

# The Social Art of Language Acquisition: A Theatre Approach in Language Learning for Migrants and its Digitization in the Corona Lockdown

Christine Best, Kerstin Guhlemann, Ona Argemí Guitart

*Today's challenges and developments – migration flows, globalization, diversification of educational pathways – clearly indicate that language teaching can no longer only take place within the framework of school and vocational training. Outside the context of schools, approaches which combine language learning with other goals of development or that are linked to concrete objectives appear most promising. A particularly challenging field is teaching languages to adult refugees, since language courses can seldom address the learning culture, the different learning speeds and key competencies adequately. In the wake of the current Corona crisis, the problem is becoming more pressing. By digitalization of language courses, there is the danger that people with better prerequisites benefit more from the offered courses than those more in need, and the gap between people with higher or lower learning success will widen further. The article uses the practical example JobAct Sprachkultur, which is a German programme for job placement, based on a combination of theatre methods, language learning and social work, to investigate the extent to which theatre methods can contribute to reducing educational inequality in the language acquisition of adult refugees/migrants. Based on a document analysis and qualitative spotlight surveys with the trainers of the program, the potentials and limitations of the theatre approach and its digital implementation can be shown.*

## 1 Introduction and background

Against the background and simultaneous challenges of globalization, migration flows and the general diversification of educational pathways (Krüger-Potratz 2016), it is clear that language teaching can no longer take place only in the context of school and vocational training. On the one hand, these challenges generally increase the relevance of language acquisition, on the other hand, the target groups vary greatly, so that institutionalized language acquisition does not seem appropriate for every target group. One group that needs to receive increased attention is that of (adult) refugees, since language is considered one of the number one keys to integration besides paid work and social integration, according to the official strategy for integration of the German government (German government 2019; Wößmann 2016; Esser

2006).<sup>1</sup> In singular chalk-and-talk language courses however, it is only rarely possible to address the sometimes very different learning cultures, the different learning speeds and the different key competencies of the participants – and even less likely to lead to sustainable improvements. The difficult situation of language education is aggravated by the current Corona crisis with the inherent tendency that its negative effects affect marginalized groups more severely anyway (Sturm 2020; Eilfort 2020) and also hinder or impede access to language courses and other educational opportunities.

The digitization of language courses that spread as a substitute has the potential to reinforce inequalities, when people with more favorable conditions benefit more from the courses on offer and the gap between people with higher or lower learning success widens as our research shows. There is a growing need for alternative concepts that reduce these inequalities and raise sustainability of learning results, otherwise knowledge gaps between those with higher and lower learning success will reinforce.

One approach that seems promising in reducing inequalities in the education system in general is Social Art (Best & Guhlemann 2020). With the approach of Social Art good experiences could be made in tackling social inequality by promoting the language acquisition of people with less language skills and therefore fostering integration of socially more deprived people. Against this background, this article first uses a practical example to investigate the extent to which Social Art in its concrete form of theatre methods can contribute to reducing educational inequality in the language acquisition of adult refugees/migrants. Based on these findings the article investigates the opportunities and also the limits of digitization in this area.

Our central thesis is that theatre work contributes to the development of key competences that are necessary for language acquisition or at least promote it. Furthermore, the theatre play gives language learning a concrete goal and provides “natural” repetitions of the learning content in the rehearsals, which is an ideal combination. Digitization of theater methods and language acquisition seem to offer great opportunities for learners on the one hand but can also produce or increase inequalities between learners on the other.

The already existing need for digital learning formats for language acquisition (Hartinger 2018) is currently greatly increased by Covid-19. Digital programs for language acquisition are available, while the offer of digital theatre programs is only limited (see also Philip & Nicholls 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> This is potentially problematic because it ignores many more factors for integration/inclusion in society and puts the pressure of integration/inclusion solely on the migrants/refugees. Furthermore, the focus on German ignores the de-facto multilingual society.

