

Nell'ambito del progetto Erasmus plus che ha visto coinvolta la scuola "Maria Garagnani" di Bologna nell'anno scolastico 2016/2017 ho potuto partecipare ad un corso di formazione tenutosi in Germania tra il 12 e il 17 novembre 2017. Il corso dal titolo "English Week" si svolge ogni anno nel mese di Novembre. Quest'anno il tema è: The spirit of Language in Body, Soul and Spirit. I relatori sono diversi professionisti della sezione pedagogica di Dornach e anche esperti non conosciuti dal ambiente Waldorf.

English Week takes place at Haus Altenberg, a historic site about 40 minutes from the city of Cologne. The worksite is nowadays a well-known Catholic youth education site situated in a recently renovated monastery with immense surroundings. Its dormitories were able to house all English Week participants and proper working space for all workshops and activities offered. This year there were 125 participants and about 25 lecturers, teacher trainers and artists present.

The concept of English Week is based on the conviction that intensive artistic work with directors, actors, storytellers, poets and clowns can be of immeasurable benefit for foreign language teachers. Thus the daily three-hour artistic workshops are the keystone of the entire English Week. In addition there are morning lectures based on the general conference theme and a wide variety of methodological workshops that follow.

English Week mornings start out at half past six when the church bells chime for five continuous minutes waking everyone in the area. Shortly after, a very small choir group passes through the hallways of all dormitories singing morning songs and greeting the new day. Breakfast follows and then it's off to a pragmatic start.

At eight fifteen sharp, everyone gathers in the main hall for singing, an enlightening experience which is brought into the church before dinner on the last evening of English Week. The morning lecture, for all participants, begins at eight forty and finishes at nine forty. The topics of the morning lectures included: Our relationships with language and what happens in the inner self when we communicate with each other; The freedom of teaching in Waldorf schools and the necessities of teaching in the Waldorf schools; Foreign language teaching and theatre performance; the process of language learning - different perspectives students are coming from and how can we encourage students to take that step into the joy of language learning; the evolution of consciousness in foreign language teaching and therefore learning.

There were various morning work groups. Being a foreign language teacher and a member of the foreign language teacher trainers in Italy, I was interested not only in my own personal growth and studies but also in gathering information and concepts to bring to foreign language teachers in Italy. I chose to attend the following three morning workshops:

1. An introduction to teaching and learning English as a foreign language in a Waldorf school: A course focusing on basic aspects of teaching and learning in classes 1 – 8. In this course we talked about classroom methodology, ideas of how to stimulate, nourish, protect and include all students in the classroom. We also discussed the necessary rhythms for language lessons, possibilities of how to deal with discipline problems and relationships with the parents. Techniques for oral skills, bridging activities towards reading and writing skills were presented along with drama activities to keep the classroom alive with real life situations that provide meaning in the students learning paths.

2. Anthroposophical basis for Waldorf foreign languages: Steiner's anthroposophy offers many aspects of language learning that are different from conventional methods. In Waldorf schools we are particularly interested in the relationship between

the senses of self-movement, the sense for language and sense of thought and how this influences the Waldorf way of teaching/learning. Questions about the spiritual dimension of language and culture were addressed.

3. Focus on the teacher/artist:

This workshop offered an introduction on using performative approaches to language teaching. The work focused on short practical exercises and how they can be adapted for different target groups.

Our morning work concluded at one o'clock when all went to the dining hall for lunch. At three o'clock in the afternoon drama workshops began and they concluded at six o'clock in the evening.

My afternoon drama workshop was Clowning. This workshop took place every day for three hours. Funny enough, clowning has nothing to do with the circus clown. The facilitator's approach was taken from the studies of Jacques Lecoq, a famous theatre artist who has spread his theories of theatre and clowning throughout the eastern hemisphere. Carol Thompson, a Nose to Nose clowning facilitator, began by explaining that clowning or more so, showing the clown in you, has to do with connecting to the fun spontaneous part of you. You don't have to be smart, funny or clever to be a clown. It involves being your plain old, ordinary self; therefore, it is the most authentic form of "you" that can exist. The heart is at the center of clowning and it is fundamental in this work. It is as stated in the title of an important Nose to Nose workshop named "The Courage To Be" that the heart gives the courage to be one's self in the most authentic way we are. In fact, the word courage contains "cuore" which means heart in the Italian language. In clowning there is a lot of compassion for yourself and others, empathy is the key word. This work offers characteristics directly connected to individuals as well as teachers and many other social professions.

The clowning workshop consisted of a group of 16 newborn clowns who learned to work together through improvisation. We were assigned various tasks and were lead to our objective and instructed not to make plans, to think or to reflect, just to walk onto stage, in front of an audience, and be our authentic selves (similar to what we do in the classroom). The workshop concluded on the final evening of English Week with a brief, spontaneous presentation (as did all artistic groups participating in the English Week) of the life of a clown.

English Week evenings were also generally filled with activity. Throughout the week there were numerous activities organised: teachers' sharing of materials – this was organised in working groups for the lower school, middle school and upper school, storytelling, artists' night, choir, country dancing and social evenings all followed by getting to know each other, singing, talking and playing cards at the "social bar".

On the morning of Friday, November 17th English Week concluded with the final review of the week and all went on their journey homeward bound.