perspective of Theater Pedagogy and Language Didactics" (2022). *Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics - All Scholarship*. 38.

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Fluchtpunkt Magdeburg: Documentation of an Integration-Oriented Theater Project from the Perspective of Theater Pedagogy and Language Didactics

Mona Eikel-Pohen and Sarah Dolbier

Abstract

Based on Dwight Conquergood's key concepts of play, power, process, and poetics/language, this paper documents the theater-pedagogical model project *Fluchtpunkt Magdeburg* 2015 to 2019, in which young people with and without refugee experiences living in Magdeburg, Germany, developed three plays and a film under dance- and theater-pedagogical direction with the pronounced goal of promoting social and linguistic integration. The aim of this documentation is to systematically describe the project and to identify successful elements that make future projects sustainable and feasible for planning and implementation in the long term.

Keywords: theater education, model project, flight, integration, language, documentation

This project received funding from the following institutions at Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, USA: the SOURCE Undergrad Research Program and the High Impact Scholars Initiative of the Maxwell School of Citizenship, the Deans Office, and the Chair position of the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics.

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1 Documentation Fluchtpunkt Magdeburg

The youth theater ensemble *Fluchtpunkt Magdeburg* (FM) was active as a youth ensemble in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, from 2015 to 2019. It was aimed at young people between the ages of 14 and 18, with and without experience of flight and migration, who live in Magdeburg and "want to tell and hear stories together about flight, hope, longing, fear and happiness" (Fluchtpunkt Magdeburg) and at the same time show interest in getting to know other people who want to deal with the topic of "Flight Stories Saxony-Anhalt". Because the topic of flight is present in Germany of the 20th/21st century, historically conditioned by the Second World War and the GDR and by the present (flight to Saxony-Anhalt in the refugee waves 2015 and 2022) again these days, acute and socially as well as politically (and thus also in art) relevant. The 15-25 participants, 50 % identifying as male, 50 % female, were recruited through contacts with associations and clubs of the migrant communities in Magdeburg, as well as inquiries in local schools to find local youths, and at the *Zentrale Annahmestelle* (ZAST) and the clearing centers for unaccompanied minor refugees.

The project was led by certified actor Jochen Gehle and certified dance pedagogue Lena Winkel-Wenke with financial support from the Ministry of Culture of the State of Saxony-Anhalt (September 2015 to December 2017) as part of the project series 'Theaterpädagogisches Modellprojekt Sachsen-Anhalt' (Saxony-Anhalt Model Theater Pedagogy Project) and, at the end, through donations and volunteer work (2018 to 2019). The FM ensemble developed three plays (*Fluchtstück* (Engl.: escape piece) 2016; *Die wunderbare Welt der Integration* (Engl.: The wonderful world of integration), 2017; *Morgenland* (Engl.: orient/tomorrow land), 2018), with which it was invited to various state school theater meetings, the fifth *Altmärkische Schulfesttage* in Stendal in 2017 and to the *Puppentheater Magdeburg* (both 2017) and produced the film *Fluchtpunkt* (2019); works whose contents are explained in more detail in the documentation as they progress.

The decisive goals of the theater-pedagogical model project were the social and linguistic integration of young people with refugee experience in Magdeburg by means of the joint development, i.e., development and performance of theater pieces that dealt with migration experiences in Saxony-Anhalt and to focus on general perspectives of and on refugee experiences instead of individual experiences of recently fled young men. Additional goals and theatrical, social, and linguistic results emerged over the course of the four years, and they are also mentioned in this paper.

2 Methods and aims of this documentation

Mona Eikel-Pohen and Sarah Dolbier observed FM from a transatlantic distance beginning in 2018: Sarah Dolbier by reading the play *Morgenland* as a course participant in a course on German literature (fall semester 2018) at a U.S. university; Mona Eikel-Pohen as a professor in that course as she had received the play and some information about it from Jochen Gehle. In the spring of 2021, when it became clear that FM would not continue after the pandemic, the project lent itself as a feasible object for an academic documentation. As a SOURCE bachelor research project at Syracuse University, Sarah Dolbier and Mona Eikel-Pohen researched and received texts on flight, migration, theater, and language development, conducted informal interviews with theater pedagogues in Germany (Cologne, Düsseldorf, Hanover, and Magdeburg) about comparable projects and approaches to integrative theater education projects, and created a list of questions for anonymous interviews with participants and theater directors. Three former participants, both with and without refugee experience, the two directors, and one person from the theater pedagogy administration in Magdeburg, were interviewed. Sarah Dolbier conducted all interviews in Magdeburg in person in May 2022 by Sarah Dolbier. They were based on a questionnaire and recorded in Zoom, in almost all cases without a camera, and transcribed automatically with the software *Kaltura*. The interviews took place voluntarily; there was no remuneration or gifts.

To scientifically consolidate this documentation, a theoretical framework precedes the aspects of the project to be documented and its basic concepts are defined and explained. This concept by Dwight Conquergood is based on four key terms (play, power, process, language (poetics), which he used to paraphrase the performative turn in anthropology in 1989. The data collected in the interviews by Sarah Dolber were qualitatively analyzed and interpreted for a SOURCE presentation.

