**Reinvigorating the Humanities through Interdisciplinary, Experiential and CLIL Pedagogy: “When History Comes to Life” in the World Language Classroom and Beyond**

The [Teachers on Teaching](http://wlteaching.commons.gc.cuny.edu) group recently centered their annual one-day workshop around experiential pedagogy that focuses on historical content. Organized by Monica Calabritto, Paolo Fasoli, Kelly Paciaroni, and Julie Van Peteghem, “[When History Comes to Life: Experiential Pedagogy in the World Language and Social Sciences Classrooms](http://history.commons.gc.cuny.edu)” attracted a hybrid audience of instructors ranging from middle and high school to college on November 15, 2019 at Hunter College. The nature and content of the event bridged all levels of instruction beautifully and stimulated a continued dialogue in ongoing efforts to sustain world language studies and keep the Humanities alive and flourishing in our educational system. Instead of fostering isolated pedagogical dialogues of secondary or post-secondary instruction, Teachers on Teaching aims to create a bridge of support, ideas, and relevancy across teaching methodologies. Each panelist selected an example of CLIL (content and language integrated learning) instruction. Some panelists provided a larger overview of the entire syllabus while others focused on one example or idea, participants were able to see both the micro and macro elements of this teaching method. The Teachers on Teaching workshop welcomed historians Elizabeth and Thomas Cohen (University of Toronto), Clare Carroll (Renaissance Society of America), and Dennis Looney (Modern Languages Association) to join them for the occasion.

The opening remarks by Monica Calabritto (Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY), Robert Cowan (Assistant Dean for Program Development, Assessment, & Review, Hunter College, CUNY), and Michael Taormina (Chair of the Department of Romance Languages, Hunter College, CUNY) set the tone for a very enjoyable and rich workshop, characterized by a brisk, intensive pace while maintaining a relaxed atmosphere.

The first session, ***Translating/Viewing/Hearing the Past***,included panelists Julie Van Peteghem, Alberto Gelmi and Monica Schinaider. They suggested a series of possible sources as a means of bringing history to life for students: eighty-year-old student journals found in the Hunter College archives, the architectural stratification of a Roman church, and songs that expose social injustice. Julie Van Peteghem primarily teaches Medieval Italian literature and Translation Studies at Hunter College. Her presentation, ***Translating the Past: Experiential Learning in the Archives,*** was inspired by her translation class, in which students work on materials that have never before been translated. This semester, Professor Van Peteghem worked with *Iride* (“Iris,” in English), an Italian language magazine published by female students from 1934-1940, when Hunter College was still designated as a women’s college in the CUNY system. This particular publication was also perfectly suited to her class for reasons of practicality as it is on site (at Hunter College). They began by visiting the archives with the Hunter Library Archivist, learning and applying the research skills required to work with archival sources. Professor Van Peteghem then explained the methodology of the research and translation process she followed with her students. After visiting the archives, they conducted research at the New York Public Library, translated a passage written about *Iride* from a scholarly book, proceeded with a description of the magazine, and ultimately translated several essays. They observed the format and content noting details ranging from the high quality of the paper on which it was printed in addition to the broad lexicon and classical citations in their work. (Dante, for example, was cited frequently, indicating a solid foundation in his literary works.) The class also discovered that the first issue of the magazine had been documented in an article in *The New York Times* in 1934. Language usage and lexical research was also explored and Professor Van Peteghem highlighted a particular metaphor in one of the essays: *alla falange degli insegnanti.* She discussed the usage of the term *falange* – a militaristic expression which was common during the fascist period. A perfect example of how scholarly investigation can lead to unexpected discoveries, students learned how to research the history of word usage considering the historical context.

Alberto Gelmi’s presentation, ***Stratigrafie – Strolls Across Time in Italy***, focused “on strategies to train students to read the spatial and historical complexities of landscapes and cities.” A room in a museum displaying works of art that span four centuries, a modern-day aerial photograph of the eternal city, and two basilicas in Rome: San Clemente and Saint Peter’s – each presents a unique view of many centuries fused together yet seen simultaneously by the modern viewer. Through the model of a semester-long project on Rome in an intermediate language course, the speaker demonstrated how texts from different media (including articles, guidebooks, documentaries, and movies) can help students to contextualize familiar and unfamiliar views of the city, and identify their different cultural nuances and historical time periods. The Basilica of San Clemente was his central example framed as an architectural palimpsest; it contains a pagan temple from the first century CE, a basilica from the fourth century CE, and a unique fresco which dates to the eleventh century CE. Each of these different sections of the church may have different yet important significance in their respective time period. Thomas Cohen delighted in this during the question and answer period, commenting specifically that it is perhaps one of the oldest known *fumetti* (comic strips) in the vernacular, including the use of certain profanities. This is a use of *volgare* in many senses, illustrating not only layers of history, but layers of language, language registers, and instruction. He clarified that this pedagogical template emphasizes a communicative approach of instruction over assessment; likewise, language comprehension skills are strengthened more than language production. Originally developed for ESL learners, Gelmi used the CELTA method to help students identify parts of speech, tense, and topic, by teasing out the different aspects one at a time. For example, tone of voice might illustrate a time period (low or high corresponding to earlier or high periods) or visual cues such as arrows, pictures and timelines may be shared with students. Using this combination of color-coding, tactile, kinesthetic, and matching games, Gelmi guides the students to understand that the Roman Forum and Colosseum were not constructed in the same time period but were actually several centuries apart. This method allows the possibility of teaching both content and language in the target language simultaneously.