Against this background, the article poses the question how the promising combination of drama education and language acquisition can be digitized, or digitally supported, and which opportunities and restrictions can be identified, especially in the group of migrants/refugees. For this reason, we are using document analysis and qualitative spotlight surveys to examine how actors in the theater education scene reacted to the pandemic, which solutions could be found, and which results can be estimated. For this, we will first introduce the approach in “normal” times and then highlight the changes that had to be made, before drawing conclusions about the obstacles and possibilities of digitization in this field.

## 2 The new educational principle *Social Art* and its practical use

In the following, the new educational principle of Social Art (Best & Guhlemann 2020), on which the practical example is based, will first be explained, and then its impact is illustrated by the German best practice project “JobAct Sprachkultur”.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1 Why are we acting up? Social Art as catalyst and fuel for development success

The approach of Social Art is based on the conviction that the art of the future will be social and that an artistic approach is necessary to meet current social issues. Artistic approaches and methodologies are therefore needed to solve these problems. Creativity, imagination and inspiration play central roles in overcoming obstacles. Social Art is a new educational principle that strengthens social inclusion and social cohesion through artistic approaches.

The idea is based on the conviction that previous educational concepts of state institutions such as schools or facilities where language courses for refugees are offered are often too cognitively focused, social arteither because they are conceptually designed to do so or, and this seems to be the case far more often, because the structures do not allow any other option, for example due to large group sizes or different learning levels (see also Dalziel & Piazzoli 2019).

Therefore, Social Art is more holistic and also includes the training of mental, emotional and physical abilities. Especially for people who have already tried other approaches without success, Social Art can be very effective.

In Social Art, the materials of the artists are not canvases, marble or stages, but social issues. The basic principle lies in the dissolution of hierarchies and the purpose of initiating positive change among the participants. Although classical theatre has always aspired to hold up a mirror to society (Rühle 1982), to show solutions to problems and thus to stimulate social

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<sup>2</sup> This can be translated with “JobAct Language Culture”.

transformation processes, Social Art goes one step further by dissolving the boundaries between stage and audience. Following the assumption that art has a universal level in which communication and exchange between the target group and its surroundings is possible, Social Art is not made by an elitist circle of artists for a small group of people interested in high culture. In our goal of social transformation, it is disadvantaged target groups who enter into an artistic process and create an artistic work primarily for people from their environment. In the classical JobAct approach, theatre plays are performed by long-term unemployed, choirs are formed, puppet theatre or short performances with objects are performed (as described below). By using classical works or plays in this process, art is opened up twice for new target groups: the performers and the audience. By engaging with the artistic process and the successful public presentation of the results, the participants will experience empowerment.<sup>3</sup> Empowerment means, that the target group is enabled to recognize and solve their problems – in short: to overcome biographical crises and to actively shape their lives according to their wishes.

The theoretical roots of Social Art lie in the Beuys's approach of an expanded concept of art, but in its dialogical claim it goes beyond this. The focus is no longer on a physical work, but on the artistic process of its creation. The mechanisms involved are provocation, reflection and distancing (Krenn 2016). It enables the handling of unpleasant or problematic situations by a “slow indirect approach to topics and experiences” (Kechaja 2017: 195), their (re-)valuation and processing. Essential elements are that art is transferred from the usual top-down approach into a participatory framework in a multi-professional cooperation of actors from the fields of art/culture, education and social work (Heinrich 2016).

In the field of language education for mixed groups with problematic biographies in uncertain life situations, artistic expressions can thus create a space in which difficulties can be overcome, solutions to problems can be found, alternative roles can be tried out and new sides can be discovered in themselves, protected from the dangers of failure (Dalziel & Piazzoli 2019). Participants can have new experiences, change perspectives, and initiate change (Bodenmüller 2004: 20). Social Art is practical rather than theoretical and brings people into contact with themselves and, on the other hand, in contact with each other. It is based on interaction and encourages people to exchange ideas, share experiences and create something new together, reaching a level of cooperation that would be hard to imply in a singular classroom situation. Working together on an artistic product gives learning a language a new meaning and promotes self-reflection. The emerging solidarity, teamwork and creativity and the pride of creating something of high quality together can build a good base

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<sup>3</sup> For more information concerning empowerment in relation to education drama/theatre see also: Westphal (2015) and Geneuss, Obster & Ruppert (2020)

for helping each other out of learning difficulties. Both the artistic process and the result contribute to the development of those affected.