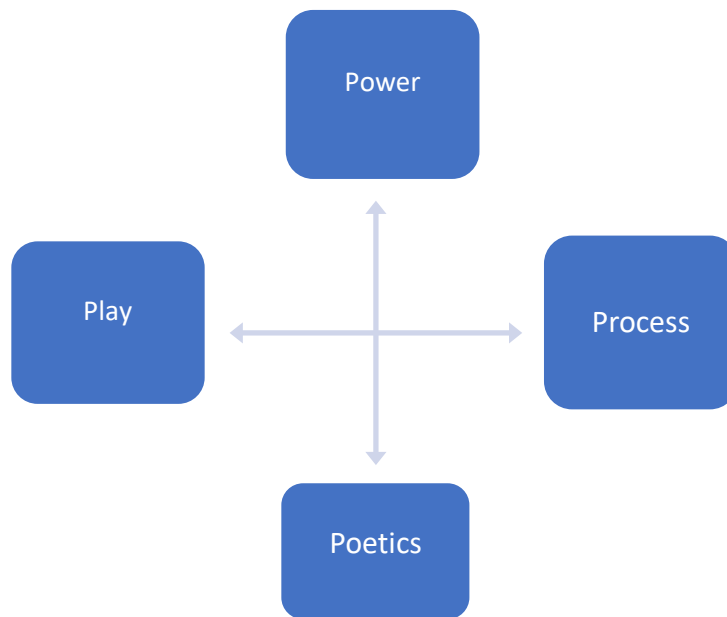
In the sense of an "appreciative inquiry" that lists "what the respective institution is particularly good at" (Terkessides, 2017, p. 167), the FM documentation aims to describe the ensemble's work, which has been continuous over several years, and to work out the extent to which the theater-pedagogical model project serves as a role model or model for other, similar projects (in the sense of integration through theater-pedagogical work or work with people who have experienced flight, or both): Which procedures, approaches and methods have worked, which didactic decisions have been fruitful? Which elements should similar projects contain? Which elements should be changed, depending on the target group and objectives?

3 Conquergood's Key Concepts

Dwight Conquergood sees the task of anthropology in looking at two complementary projects: on the one hand, empirical field research, especially of less traditional performative genres and processes, and on the other hand, the conceptual development of the performative arts as a paradigm for meaningful action (Conquergood 1989, p. 82). The authors of this documentation pursue the same goal, namely, to look at FM retrospectively empirically and to describe its concept scientifically in order to derive methodological and pedagogical elements with model character for future, similar models. Therefore, it is important to describe Conquergood's notions and assumptions of play, power, process, and poetics in advance. To the authors' knowledge, there are no other scientific models to capture such integrative theater projects. Maike Plath's "four thematic pillars" of theater work are probably helpful in part but capture the variables of power and language only partially and more implicitly than explicitly (cf. Plath 2013, pp. 59f.).

The key concepts can be visually illustrated in a matrix in Fig. 3.1: The horizontal axis refers to how FM sought to achieve social and linguistic integration. The vertical axis refers to what goals the project sought to achieve ('what'-axis): These are social and language competencies. One end of the axis refers to what Conquergood calls 'power'. This is both about empowering the young people by training them as part of a group, but also about addressing the structural as well as financial frameworks of the project. The other end aims at language (in Conquergood's terminology 'poetics'), by which is meant not only the acquisition of German, but also the inclusion of language and multilingualism as an expression of culturality, as well as language as a vocal and thus aesthetic means.

The horizontal axis refers to the question of how FM sought to achieve social and linguistic integration. On this 'how'-axis, the concepts of 'play' and 'process' are located. Here, play encompasses decisions about theatrical genres (comedy, spoken word, black theater, etc.) as well as methodological decisions (forms of material collection and play development) that are production-oriented, i.e., focused on play development and aimed at performances in front of an audience. At the other end of the axis is the focus on process, i.e., the question of how production-oriented play projects are implemented pedagogically.



[Fig. 3.1: Conquergood's key concepts on a matrix]

In the following subsections, the four key terms are shown in more detail in their meaning according to Conquergood and thus their relevance for this documentation, and where necessary for the context to be documented, they are paraphrased and examined regarding their function and meaning for integrative projects. We begin with the horizontal axis (play/process) before documenting FM's explicit goals of social and linguistic integration.

3. 1 Play

Conquergood defines play in a very broad sense, not only in terms of a stage event, but also in terms of social structures and institutions. He sees the function of play as "understanding the unmasking and unmaking tendencies that keep cultures open and in a continuous state of productive tension" (Conquergood 1989, p. 82.).

MF's play leaders took up this broad definition because they saw culture/s as open, unfinished, and negotiable constructs, creating space for interculture that "strives to forge new relationships, shift perspectives, and renew" (Terkessides 2017, p. 99). Thus, instead of assuming a multicultural perspective where cultures intermingle, they assumed that "a third space" (Bhabha 1994, p. 219) opens where different cultures do not necessarily blend into a new one, but where, in a transcultural sense, there are "interweavings and connections of a multiplicity of individual cultures"

(Hartmann 2017, p. 318). Therefore, FM is not primarily about the question of whether assimilation or integration of refugees takes place in a project like this one (cf. Interview 3 and Czollek 2020, p. 192), but how participation of all can take place (cf. Michaels 2011, p. 129).

Didactically-methodologically, the FM facilitators experimented by combining two forms of theater. They wanted to guarantee the development of a play that did not present individual participants with refugee experience as successfully integrated ('tokenism') in the sense of a token policy and thereby exploit their experiences [cf. personal conversation with Lena Winkel-Wenke]. They referred to the *Expert*innentheater Riminiprotokoll* (*Experten des Alltags* 2012, p. 8) and to *Playback Theater*, which is used in psychotherapy (Kowalski et al. 2022, p. 2).

While in expert theater it is the participants themselves who tell their stories and develop them into plays, the participants as well as the FM facilitators worked with stories of flight experiences from Silesia and East Prussia (Poland) after World War II or during the GDR years, when it was not possible to leave the GDR at will and escape was associated with prison or death, and not with the escape stories of the participating ensemble members. In contrast to the concept of expert theater, the actors did not have to draw on their own experiences (this was not possible for the young people who had grown up in Magdeburg due to their lack of experience anyway), but were able to deal with the obvious topic, but at a distance through the stories of others, based on jointly discussed texts and conversations with contemporary witnesses. In this sense, they became experts, if one understands an expert not as a person who has experienced something, but as one who actively deals with a topic, independent of personal experience, and deals with this confrontation in a reflective and productive-transformative way.