Monica Schinaider is a Senior Lecturer of Spanish in the Department of Romance Languages at Hunter College and addressed how songs can be utilized as a didactic tool for both heritage and non-heritage speakers in the same classroom. She observed that language textbooks currently used in the Spanish Program provide ample material at the lower levels regarding daily life in typical subjects such as family, work, and school and they now also address topics such as gender and identity. In her presentation, ***History in the Foreign Language Classroom: Argentina’s Recent Past through Rock-and-Roll*,** Professor Schinaider demonstrated how she has used songs and lyrics to teach language and history in tandem in the intermediate levels. Using the lyrics of *Los dinosaurios,* written in 1983 by renowned Argentine singer-songwriter Charly García, Professor Schinaider demonstrated how this particular musician responds to and interprets political dictatorship, violence and injustice. She highlighted the language usage as the subjects change and the predicates remain the same. She then noted the verb tense usages of the present conjugations of *poder* followed by the near future usage of *ir a* + infinitive. She added how songs can be used in a classroom with heritage and non-heritage speakers. The heritage learners will naturally have a greater vocabulary and propensity to comprehend the subtle metaphors and allusions within the lyrics. The non-heritage speakers can discuss the subvert messages and they can be grouped together for richer discussion. Songs from Iberian and Latin American countries could be compared and discussed in their political and historical contexts, while students also bring the music they like to listen to in their daily life into the discussion.

The second session, dedicated to ***Experiencing/Living the Past***, centered on the imaginative act of impersonating the Other (namely the individual from the past, and women in particular). Activities were presented as a means of fostering empathy and encouraging critical thinking, both of which are necessary elements for producing more sophisticated thought and language in L1 and L2. It opened with Monica Calabritto’s presentation: ***Exploring the Present through the Past: Twentieth and Twenty-first-century Narrative Perspectives of Early Modern Italy.*** Professor Calabritto (Hunter College and The Graduate Center CUNY) described her ongoing course on the historical novel, in which students enjoy an active role as both creators and interpreters, while the instructor is a facilitator of the learning process. After reading about the specific genre and the historical period under consideration, the class reflects on gender issues and on the juxtaposition of past and present – topics which are also relevant in the primary sources of the course, namely *Rinascimento privato* and *I segreti dei Gonzaga* by Maria Bellonci read against the canonical historical novel *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) by Alessandro Manzoni. Bellonci’s novel contains visual descriptions of art, which the students are also asked to observe carefully and to describe in an applied exercise of ekphrasis. Thus, the students share the experience of the characters vis-a-vis art and produce an original outcome in the target language. They simultaneously read and learn about the exercise of ekphrasis and subsequently practice the rhetorical exercise through their own empathetic interpretation of the specific character’s experience. Later, they create imaginative dialogues between characters or between themselves and the characters, in which they demonstrate mastery of several skills: a sophisticated level of language production, familiarity with the conventions of the genre, and textual analysis. Students created their own narratives: one student wove her own fictional character into the storyline of Manzoni’s text. Another wrote from the perspective of one of Bellonci’s female characters. This content-based class in L2 enhances the students’ capability for empathy while producing a deeper knowledge of the literary genre. This was confirmed by one of Prof. Calabritto’s students attending the workshop who is also implementing some of these activities as a secondary school teacher. This class is geared towards TEP (Teacher Education Program) students in Italian, that is, people who will become teachers of Italian at the secondary level.

