

# Full-Scale Theater Production and Foreign Language Learning

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**Abstract:** *This article reports a case study designed to explore the effectiveness of full-scale, authentic-text theater production for second language learning. Based on the results of preproduction and postproduction tests completed by cast and crew members, as well as the observations of all involved, the authors maintain that the diverse communication tasks necessary for the project, and the motivation generated by a common and public goal, make foreign language theater production particularly conducive to learning. The findings in this study indicated general tendencies toward improved proficiency in speaking and reading and very positive student perceptions with respect to the gains they made individually in various skill areas. Finally, the study revealed increased levels of comfort in using the foreign language.*

## Introduction

Many aspects of foreign language theater production make it an effective means of teaching a foreign language and encouraging the continued study of the language and its culture(s). It involves students in a variety of communicative tasks on a daily basis throughout the numerous phases of production: auditions, rehearsals, textual analysis and discussion, set and costume preparation, performances, and postperformance reflections.

The Italian Theater Workshop (ITW) was a pilot study aiming to explore the various types of interaction and modes of communication that could take place between members of a foreign language theatrical troupe—actors, stage managers, designers, and directors. In this first, pilot year, it was designed as an immersion experience with a limited number of participants in order to gauge its qualitative potential within a postsecondary curriculum, and its quantitative potential for measuring students' proficiency. The ITW proved to be a positive and multifaceted experience that contributed to students' linguistic progress and cultural understanding. First, the long-term focus on a single text provided the opportunity for an in-depth and intricate study of authentic literature. Second, if only in very general terms, the immersion experience helped improve students' proficiency in different skill areas. Third, the physical representation of characters' ideas and values as well as the regular use of gestures and idioms allowed participants to gain an insider's view of certain cultural norms. Fourth, since students took great pride in the project and in its final, public goal, they were highly motivated to devote themselves to competent and accurate communication. Finally, the ITW inspired a true team spirit for learning about language and culture, leading to great satisfaction for individual participants, the theatrical troupe, and the university department as a whole.

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