This step enabled the game leaders to bring all participants to a common denominator in terms of content and cognition. Patrice Baldwin and Alicja Galazka describe the effect of this cognitivization as positive:

"By staying as experts throughout a drama, the students can be placed at, and maintain, a more objective, 'cool,' and safe distance from dramatic situations and events and it may be that they are engaging more cognitively than affectively and dramatically" (Baldwin and Galazka 2022, p. 139).

In this way, the directors allowed the ensemble members to become experts. In this way, they avoided situations in which they, as experienced and trained theater and dance pedagogues, would have had to deal with triggered personal memories, which they could not have dealt with professionally, like psychotherapists [see Interview 3 and personal conversation with Lena Winkel-Wenke]. Ole Hruschka describes Tobias Rausch's project *Fluchtpunkt Berlin* from 2013, which is

concerned with avoiding the objectification of young people's most personal experiences, with a similar approach of caution

"Um Betroffenheitskitsch oder Elendsvoyeurismus zu vermeiden, wurde das Rechercheprojekt unter die weiter gefasste anthropologische Frage gestellt, warum «Migration eigentlich der Normalzustand und Sesshaftigkeit die Ausnahme» ist – und was ein Zuhause als »Transitzustand im Hier und Jetzt« bedeutet (Rausch, 2013a, in Hruschka 2016, S. 116)."¹²

With the narratives, the ensemble developed its first play, *Fluchtstück*. With this, although not a school theater, it was invited to the first of three participations in the Schüler*innentheatertreffen Sachsen-Anhalt (Magdeburg 2016 and 2018, Halle 2017).

The second method FM refers to is playback theater. Conceived as a therapeutic method, it offers narrative therapy patients* the opportunity to see their narratives brought to life by actors without having to participate in the action themselves. FM used elements of playback theater because the participants with refugee experience can bring their themes onto the stage and modify them without having to start from their own narratives but can integrate them there without having to explain themselves.

The ensemble members' developing the refugee narratives into a play thereby decoupled personal experiences without, however, denying them. This gave ensemble members the chance to actively, creatively, productively, and transformatively (possibly even therapeutically) engage with their own stories or those of other ensemble participants (see approaches to this form of work in de Smet, 2019). This approach combines elements of expert and playback theater. It involves all ensemble members, regardless of their personal experiences and biographies, by first forming expertise and based on this expertise, jointly developing a play from it, whereby empathy for the fellow actors with refugee experience can arise along the way, especially from the participants without refugee experience, which can be expressed in playing along and avoid a hierarchizing culture of regret.

Aesthetically, everyone's participation is also reflected in the fact that in the plays FMs developed, no leading roles were distributed (cf. Schwitzgebel 2019, p. 31). Many scenes were designed in a choral-dance manner (cf. Hruschka 2016, pp. 99-109.) to include all participants [in

¹ Dreyse and Malzacher describe this in a similar way in *Experten des Alltags* 2012, S. 28.

² "To avoid consternation kitsch or misery voyeurism, the research project was framed under the broader anthropological question of why 'migration is actually the normal state and settledness the exception'-and what a home means as a "transit state in the here and now" (Rausch, 2013a, in Hruschka 2016, p. 116)."

Fluchtstück, the play is danced or performed predominantly in a choral manner and, in parallel, the corresponding text is spoken successively in sections in Arabic, English, and German].

The initial play through body work (since initially there was no common language and body language can absorb supra-cultural linguistic hurdles) as well as the elaboration of stories from the outside and the joint development of the escape play offered occasions for "unmasking and unmaking" (Conquergood 1989, p. 82) of emotions, experiences and stories without exposing the participants individually and/or personally due to a lack of or very intensive experiences. It offered a theater-pedagogical shelter in which experiences, instead of being psychologized, experienced aestheticization through the suggestions of the play leaders and recognition by the audience, whereby body language and text could complement each other.

3.2 Power

Since everyone's participation was foregrounded in FM's pedagogical work, this circumstance rendered the question of assimilation or integration redundant. "I am now also a German potato," said one participant with a wink [Interview 2], and this humor, paired with a healthy dose of irony, also reveals this participation as part of German culture linguistically.

Almost all interviewees, whether game leaders or participants, used the term "at eye level" [Interview 2, 3 and 5], with which they named the relationships to and among each other. In the literature on foreign language drama pedagogy in schools, Almut Küppers observes:

"Dieses Zusammenspiel der Kulturen gipfelt im Idealfall in sich wechselseitig beeinflussenden interkulturellen Lernprozessen zwischen allen Akteuren des Unterrichts, die Lehrperson eingeschlossen" (Küppers 2015, S. 149),³

and Baldwin & Galazka locate this state with a Plato's term as "metaxis," i.e., "in-betweenness" (Baldwin and Galazka 2022, p. 28), as a mental as well as physical in-between space where an ensemble can meet and work with each other as equals as a group. That is, although structural roles as participants and play leaders were clearly established, the existing hierarchy was not denied, but perceived as minimal. It would therefore be obvious to cite empowerment as an FM goal here, but Katrin Ackerl Konstantin objects: "Those who want to enable people to shape their own lives assume that they need experts and interventions in order to cope with their lives

³ "Ideally, this interplay of cultures culminates in mutually influencing intercultural learning processes between all actors in the classroom, including the teacher" (Küppers 2015, p. 149).