Kelly Paciaroni, a PhD student at The Graduate Center and High School Italian teacher at Baldwin High School in New Hyde Park, NY, conceived the initial idea for this year’s conference theme. She presented: ***Ancient Symbols, Magic Beans, and a Secret Pigeon in Renaissance Rome: A ‘Case’ for Sustained-content Teaching and Learning in the World Language Classroom*.** The presentation was centered on the example of a high school project, which also spans for an entire semester, and is designed according to Sustained-Content Language Teaching/Instruction (SCLT/I). In this course, the Renaissance provides ample content, that is, “a lot of input,” in the forms of art, poetry, and history. Strategies for contextualizing the micro-historical events presented in early modern trial documents include impersonating archival researchers or people described in *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* by Thomas Vance Cohen and Elizabeth Storr Cohen. This text was one of the sources used in a graduate level course taught by Monica Calabritto in Fall 2018 and Paciaroni found a way to apply it creatively to a high school class. Part of the in-class activity is prepared in advance while another stage emphasizes spontaneous second language production. Students dress as lab researchers examining evidence and present their cases. This part of the class emphasizes the performative aspects of second language acquisition because the text is prepared beforehand and presented to classmates. However, the final goal is output that goes beyond the performative aspect and encourages spontaneous usage of the target language while students think critically about the content. Therefore, the second part of the activity emphasizes the meaning-bearing features of language creation. Peers pose questions and the presenters respond. Both those asking the questions and those answering them must produce their thoughts spontaneously in the target language. The fun enjoyed by the students was evident in the short film of her class, which she shared with conference attendees. This unique syllabus led them to a sophisticated and engaged use of the language as was highlighted by their appropriate use of hypothetical sentences and spontaneous humor. Paciaroni subsequently commented on the market value of our role as teachers. She highlighted that her students refine multiple skills which are not only valuable in the humanities. For example, they gain presentation skills, general cognitive skills, research skills, a mastery of the content while the entire class experience leads to community building.

Sarah Schubert (Herricks High School) teaches social science and global history, but she dreams of a multidisciplinary classroom that includes world languages as well. Her presentation was entitled: ***Doing History: Teaching the Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, and Scientific Revolution through Art, Music, Culture, and Research Skills.*** Beginning with basic broad concepts such as an overview and explanation of the Renaissance and what it meant to be an individual in this time period, she creates an immersive learning environment in which students learn about the Renaissance through role play that culminates in a staged dinner party. The activity is scaffolded. Students begin with a guided research project on an assigned historical figure; Schubert provides a handout with questions formulated in advance and designated online databases such as [abc-clio.com](https://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/). Students then search for additional materials, followed by communal note taking and comparisons between aspects of different historical periods. The classroom is also equipped with a closet of period costumes. Thus, at the culminating dinner party, students are encouraged to partake in interpreting the role in costume. They introduce themselves and ask questions to the other Renaissance guests, honing their presentation and interaction skills. They create ideas, synthesizing information and supply their knowledge interpreting the character through historical roleplay and again, questions are posed, such as: “Who would your modern-day counterpart be?” or “To what extent have the nations of Europe improved since the medieval age?” Students reply from the historical figures’ perspectives, actively immersing themselves in the time period. Schubert incorporates technology in her classes: Herricks High School is a “Google ready” school which uses “Google classroom” as well as “Google docs.” (She added that a great benefit of the Google classroom application is that teachers can track how much time is spent on unrelated websites.) In addition, her students are encouraged to use the application [snapandread.com](https://snapandread.com/) which can be very helpful to a diverse student body of learners: the text can be listened to as an audiobook, words can be highlighted and defined, passages can also be translated for non-native English speakers. Aided by props and technological tools, immersed in the music of the early modern period, and inhabiting the persona they are studying, students of all abilities and interests learn about prominent historical figures and they enjoy themselves in the process. In a diverse classroom this approach to studying history through “doing” history is beneficial; it engages all learners.

Three keynote speeches concluded the morning. Clare Carroll (Renaissance Society of America, The Graduate Center and Queens College, CUNY) gave an inspiring speech beginning and ending her presentation quoting Faulkner: “The past is not the past; it’s not even dead.” In the spirit of appreciating pedagogues and remembering those who have changed our lives, she said “How wonderful would it be if we erected statues of incredible high school teachers instead of civil war generals?” Professor Carroll graciously recalled other colleagues and former teachers such as (Larry) Lawrence Rhu, who emphasized the importance of reinventing the Humanities. She suggested that all PhD students should be focused on continuing these efforts. Addressing university Deans in particular, she emphasized the importance of evaluating the quality of teaching as equally if not more important than publications when determining eligibility for tenure. Professor Carroll stated some daunting statistics: eighty percent of U.S. college graduates have never taken a course in American history and fewer than fifteen percent study a foreign language. We were reminded of numerous teaching strategies from past and current pedagogues. She recalled Fred Purnell’s “Reacting to the Past” series in reference to the trial of Socrates and Galileo, and the French Revolution. “Reacting to the Past” was a teaching strategy developed at Barnard by history professor Mark Carnes. Students are thrust into historic scenarios and texts, re-enacting them and learning by experience. The methodology subsequently became a textbook series and an annual conference. Professor Carroll encouraged all teachers to immerse students in reading primary texts intensively – over and over again. She would love to see an interdisciplinary approach with foreign language and content. As current President of the Renaissance Society of America, she also mentioned the [RSA Innovative Teaching Awards](https://www.rsa.org/page/RSAHighSchoolGrants) in support of secondary school teachers who promote the study of the Renaissance in the next generations of students. She described the project of Maggie Ellen Ray, a 2018 recipient of the RSA award, who led her AP language and composition class students in an exploration of Renaissance commonplace books. While gaining first-hand experience of Renaissance rhetorical strategies for learning, reading, and remembering, students create and maintain their own digital and analog commonplace books to be used as a study guide for the AP Language exam. Professor Carroll discussed the potential of a newly emerging major: literature and human rights and noted the importance of history, stating that “our future depends on our understanding of the past.”