## 2.2 The human is only human when he acts – Practical use of the method in the JobAct program

The practical example for the application of Social Art in the focus of this paper is called “JobAct” and mainly uses theatre methods as an artistic principle in education and labour market inclusion. Developed 13 years ago by the social enterprise Projektfabrik gGmbH in Witten, Germany, the approach uses the power of creative tools and arts to help different groups of unemployed people (young people, long-term unemployed, single parents, migrants and refugees) to develop their self-awareness and retake control of their lives, building a solid base to gain and maintain employment. In the group of refugees and migrants the main part of the development goal thereby is language learning.

Through a combination of traditional approaches to employment (including job, language and entrepreneurship training) and theatre training, the methodology is structured throughout the development of a theatre play. Alongside the process, participants work with a group of peers to develop a theatre play while mutually building language and social skills in a joyful and playful way. This is done with the help of trainers with a professional artistic background, combined ideally with social work / psychological skills (as in the profession Social Artist). The first sessions with the participants focus on getting them into acting spirit, finding a connection between body language and spoken language and getting into the spirit of the play that is being performed. With the help of some main elements of the play, like a basic emotion or conflict or theme, the trainer gets the group to overcome any inhibitions against acting or feelings of lacking acting skills. Starting with small theatre exercises with voice and movement in the safety of the group, tension is built up slowly, by letting the participants first do smaller rather than bigger individual tasks, always rewarded with appreciative feedback and applause. This way, step by step, the participants can develop the self-esteem to explore their inherent strength and skills that are growing in the process simultaneously.

Far from being an end in itself, theatre thus provides the opportunity to develop skills that are crucial for both language learning and job searching such as teamwork, decision-making, negotiation, critical thinking, commitment or time management. Furthermore, it offers a low-threshold entry to activate personal development and self-esteem building processes. This involves a change in the learning perception: participants are no longer seen as passive recipients of assistance but agents of change in their own lives and regarding others. The group setting is, therefore, one of the keys of the approach, as it fosters mutual trust and enhances the sense of belonging: both important milestones for identity-building processes.

So far, there is unfortunately little empirical evidence of the positive development of personal skills through drama (Wirag 2019 as cited in Geneuss, Obster & Ruppert 2020), although the approach of Social Art, similar to other drama or theatre pedagogy approaches, offers indications of this.

Due to its great success in Germany and its superiority over conventional methods of job placement, the approach has been disseminated and implemented in two European projects<sup>4</sup> throughout Europe in the last three years.

### 2.2.1 Project structure JobAct

The practical implementation of the JobAct method in Germany<sup>5</sup> consists of two phases: a six-month theatre training and a subsequent two- to four-month work placement. In the first phase, participants receive drama training three days a week, create backdrops, props and costumes one day a week, and receive an individual application coaching one day a week including analyses to identify individual strengths and problematic situations. In the end of that phase, there is a stage-ready play as a group result and an individualized career plan for each participant. In order to enable a holistic effect of the approach and to avoid possible loss of interfaces, theatre training takes place once a week in the presence of the social workers, so that questions or problems that arise can be answered and solved at short notice. The training phase ends with the play being performed in front of a general audience. Here, for example, friends and family of the participants are invited, but also potential employers and employees of the Job Agencies. The participants are targeted for a two-fold effect, (1) the improvement of the participants' self-perception, which has already changed during the training phase, by the experience of success of the performances, and (2) the change in the perception of others in the social environment of the participants. The play is always a classic play by a well-known author; each year, going forward in time, another author is selected as the focus for all the JobAct projects. The approach deliberately does not incorporate biographical experiences into the creation of a play, as it aims at expanding the horizons of the participants with new experiences. In addition, experience has shown that participants can gain more respect in their environment by participating in a well-known play instead of something self-made. The energy and self-confidence the participants gain from the premiere, builds the ground for their transition to the second phase of the project.