appropriately" (Ackerl Konstantin 2014, p. 55). FM's play leaders did not see themselves in the roles of such experts and interveners and, in addition to their pedagogical and aesthetic claims, held to a course that could be described as 'enabling pedagogy' (Schwitzgebel 2019, p. 34). They created a safe framework for sharing experiences and togetherness and thus (casually) achieved many sub-aspects of empowerment, 'participation in decision-making' (in every rehearsal, to which participants brought their ideas), 'self-efficacy perception' through the feedback during and after the performances and the invitations to the festivals, 'social capital' through fostering friendships (as an ideal case of group formation, cf. Schwitzgebel, p. 23), "acquiring competence and claiming it," and "setting and pursuing goals" (designing and performing a performance) (Kliche and Kröger, 2008, pp. 716-720). They saw themselves as mates rather than captains of the FM project (a metaphor of good theater pedagogues, cf. Höhn 2018, p. 16), but they also knew at which points they had to take on responsibility and commitment beyond the ordinary (such as when the funding for 2018 was cancelled and this only became public in April, shortly before the premiere of *Morgenland*; when disputes arose among the young people that became irreconcilable or when members were threatened with deportation). They countered problems with the greatest possible transparency and pedagogical tact. This approach showed the young people that the theater-pedagogical model project was not just about fun and games, but also about financial as well as political aspects (for example, that FM was regarded as not relevant beyond the borders of Magdeburg, [Interview 3 and personal conversation, Jochen Gehle]) and aesthetic-cultural questions regarding public interest on the part of state funding agencies ("Why doesn't anyone from them come to see what we're doing?", [Interview 3]), marketing and external impact. Yet it was precisely working on these problems and attempting to solve them transparently that seemed to bring the group closer together, as evidenced by the completion of the film *Morgenland*, which aesthetically recreates the core scenes of the three plays in Magdeburg locations (the marketplace, the Elbe River, a gymnasium) and, most importantly, was made accessible to the families of the unaccompanied refugees via YouTube.

The second FM piece *Die wunderbare Welt der Integration* (2017) illustrates how much the young people had developed and emancipated themselves as a group: they demanded a funnier genre for the new piece and now declared themselves the experts of their own experiences with the topic of integration. They focused in a grotesquely distorted way on "diversitarian insecurities" (*Fluchtpunkt* Film, min. 14:15) by having one person present "guiding theses on integration" or by giving supposed tips ("Say it German!", *ibid.* min. 23:34). Thereby, the piece contained a lot of sarcasm, culminating in the singing of the song of the Germans ("With all three stanzas!"), with the last one

listing Christian, i.e., school-free holidays (ibid., 31:01). Here, the ensemble members dealt intensively with the official and formal German concept of integration by thematizing, critically questioning, and caricaturing it, as it were as evidence and contribution to now qualifying themselves as "German potatoes" [Interviews 2 and 3]. Within the framework of their newly acquired possibilities as a transcultural theater collective, they elevated integration to the core theme of their second play. They empowered themselves in a certain way through the choice of the theme, i.e., without having been instructed to do so by the facilitators and they thus proved, in Conquergood's sense, their own acquisition of performative resources with which they understood, achieved—and moreover undermined through art - the intended goals.

3.3 Process

The importance of processuality for everything cultural does not need to be discussed here. Maike Plath states that theater for young people "has become highly professionalized in the last ten years and hardly needs to fear a (negatively understood) 'pedagogization'" (Plath 2013, p. 22). However, both process and production orientation must be able to occupy equal space in theater education: Theater pedagogical projects need explicit goals such as performances, and successful theater projects achieve this goal and others beyond, which a. are not formulated in advance because they seem unrealistic or unrealizable or b. only arise in the process and c. are not measurable:

"Wahre Bildungserfolge – wie zum Beispiel eine positive Veränderung der eigenen Verhaltensmuster in Bezug auf Fremdartiges bzw. auf die Vielfalt anderer Menschen, der fantasievolle, konstruktive Umgang mit (unvorhergesehenen!) Krisen oder die Fähigkeit zur kreativen Umwandlung einer Krise in etwas ganz und gar Neues, Produktives – werden durch Tests, Statistiken und Noten nicht abgebildet" (ibid., S. 18).⁴

Goals do not present themselves automatically, but are results of processes that sometimes hurt, call for giving up, and require complex problem solving. Social integration, which FM explicitly stated as a goal, and others that gradually emerged are considered below.

Social integration: The goal of social integration, explained one of the game leaders, was reached when she noticed "that the young people arranged to meet each other [...] that integration started to work [...] with each other, and not next to each other" [Interview 3]. Various participants mentioned these meetings outside of rehearsal time, where they arranged to meet for swimming,

⁴ "True educational successes - such as a positive change in one's own behavioral patterns in relation to strangeness or to the diversity of other people, the imaginative, constructive handling of (unforeseen!) crises, or the ability to creatively transform a crisis into something entirely new and productive - are not mapped by tests, statistics, and grades" (ibid., p. 18).

learning lyrics or German, and it is precisely these meetings that indicate that the group had defined itself as such and was functioning. But no group formed in an ideal and problem-free zone. An incident in the early phase shook the FM ensemble: During a body and trust exercise, in which a person standing in a circle was to be cradled gently, the perception arose among some male participants with refugee experience that other male participants with refugee experience from another country had touched a female participant inappropriately. This happened at a time when communication in German was still very rudimentary, before the MeToo movement, but shortly after the Bataclan attack in Paris in November 2015, which made the male young people with refugee experience and a Muslim background even more aware than before of their exposed position as tolerated refugees in Germany [see Interview 3].

This was followed by what John Crutchfield calls intercultural "friction" (Crutchfield 2021, p. 32): a verbal confrontation in Arabic outside of rehearsals between male FM participants with refugee experience from different countries, which culminated in participants from one nation demanding that participants from another stay away from FM and thus also asserting themselves. It was a painful experience for the ensemble as a whole that there were unspoken norms and expectations among the young people with refugee experience, which the participants from Magdeburg did not necessarily share and which the game leader had not included in their considerations, according to one game leader [Interview 3]. No common group rules had been developed, with the help of which crises of this kind within the group could have been prevented or countered (cf. do Mar Castro and Dhawan 2020, p. 268). In addition, the ensemble did not have a professional translator or a socio-educational person who could have drawn on experience from working with culturally diverse groups.