Dennis Looney (Modern Language Association) reported some national trends about language departments. Many are consolidating and a number of programs have been discontinued following the re-evaluation of language requirements. The percentage of adjunct faculty is increasing. However, there are also some positive signs from departments that have made an effort to create interdisciplinary tracks for students majoring in a foreign language. For example, Iowa State places emphasis on cultural competency, global awareness and fostering global citizens; the university has created majors in German and Engineering and French and Business. South Dakota State University has a “Workplace Intercultural Competence Certificate”, Mount Holyoke offers a “Global Competence Award” and Georgia Tech offers a Bachelor of Science in Applied Languages in Intercultural Studies. Departments such as these don’t suffer from the same decrease in enrollment in foreign languages. In this vein, Professor Looney suggested that humanities departments examine the curricula in other programs that are flourishing while also emphasizing the skills obtained through language learning and literary studies. Thus, while the world of learning is changing radically, the intrinsic value of humanistic inquiry remains strong.

For example, Humanities departments are experiencing difficulty in many four-year colleges but Associates degrees in the humanities are skyrocketing at two-year colleges. Community Colleges are the laboratories or seedbeds in which the humanities are doing well. Professor Looney brought a recent MLA initiative to our attention: the MLA has developed a [Committee for K-16 alliances](https://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings/Professional-Issues/Committee-on-K-16-Alliances). The committee will support the K-16 educational community in teaching foreign languages and literatures to ameliorate the dialogue between secondary and post-secondary teaching. Through exploring common issues, the goal is to strengthen career paths in education for graduate student who become members of MLA.

Finally, Thomas Cohen reflected on inhabited pedagogy in both the history and the language classrooms. “There is more than just words in languages,” he said. Embodying a work of art, for example, allows students to connect with it, while at the same time taking a critical distance. Occupying a position in space and performing an action is an immersive experience, which triggers the learning process. Elizabeth and Thomas Cohen often use interactive exercises in their undergraduate history courses with the very diverse student body at York University in Toronto. One of the breakout sessions that concluded the day included a workshop led by the two historians. Entitled ***Making Renaissance Families***, it was geared toward teachers of college courses and required that the participants “inhabit and interpret” the roles of various figures in several families. Conference attendees who teach at the college level were asked to read two sources in order to better understand the customary traditions of marriage and dowry in the Renaissance. Simultaneously there was a presentation for middle and high school teachers of world languages and social sciences that included role modeling of how to utilize the activities in your classes immediately. ***Reshaping the Baroque in the Americas*** was led by Kelly Paciaroni and Sarah Schubert.

It was a pleasure to have such stimulating interactions at Hunter College. While the Renaissance was the primary time period highlighted at the workshop, the teaching strategies presented are useful tools in potentially every class in which the instructor wants to engage with students intellectually and experientially. Indeed, one of the difficulties of students of all levels is to understand the temporal, historical frameworks from a modern perspective; all the examples of the panelists allow an exploration of contextual history and language. The RSA and MLA demonstrate strong support of faculty initiatives and they are finding creative approaches to reinvigorate the humanities. A great benefit of having scholars who are both accomplished researchers and dedicated teachers is that they clearly recognize the importance of teaching. When we can bring our research into the classroom as has been demonstrated so well by all of the speakers, our enthusiasm is infectious, and students are more deeply engaged. This broad collaboration of secondary and post-secondary educators, supported by graduate school faculty leading two major global associations and enabled by open dialogue among all participants provides a strong foundation for the survival and thriving *Renaissance* of the humanities. May we continue to work together and not in isolation! We shall overcome.

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