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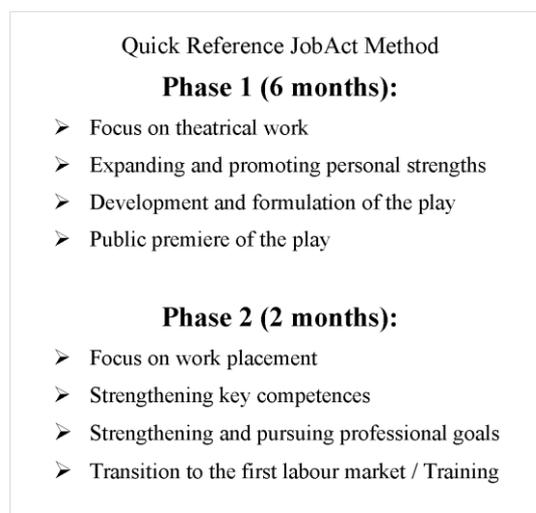
<sup>4</sup> For further information, please see [http://www.sfs.tu-dortmund.de/cms/en/projects/finished\\_projects/JobActEurope.html](http://www.sfs.tu-dortmund.de/cms/en/projects/finished_projects/JobActEurope.html) and <http://www.sfs.tu-dortmund.de/cms/en/projects/ARTE.html>

<sup>5</sup> For economic reasons on both sides, participants and funders, the periods are shorter in other European countries.

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In the second phase of the project, the key competences previously acquired, such as teamwork, personal problem management and crisis management as well as language and expressiveness, can be applied and used in a two- to four-month work placement. By the previous success experience participants are empowered to convince future employers and/or consolidate the self-esteem needed for job search and life management by experiencing further success in an internship. At the same time, a theatre training takes place one day a week, to discuss and solve problems in the internship with the further use of artistic methods. The internship is already sought during the practical phase with the help of job coaching, in order ideally to enable a seamless transition. Often, during the internship, training or employment opportunities arise either in the same company or through previous or parallel application processes, which usually ensures the continuation of employment.

The method as a holistic package has proven to be very successful: The placement rates double those of traditional trainings from the Job Center at the very least. Taking into account that the approach is usually dealing with the more problematic cases facing multiple placement problems, the numbers can be considered even more impressive.



*Fig. 1: Quick Reference JobAct Method*

## 2.3 Practical use of the method in the JobAct program “Sprachkultur” and its impact

### 2.3.1 Project structure JobAct Sprachkultur

The project structure of JobAct Sprachkultur is similar to the described JobAct method, with the addition of a target group specific language approach. Therefore, in the first phase of the project, the participants receive language training three days a week, besides theatre training and job coaching. One day a week is spent exclusively on language teaching, while two days a week are devoted to theatre and job coaching in addition to language lessons. In the second phase of the project, the participants are in internships three days a week, receive theatre

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training one day a week and language courses one day a week. Experience show, that the best results arise with the language training being interlinked with the theatre training, by teamwork of a language trainer and a drama trainer. This way the results in both areas, the progress of the theatre play and language acquisition, can be improved.

### 2.3.2 Language teaching, target group and impact of JobAct Sprachkultur

The target group in the JobAct Sprachkultur projects is very heterogeneous in every possible way: age, sex, culture, country of origin, duration of stay in Germany, language skill, education level and learning skills. Due to this, and often difficult life situations, different needs have to be met, so there is only a limited uniform concept for language teaching. The language trainers are given a toolbox which they can – but do not have to – use, they receive recommended literature but are otherwise free in the creative design of the lessons shaped to meet individual requirements. Being familiar with the Social Art approach and the spirit of the theatre work, the language trainers should design the lessons according to their strengths and possibilities as well as those of the participants rather than according to universal rules. Therefore, the lessons are usually quite individual, but based on many years of positive experience in strengthening key competences. They are often associated with theatre training, which has a high impact on the participants.