Myria Schwitzgebel describes the fact that group dynamic development processes often include painful group formation phases with the five-phase model according to Tuckman or Bernstein and Lowy (Schwitzgebel 2019, p. 3): 'Forming', she says, is the first phase in which everyone is still quite shy and cautious in their interactions. In the FM ensemble, this phase lasted a few weeks or months and focused on work with the body, a form of "important social bounding [sic] activities" (de Smet 2019, p. 8). The end of the 'storming' phase described above initiated the 'norming' phase, during which a relatively stable group formed. For FM, this was the period from 2016 to 2019, although especially from 2019 onwards, participants left, either because of the pandemic or because they went abroad after graduating from school, went on to study or train, or lived in other cities with their families who had since moved on. The 'Performing' phase extended

from the escape play performance in Halle in June 2017 to circa spring 2020 with the onset of the Corona pandemic. The final phase, 'Adjourning', was initiated with the work on the film *Escape Point* and ended with the release of the film on YouTube.

That the last phase and within it the actual performances should be given special value was confirmed by all interviewed participants and facilitators [interviews 1-5]. This was especially true for the escape play, because its debriefing with another group, who saw it in the course of the 2016 *Landesschultbeatertreffen* (state festival of school theater) in Magdeburg in the form of a peer review and discussed it with the FM ensemble, was particularly emotional. Here, in response to questions from their peer reviewers, the young people with refugee experience spoke for the first time of their own experiences and feelings. "We were all crying," the game leaders recalled [Interview 3, personal conversation with Lena Winkel-Wenke]. It seems that this event in the context of a youth theater meeting, where plays were performed in front of all participating group but only evaluated with another group of peers, was a good and safe space in which it was possible for the young people with refugee experience to voluntarily share their own stories. Other young people who had expressed from the outset, and still expressed in the interviews with Sarah Dolbier, that they did not want to talk about their flight experience made use of their right of veto [Interview 2], which can be understood as a self-confident, emancipated act (cf. Plath 2022, pp. 111-113). After this emotional event, the ensemble members did not turn away from the project, but rather wished for a funnier piece for the following year as a follow-up project. They were free to decide what they wanted to share with whom and in which form or genre they wanted their expertness to be accommodated. In addition, for the refugees it was another step towards self-perceived social acceptance: Since the *Jugendtheatertreff* is not a competition but also an "eye-to-eye" festival that is not about winners but about mutual recognition, it represented a place where especially the FM ensemble members with refugee experience received recognition by a peer group.

Identity is scientifically described as a social construct and therefore often negatively (Bischoff 2004, p. 8; Hall 2018, p. 28), but it is precisely as a construct that identity formation leaves room for development, expansion and change. Especially those people who find themselves in intercultural or transcultural situations benefit from the chance to experience the facets of their own cultures and identities as well as the connections to further cultures and to reflect and transform them for their own identities. Two participants without a migration background stated in the interviews that they now not only knew what integration really was but had also experienced it [Interviews 1 and 5]. One participant with migration experience stated, "I feel so integrated that I

can say, I am Magdeburger," "I can support others," and "I can teach other people [to] where my border is" [Interview 2]. Beyond these feelings and comments, the influence of the model theater pedagogy model project on the participants' identities can also be seen in the fact that the interviewees consistently showed them to be interested in further, future theater work, probably not as actors on stage, but as costume designers, stage and event managers [Interviews 1, 2 and 5]. Accordingly, one of the participants is now studying languages and peace and conflict studies with the goal of "later working as a mediator, with people with a refugee background" [Interview 5]; another is training as an event manager. Both experienced, as they stated in the interviews, the influence of FM on their career and study choices as lasting. FM influenced their personal perspectives and professional decisions.

Maike Plath defines development and independence as some of the most important educational goals,

"sich in der Tiefe mit Inhalten zu beschäftigen, sie in Beziehung zu sich selbst und der eigenen Situation in dieser Welt zu setzen, und auf diese Weise die Fähigkeit zu erlangen, eigenständig Fragen zu formulieren [...]. Fragen an die Welt (und nicht: Antworten lernen auf vorgegebene Fragen)" (Plath, 2013, S. 14 und S. 18).⁵

The question that the FM ensemble members asked themselves for their third piece, *Morgenland*, was: how do we imagine our common future? It transcends the original common goal of making theater about flight and migration, can be understood as a step in a post migratory society, and shows how the ensemble developed in terms of content and aesthetics (and language): from interviews with experts for the flight piece, to the development of the critical-grotesque piece *Die wunderbare Welt der Integration*, to the utopian *Morgenland*, which expressed the young people's concerns and visions for a common and global future because it addressed the uncertain. As the last work of the ensemble, it concludes a trilogy, which is also conveyed by the film *Fluchtpunkt*, which summarizes the three plays and thus the experiences made through theater in the course of four years and invites reflection on them.

It can thus be stated that the ensemble initiated physical, social, group dynamic, aesthetic, socio-critical, metacognitive and, as will be shown, linguistic learning processes. The results of these are, among other things, lasting friendships, socio-critical views of one's own and other culture(s),

⁵ "to engage with content in depth, to relate it to oneself and one's own situation in this world, and in this way to acquire the ability to formulate questions independently [...]. Questions to the world (and not: learning answers to given questions)" (Plath, 2013, p. 14 and p. 18).

which led to the aesthetic reshaping of one's own and other people's life experiences into three play developments including stagings. Measurable, manipulable, and administrable (cf. Conquergood 1989, p. 83), they are not, however (cf. Schmenk 2015, p. 47, who articulates the impossibility of formulating learning goals for theater and language learning). But, according to Florian Vaßen, that is not what matters:

"Beim Theater-Spielen geht es – trotz aller sozialer Relevanz – nicht primär darum, dass mit seiner Hilfe etwas gelernt wird, und es ist auch keine Methode, durch die föhr etwas gelernt wird. Vielmehr entstehen im ästhetischen Ereignis des Theaters, in dem Ästhetik, Theatralität, Leiblichkeit sowie Sinn und Reflexion eng miteinander verbunden sind, neue Erfahrungen" (Vaßen in Hruschka 2016, S. 26)⁶

What is possible - and necessary - however, is reflection:

"Rückblickend lässt sich der Grad des Gelingens eines Projekts auch daran ablesen, ob die Beteiligten ihre individuellen Beweggründe, ihre Haltung zum Thema oder eigene, spezifische Qualitätskriterien formulieren können – und ob sie in der Theaterarbeit einen positiven Beitrag zur individuellen Veränderung oder Weiterentwicklung erfahren" (ebd., S. 21).⁷

The FM ensemble was given the opportunity to do this directly through participation in and feedback at the state youth theater meetings and retrospectively through participation in this scientific documentation through the interview format. The latter is rather the exception for both ensemble members and facilitators (as well as teachers who work in theater education) (cf. Plath 2022, p. 156), but would often be very helpful for one's own professional development as well as the improvement of projects.

3.4 Poetics/Language

In recent decades, the importance of language within performance research has receded into the background in favor of the body and corporeality (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008, pp. 11-21). In the context of documenting a theater project that strives for social as well as linguistic integration, however,

⁶ "Playing theater - despite all its social relevance - is not primarily about learning something with its help, nor is it a method through which something is learned in a leading way. Rather, it is in the aesthetic event of the theater, in which aesthetics, Theatricality, corporeality as well as meaning and reflection are closely connected, new experiences arise" (Vaßen in Hruschka 2016, p. 26).

⁷ "In retrospect, the degree of a project's success can also be gauged by whether those involved are able to formulate their individual motivations, their attitude toward the topic, or their own specific quality criteria - and whether they experience a positive contribution to individual change or further development in the theater work" (ibid., p. 21).

language must be thematized. This is not just about vocabulary and grammatically correct forms, correct as well as fluent pronunciation, or the distinction between dialectally colored German and standard or stage German, but also about elements such as multilingualism as a preference, the inclusion of languages other than German through translations in performances, and the general importance of voice training that transcends individual languages.

With its intermediary position between body work and language work, voice education in general should be given great importance (cf. personal conversation with Bassam Ghazi). In schools, however, voice training is not part of the curriculum in either German or foreign language classes, and while it is an indispensable part of the program in choir rehearsals, it is often only ritualized in theater work as part of warm-up exercises but is rarely discussed afterwards. Nevertheless, voice training has the potential to open new or expanded spaces acoustically and verbally for performers, as each individual explores and tests the indifference position (middle register) of his or her own voice and learns to deal with it more consciously and effectively. Likewise, breathing techniques are part of voice training and not only lead to a more stress-free, less strained use of one's own voice, but can also help to create greater inner balance and better control over one's own physical and psychological state (The Neuroscience of Learning, pp.79-82). Moreover, voice is an instrument that functions independently of the language used when there was no common language for FM ensemble members. Voice training, at the intersection of language and play, body and mind, can and should play a key role in a theater project dedicated to linguistic integration.

The FM ensemble used multilingualism to its advantage in the escape play (cf. Holthausen 2011, p. 154). Translations were necessary from the outset to make themselves understood and were produced by the ensemble participants themselves. By performing their piece in three languages, they achieved other effects besides the de-hierarchization of German, where different languages coexisted:

"nicht eindeutig fixierbar, beide erzeugen einen je singulären Überschuss [...]. Die verschiedenen Formen [...] arbeiten auf diese Weise einer Hierarchisierung von Bedeutung und subjektiver Körperlichkeit entgegen (Dreyse 2011, S. 66).⁸

In the escape piece, the ensemble preferred the language sequence Arabic - English - German in sections. At first, this was to accommodate the Arabic-speaking audience (friends, siblings, parents), who rarely encounter a language other than German or occasionally English on

⁸ "not clearly fixable, both generate a singular surplus each [...]. In this way, the different forms [...] work against a hierarchization of meaning and subjective physicality" (Dreyse 2011, p. 66).

German stages and in German cinemas (cf. Israel 2011, p. 57). Then came English, understood as a lingua franca, and finally German, thus giving all potential viewers not only the opportunity to understand the play in a preferred language, but also to deal with other languages in the case of identical content: "If we want to challenge the narrative of Germanness - one language, one narrative, one heritage - we should do it by claiming the space through multilinguality and multiperspectivity" (On Multilinguality 2017, p. 76).

Pertaining to the goal of language learning in the FM ensemble, all interviews revealed that none of the native speakers of German spoke Arabic and that English skills were rudimentary, and that language hurdles were overcome initially by means of picture dictionaries and later by translation apps [Interview 1-5]. Trained German-as-a-Foreign-Language-Coaches were not consulted, special German courses for the acquisition of the German language were not offered in the environment of the young people (in the beginning there were no welcome or integration classes in Magdeburg, the new arrivals were placed directly in regular classes) and many grammatical phenomena (for example, plural and compound formations, prepositions and case), as was repeated several times in the interviews, were treated with "you just have to learn that, there are no rules" [Interview 5] and "German is just a heavy [sic!] language" [Interview 1].