#### Effects of gender

The gender and age distribution of the participants is very mixed, both men and women of different ages take part in the project. Our spotlight surveys revealed the tendencies that the participating women in the projects often showed a higher willingness to learn than participating men and usually also achieved faster and higher learning success in language acquisition. In some cases, the motivational pull of the female participants was so strong that the male participants were also carried along, abandoned their refusal attitude and ultimately benefited from the group mix and the project.

#### Effects of migration history

The participants either have a migration background or are refugees with different lengths of stay in Germany and various countries of origin, mostly Syria, Iran, Romania, Turkey, Afghanistan, and North African countries. In this context, the interviewed language and theatre trainers report changes in the group spirit over a few years. Before the migration flows of 2015, participants in theatre projects for language acquisition were mainly people with a migration background, who had already lived in Germany for many years, but had not yet been able to acquire comprehensive language skills. Working with this target group was more challenging than it is now in the JobAct Sprachkultur format due to the fact, that this target group had already made bad experiences with employment agencies in Germany and partly

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also due to deadlocked language levels. Nowadays, the work with the target group is more effective than before, due to the mix of longer settled migrants and more recent refugees, who usually have a very high level of motivation and commitment and show more openness for new approaches.

### Effects of education levels

The above-mentioned heterogeneity of the target group is also reflected in the fact that the participants often have very different levels of education and language skills. At the beginning of the project, official language tests taken beforehand provide information about the language level of the participants, although the tested result may not necessarily correspond to the actual language competence of the person. They vary from people with almost no knowledge of German to people who have already reached a B1 level. At the end of the project, the participants take a language test again, which they usually pass with a higher level than they had at the beginning of the project. On the one hand, the great difference in prerequisites is a great challenge for the language teachers, on the other hand, the participants, becoming a team in the theatre process, help and support each other a lot, which helps overcoming cultural stereotypes and can train social skills.

In the theatre part of the projects, classical German plays are rehearsed, whose original language is partly adopted, partly changed. This is also subject to the artistic and creative freedom of the trainers. One of our interview partners reported that he would start with the original language of the text, use more everyday language in the middle of the project and then switch back to the original language of the play at the end of the project. Working with the original language gives the participants the opportunity to deal with something new and foreign. This creates the desired space for discussion, resistance and the creation of something of their own, which they can shape themselves. The aim is not to work too much outside the practical sphere of the participants, but to confront them with something new and motivate them to discover it.

### Obstacles and possible solutions

As already indicated, both opportunities and difficulties arise from the heterogeneity of the group. In addition to the frequently mentioned initial difficulties with male participants, cultural differences, and mutual prejudices among the participants at the beginning of the project sometimes lead to friction. According to the interviewees these are usually reduced in the course of the project, the joint cooperation and in the course of getting to know each other.

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In the beginning of the project, most participants are quite highly motivated because they start with the expectation to learn German, get an internship and have a job afterwards. After 1 or 2 months in the project, there is usually a noticeable decrease in motivation as soon as they realize that this requires considerable time and will be a longer process. In addition, some participants do not meet the requirements of the language classes anymore, either making no progress at all or only slowly, and do not understand the use of acting. If not supported in this stage, these participants often drop out of the language classes emotionally and mentally and stay away in the worst case. This in turn often results in general demotivation and the sense of the project is no longer recognized.

In order to overcome these difficulties, the trainers have tried different approaches. On the one hand, it was helpful to separate the participants who felt disconnected for a short time and to help them in a 1:1 support. In some cases, this was already sufficient to regain motivation. This requires special conflict resolution skills and a talent for improvisation on part of the trainers, since quick and very individual action is required in such situations, in order to respond to the needs of the individual on the one hand, and keep in mind the group dynamics on the other hand. In other cases, trainers used personal visits to the participants who wanted to leave the project at home to break down the resistance by explaining to them explicitly why what is being done and how. In any case, sensitive action is necessary to convince the participants not to give up.

One of the interviewees sees great potential in linking language teaching in general even more with theatre training to enable learning with the body and into the body. In movement, language and learning content is consolidated much more intensively than in teaching approaches based on direct instruction or lecturing. In his experience, the greatest progress in acquiring language skills has been made when teaching was done in movement and with physicality. For this to happen, however, there must be close cooperation between the theatre trainer and language teacher, which is not always possible with the given resources.

### 3 In the net of art - digitalization in the field of arts education and educational theatre

Even though digitization has already changed and will continue to change the world we all live in and much research is being done in various areas, there is still only little research on digitization in the field of cultural education. In order to change this, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has been funding interdisciplinary research projects on digitization in the field of cultural education since 2017 (Jörrissen et al. 2019b). Around 25 universities at numerous locations in Germany are involved in research on digital

phenomena in cultural education in the fields of music, literature, dance, performance and the visual arts, among others. Jörrissen et al. (2019a) also emphasise the necessity of this by arguing that digital transformation should not be understood as a technological phenomenon alone, but as a social and cultural transformation process that requires new cultural technologies for society. The authors argue that digitality should be seen as a comprehensive set of conditions of cultural, aesthetic, technological and media aspects, in which new freedoms and forms of articulation will open up. Aesthetic practices and cultural phenomena are already being expanded and supplemented into the digital realm through YouTube videos, digital exhibitions and post-digital media art (Jörrissen & Unterberg 2019), and the range of online educational offerings such as foreign language courses is growing (Krebs & Godau 2018). In regard to the already presented JobAct method and the lockdown situation during the Corona pandemic, it would therefore be obvious to also consider the possibilities of digitalization in the field of theatre pedagogy.

As research on digitization in cultural education is limited, it is not surprising that there is hardly any research in the field of (digital) theater pedagogy. Among the few, Siedenbiedel (2013), for example, reports the production of a self-developed play or existing plays with students on the topic of digital media and/or with the help of digital media. More recent, large-scale research, also with regard to forms of education other than school education, is not yet available, even though it gets even more urgent with regard to the Corona pandemic impacts.

## 4 The living room as a stage – Approaches for Digitalization in times of the Pandemic

The need for digital teaching and learning methods in the context of theater education, especially with the focus on language acquisition, can be explained by the background of globalization, digitalization and migration flows described above, but has become even more urgent since the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 4.1 Digital improvisation: Development of new teaching and learning formats

In the course of the interviews conducted for this article, the interviewees were also asked how they carried out their project work with the help of digital means, especially during the pandemic-related lockdown in Germany in the spring of 2020. The theatre groups of the interviewees were affected by the beginning of the lockdown a few weeks before the planned premiere of their plays. After a one-week orientation phase on how to deal with the new situation, digital meeting possibilities via video tools were explored in order to stay in touch

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with the participants during the lockdown. The biggest difficulties here were the lack of hardware, as most participants had only smartphones, not laptops, which were not really suited for the work, as well as a lack of digital skills, which initially made it difficult for many participants to operate the platforms. Next problem was the required access to a stable internet connection with the required data volume for learning days on video platforms, and a suited learning environment in the accommodation, which was the biggest problem for refugees and persons with big families. Unfortunately, some participants therefore dropped out of the project and could no longer be reached by the trainers. The few remaining participants proved to be very committed. With them, the German lessons were continued online, texts were read and edited together, theatre exercises were carried out and there was singing. The project even planned a reduced digital premiere but switched to working on a real one when the lockdown ended.

On the side of the trainers, an online coworking and communication tool *Slack* was introduced within the organization. Various channels of exchange were established here, for example on the topics of “digital learning methods”, “digital culture” and “learning material”. The trainers had the opportunity to exchange experiences and material and there was room for discussion and inspiration.