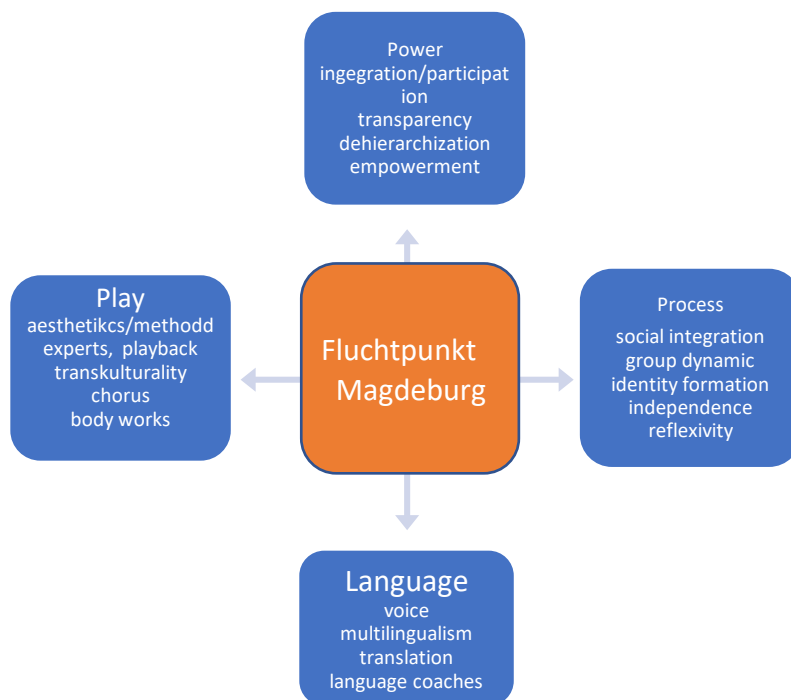
It might have been helpful to have a DaF coach virtually or in person (like DaF students of the local university), like at *Projektfabrik GmbH Witten* (Best, Guhleemann & Guitart 2020, p. 8). They could observe rehearsal phases and provide opportunities for language reflection in coaching phases, with feedback on questions, input on rules, and in the form of spaced repetition (Müller 2017, p. 27).

What FM could do for linguistic integration, however, was to provide a space outside of the clearinghouse with other Arabic-speaking youth, and outside of the school burdened by assessments and grades, that allowed learners opportunities for linguistic exchange, for learning in contexts of their own interests and concerns with a self-selected peer group. The fact that participants with immigrant backgrounds are now in vocational training and degree programs in Germany that require the B2/C1 level of the *Common European Framework of References for Languages* (CEFR) and can participate in interviews used for academic purposes and read and understand the associated consent forms points to success.

4 Summary

Play - Power - Process - Poetics/Language: All four of Conquergood's key concepts can be related to FM's work over several years. It can be noted that the facilitators always made pedagogical,

dramaturgical-aesthetic, structural and financial decisions as transparently as possible and tried to keep a symmetry on both axes, i.e. balance between production and process orientation on the 'how' axis as well as the greatest possible equal distribution on the 'what' axis between power and language, whereby it must be admitted that the power aspect of integration and participation, transparency and empowerment was given more attention than language, since there were no coaches for this and the facilitators, due to their personal values and professional pedagogical approaches, had more experience with the power area than with the language area. Moreover, language was spoken and learned immersively everywhere, not just in the FM rehearsal phases. Thus, if one maps the key concepts with their subcategories on a matrix as in Fig. 4, they present themselves as relatively centered, i.e., not swinging too far to either side:



[Abb. 4: Conquergood's key concepts with details from the FM project work.]

Thus, on the axis of play or production and process orientation, the game leaders of FM took into account "the pedagogical and the artistic claim to weigh against each other again and again, to keep in balance - in one word - to stay alive" (Hensel in Passon 2015, p. 73). Additionally, they realized this balancing also in relation to the dimensions of power and language orientation by using all democratically available tools such as transparency and participation as ways to empowerment and appreciation of multilingualism as a fact as well as languages as an aesthetic means and

transparently and consciously. This leads to the final question, which of these elements could be used in future projects that are similar in themselves (in relation to school-age children who have fled Ukraine, but also in courses in higher education that could serve to integrate regional, national, and international students.

5 Discussion and Outlook

What functional elements can be derived from the documentation of the theater-pedagogical model project *Fluchtpunkt Magdeburg* for other, similar integrative (theater) projects with the goal of social and linguistic integration through process- and production-oriented approaches?

Constants such as space and time have proven their worth: The *Landeszentrale für Freies Theater Sachsen-Anhalt* served the FM ensemble as a central and stable location for its rehearsals and meetings during the four years. The organizers formed a functioning team from two related but not identical disciplines with pedagogical experience. They complemented each other, represented different genders, and modeled "eye-to-eye" democratic and participatory practices with their ability to work together over the long term and to address and manage problems transparently.

With the method combination of expert and playback theater, the ensemble members acquired cultural knowledge, developed social and practical skills, and fostered their linguistic and communicative competence. For future projects, it might even be conceivable to have group members interview other everyday experts on a topic of common interest and to develop plays from this, i.e., to link expert and playback theater even more closely.

The process orientation allowed them to have group experiences with all its phases as well as more insight, awareness, and empowerment as participants in a democratic society. At the same time, the production-oriented approach set the schedule and overall flow, but most importantly allowed for artistic experiences, i.e., the translation of personal and acquired information on topics related to the interests and experiences of the ensemble members into performed pieces through body work, dance choreography, choral stage devices, and aesthetic demands. The ensemble members created a product that neither the native members nor the members with refugee and migration experiences could have developed without the others. The inclusion of multilingualism, intercultural and intergenerational experiences not only strengthened the global relevance of the project, but also fostered identity formation and empathy beyond the expressed goals of social and linguistic integration.

General factors that can be observed and derived for other integrative projects are, above all, a reliable location and sufficient time that truly allows for the formation of a group (i.e., not a classroom, course, or semester schedule that creates time pressure and a hectic pace, but a series of weekend workshops or an intensive phase at the beginning of a semester). An important basis for this kind of project work seems to be to find topics that are relevant and interesting for the participants and that can be developed and implemented by all, so that working "at eye level" among the participants can be achieved. It also seems important to allow time at the beginning to develop ground rules so that questions and problems can be avoided and overcome. In inclusive projects, it is important to consider multilingual skills (such as accents, dialects, languages) as advantages (rather than obstacles, barriers, or even deficiencies). It is equally important to emphasize that such projects aim at products or productions that could not be created outside this inter- or transcultural space. This awareness could lead participants from diverse backgrounds to think critically about their identities and to understand them as subject to permanent change. Finally, planning regular periods of reflection into such projects, whether about content, identities, group issues, or language issues, may not only enable future improvements to similar projects, but also provide opportunities for metacognition, which in turn demonstrates learning beyond testing and grading. In their interviews, FM game leaders provided feedback that the opportunity to look back at the project several years later provided both emotional and professional insights, ideas, and inspiration for future projects [Interview 3, min. 48]. This comment leads to the question whether project leaders and participants should not more often have the opportunity to reflect on their projects after a certain period of time in order to receive some form of supervision or scientific support from the outside that provides professional backing and pedagogical support. Administrators such as those at the Ministry of Education of the state of Saxony-Anhalt could also potentially benefit by receiving scientifically sound feedback, becoming part of a scientifically interdisciplinary project, and gaining more visibility overall for funded projects.

Unfortunately, Saxony-Anhalt allowed the *Theaterpädagogisches Modellprojekt* (Model Project for Theater Education), which was "unique in Germany in bringing together contract-based, i.e. municipal, theaters with the independent scene in a funding program" (cf. Behrmann 2017, link), to expire at the end of 2017, while the *Landeszentrale Freies Theater LanZe* continued to receive funding. FM was able to run until 2019 thanks to volunteer work and donations but ended completely with the onset of the pandemic in 2020, instead of leading to a longer-term follow-up project that would be accessible to a broader share of the population as a transcultural collective with people 18 and

older with and without migration experience (cf. Sahlia Shagazzi, Schauspiel Köln, personal interview, 6 May 2022). The current wave of refugees from Ukraine, however, as well as the fact that the first guest workers came to Germany just over 60 years ago, whose integration, however, was neither envisaged at the time nor its absence is hardly reflected even today (cf. personal conversation Barbara Kantel, 10 May 2022), point out that sustainable projects for a real integration, which go beyond mere language courses and the learning of 300 questions for naturalization, but bring people closer together and emphasize commonalities instead of differences, from which transcultural new things can arise, are really needed. As shown with FM, such careful as sustainable and complex, well thought-out concepts exist. It would be desirable to promote them and to make them public as modifiable models in publications like this one.

Transferred to other project areas, for example to promote a better campus climate, at Syracuse University (see link), similar integrative projects might be desirable, bringing regional students into better and more authentic contact and exchange with statewide as well as international students. They would continue to be, though not necessarily theater-based, product-, process-, language-, and production-oriented: In such cases, it would be more a matter of finding a common theme relevant to one's own person(s) than of developing a play: "It needs an occasion where the space is basically open first" [Christiane Böhm, personal conversation May 12, 2022]. In such a common framework, something can be developed or created together at eye level ("whether that is theater or building insect hotels, it doesn't matter at first", *ibid.*). It seems important to take into account the emerging group dynamic processes, to accept them and make them transparent, not to understand culture as well as language and forms of communication as monolithic and normative, to allow authentic opportunities for participation in processes and products, and to replace evaluations and assessments with sufficient time for reflection and review.

As much as these open formats seem to contradict everyday school or university life, which is characterized by predetermined goals in lengthy curricula, fixed rubrics, enormously high costs that create pressure to succeed (and all too often depression and anxiety), they would be desirable for the climate not only in local-regional work, but in the social, emotional, pedagogical, and inter- and transcultural microcosms of university, college, and school communities across state and national borders.

6 Thanks (in alphabetical order)

We thank all of you who encouraged, mailed, answered, challenged, and supported us:

Christiane Böhm, Gail Bulman, Elisa Fest, Daniela Fichte, Jeanne Diederich, Jochen Gehle, Bassam Ghazi, Kate Hanson, Barbara Kantel, Elisabeth Ostendorp, Karin Ruhlandt, Sahlia Shagasi, Anke Stöver-Blahak, Emma Ticio-Quesada, Seth Tucker, Silja Weber und Lena Winkel-Wenke, and all those who want to remain anonymous.

We owe you enormous thanks!

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8. Appendix

Questionnaire Interview Questions for Ensemble Members and Facilitators

A. For ensemble members

1. What motivated you to do theater?
2. What did you like (and dislike) about theater?
3. What about theater work was effective for you in integrating or helping to integrate others?
4. What difficulties did you face? Which of these were you able to overcome? Which ones were not? How? Why?
- 5) Did your view of the topic or the contents and forms of integration change during or through the project?
6. In your opinion, can theater contribute to integration? How? Where not?
7. Has this project influenced/changed your life? If so, how?
8. Do you continue to use what you learned from the project or to help others in the future? If so, how?
9. Would you participate in a project like this again? Why (not)?
10. If so, what should stay the same/unchanged? What should be different?
11. what is/was the importance of the project in your life?
12. What did you learn about the German language, culture, politics etc.?
13. What language barriers did you encounter and how did you address them?
14. Did you have German classes that helped break down language barriers?
15. Did the project change your perspective on German culture, politics and language? If so, to what extent?
16. Did it also change your perspective on your languages, cultures, etc.?
17. How would you like it if such projects were a compulsory or optional subject at (vocational) school or university?
18. Did the project change your perspective on the concept of integration? If yes, how?
19. what else should i ask you or what else would you like to say?

B. For Facilitators

1. What about the theater work has been effective for you in integrating or helping to integrate others?
2. What motivated you to do this project?
3. What did you like (and dislike) about the project? What difficulties did you encounter? Which of them were you able to overcome? Which ones didn't?
4. Did your view on the topic or the contents and forms of integration change during or through the project?
5. In your opinion, can theater contribute to integration? How? Where not?
6. Do you use what you learned from the project to help others in the future? If so, how?
7. Would you organize and lead such a project again? Why (not)?
8. If yes, what should remain the same/unchanged?
9. How was the project financed? What was good and not so good about it?
10. What did you use to guide the organization? Have you seen similar projects elsewhere?
11. What is/was the importance of the project in your life?
12. What did you learn about languages, cultures, politics?
- 13) How did the project change your perspective on German culture, politics, and language?
- 14) How would you like it if such projects were a compulsory or elective course at school or university? Who else in the world could benefit from such projects?
- 16) What advice would you give to others who use theater/theatre pedagogy to achieve integration or language growth?