### 4.2 Somehow not the same – Possibilities and limits of digital theatre methods in combination with teaching languages

Even though there were great possibilities with digital theatre methods, there were also limits. What the interviewed trainers experienced as positive about this digital improvisation, was that telephone meetings were sometimes more intimate than meetings in real life. The omission of social components led to a change in the learning effect, as the work on the text was more concentrated overall, but also limited to 1.5 hours, because the concentration of the participants decreased considerably after this period. The biggest problem was perceived to be the lack of presence: In the JobAct Sprachkultur project, body language, personal presence, facial expressions etc. are usually very important. Especially when language skills are still low, body language plays an important role in groups of mixed language levels, first to bridge language gaps and second by being perceived as an expressive person. The latter is strongly linked to the connection between perceived intelligence and eloquence in our society. According to the interviewees, it was not possible to compensate for the loss of these aspects through online solutions.

It is also questionable who should bear the costs for digital solutions, for example the required Internet contract. Especially for economically weaker people, it can be difficult to raise these additional costs. According to the interviewees, the improvised digital solutions are good

additions to normal theatre work but cannot yet be seen as real alternatives. For this purpose, comprehensive digital concepts would have to be developed, the necessary hardware would have to be available for the participants, the assumption of costs would have to be clarified and the participants would have to demonstrate the appropriate digital competence. Although artistic demands are not the focus of the projects, they are important, especially for the participants. Due to the digital solutions, however, the aesthetics were mostly lost to a large extent, so that in the view of the interviewed trainers, the filming of content could at best be declared as video art, but not as a play.

## 5 Mind the gap – Outlook and approaches to creating equal opportunities in language education in combination with (digital) artistic methods

The presentation of the practical example JobAct Sprachkultur has shown that language acquisition can profit from the integration of theatre methods in more than one way. Positive effects are reported in the areas of increasing key competencies, fostering teamwork, cooperation, raising motivation and fun in learning and providing a learning target. Knowledge gaps and inequalities of chances can be levelled out to a certain extent by working not only with the mind but with the body, emerging learning teams and the pull-effect from the more motivated women or recent refugees. The forced quick road to digitization in the wake of the Corona pandemic showed however, that most of these opportunities do not remain valid in the digital training. Starting with the sudden separation, team effects lost their impact, so that the lack of digital skills could not be overcome with the help of the group members. In consequence, the status of digital skills, self-management skills, living arrangements and technical equipment – i.e. the economic status – became relevant factors for keeping the connection to the project. Generally, a big part of the JobAct projects is bridging differences and enhance chances for people most in need. For this, an outreach approach is needed, whereas digital technologies require the self-initiative, that most participants need to regain in the project work. Another component that could not be implemented in the online version of the project is the learning-through-movement. Although in the range of digital possibilities with the given equipment the trainers tried to include some movement elements, the heart and soul of the theatre work – physical interaction between the participants – could not be realized in the digital implementation. Another lack of experience and a crucial factor for the aim of empowerment lies in the lack of direct feedback and encouragement in the digital premiere of a reduced version of the results. The impression that the remaining participants were motivated and could profit from the online version of the project emphasizes the effect of the increase of inequalities in the learning prerequisites on the side of the participants. The project lost the people with economic problems, difficult living conditions, lower learning

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motivation and lower self-management skills – exactly the people most in need that should, in theory, profit most.

The findings that digitization in this case led to widen the gap of prerequisites between the participants, must, however, be seen as a result of digitizing an offline approach quick-and-dirty with nearly no time for conceiving, planning and preparing the participants. Under these circumstances it leads to the conclusion that digitization is a promising addition but no real substitute. One potential is, that it could be a tool to overcome access barriers for people in remote areas or people with limited participating options due to caring duties. Promising approaches considering the condition of participants with the required technical equipment could be a combination of theatre training in person and language training online – based on a thoroughly prepared concept.

In the example of the JobAct Sprachkultur project that was affected by the Lockdown, the initiators were able to offer a complete repetition of the project, to which all the participants agreed to come, although this was made optional.

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