



Multilingual Making in a Second-Language Poetry Club

A RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR TEACHERS

by Borbala Gaspar & Chantelle Warner

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Borbala Gaspar & Chantelle Warner

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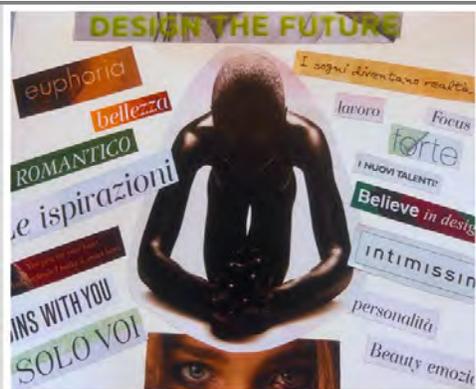
We also wish to extend our gratitude to the departments of French & Italian and German Studies at the University of Arizona for their close collaboration. We are especially grateful to Beppe Cavatorta, who provided us with resources including books, tips, and recordings of his own poetry for our use in the poetry club. We also thank Paolo Albani, an Italian poet and instructor, who shared with us materials, including his own poems, that enriched our toolbox of examples.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we would like to thank the participants of the Playful Poetry Club for sharing their work, thoughts, experiences, and time with us. They are the un-cited co-contributors to this handbook, and it was a pleasure to learn and create with them.

A note about the front cover

The work of art represented on the front cover of this book was created by one of the students participating in the club that is the focus of this handbook. This was the student's second clay production. The first depicted a hunched over human figure, and the student shared at the time and again later in an interview that this had been an emotionally rough time for him. The clay figure created on the cover and the poem that blossoms from his head represented for this student a newfound sense of optimism, which he wanted to share in that moment.

As you start exploring the content of this book, we hope this piece serves as a reminder of the complex human selves that students bring to language learning. It is this whole-humanness that we aim to involve in language study through the ideas and examples shared in this handbook.



Introduction

Multilingual Making in a Second Language Poetry Club is a culmination of conversations, pedagogical practices, and ways of being together that developed as a collaboration between Borbala Gaspar and Chantelle Warner (the two co-authors of this guide) and the engaged group of students who partook in the year-long series of extracurricular gatherings, which served as an exploratory space for the ideas shared in this handbook. The poetry club evolved from our (Borbala and Chantelle's) shared desire to create a space adjacent to the classrooms in our language programs (Italian and German respectively) where students could explore the values of learning a new language that extend beyond the pay bumps and cultural capital so often prioritized in advocacy materials for modern language study in the US (see [Warner, Gaspar, & Diao, 2021](#); [Diao & Liu, 2021](#); [Thompson, 2017](#); see also [Gourlay and Stevenson, 2017](#) for parallels in the UK). Our approach was grounded in a belief that language learning is at the heart an aesthetic and affective endeavor, rooted in the human capacity for exploring alternative ways of making sense of themselves, the world, and their experiences within it. There is, therefore, something quite inherently poetic about engaging in a new language that we hoped to bring to life by creating opportunities for learners to play with a diversity of linguistic and other meaning-making resources. At the same time, we were beginning to recognize the important role that language classes and the communities built around them play in students' lives and how they foster a sense of belonging that is somehow qualitatively different from other parts of college campuses—perhaps because language and culture learning connects so intimately to aspects of identity and imagination.

This handbook is intended as a resource for educators who wish to develop a similar extracurricular club or who are looking for inspiration for their classrooms. In the first chapter of the handbook, we introduce you to the background of the project and the current discussions of well-being in higher education. Part two provides an overview of the conceptual underpinnings of multilingual making and poetic play as ways of engaging with language and language learning. Core concepts and principles are outlined, emphasizing the significance of living together in and through languages, and the role of multilingual making when learning a new language. The handbook explores various forms of poetic play, such as collage, response artwork to poetry, clay work and visual representation of poems. It delves into core principles for establishing a multilingual poetry club offering guidance on creating and sustaining such a club. Sample activities illustrate each example including collage, mixed media, limericks, and remarks from the authors and creators of the artworks. Additional resources such as blackout poetry and other ideas that could potentially further engage club members in creative expression are included as well. Finally, this book concludes with reflections and additional resources for educators interested in promoting multilingualism and creativity through poetry.

Overview of the handbook

After reading this handbook, you will be able to...

- Identify the key factors that students indicate as influencing their sense of belonging;
- Define and discuss key concepts and terms related to playful poetry and living literacies approach and relate them to other discussions in the field of second language teaching and learning;
- Explore the forms and functions of multimodality and living literacies in the examples;
- Reflect on how you want to apply these ideas into your context.

Background

In this section we delve into the context of contemporary higher education within which our project is situated. Concerns about the prevalence of feelings of anxiety and depression and about the overall well-being of students have been voiced by many leaders in higher education in recent years. As reported in a publication from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2020), statistical reports show that 66% of students felt overwhelming anxiety in 2019, compared to

58% in 2016. Over the last decade a series of studies (e.g., [Houghton & Anderson, 2017](#); [Gravett et al. 2021](#); [Lu et al, 2023](#)) have placed student mental health and well-being at the center of discourses in higher education. For example, in [a nationwide survey conducted by Inside Higher Ed](#) in 2023, more than half (56%) of the student respondents reported experiencing prolonged, chronic stress during their studies. Relatedly, a series of studies ([Bentrim & Henning, 2022](#); [Gummadam et al., 2015](#); [Burger, 2023](#)) have suggested that students' sense of belonging has a significant impact on their well-being and their academic success. Research has demonstrated that a lack of a sense of belonging can negatively impact students' well-being, mental health and as a consequence, their academic performance ([Gopalan & Brady, 2020](#); [Mowreader, 2023](#)).

While pursuing their degrees, students may experience feelings of being rejected or that they don't belong to the institution ([Heisserer & Parette, 2002](#)). They also report feeling stressed to make new friends ([Dyson and Renk, 2006](#)). While one's sense of belonging and well-being rely on a complex variety of factors, a core finding in *the Inside Higher Ed* survey is that students overwhelmingly expect faculty to play a key role in fostering both, see similar findings in [Beauchamp et al., 2021](#); [Komarraju et al., 2010](#); [Vaccaro & Newman, 2016](#)). On our home campus at the University of Arizona, a [survey](#) administered to all incoming students found that 89% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I expect that staff and faculty will help me to be successful as an Arizona student." Among the efforts that are often cited as positively contributing to students' well-being and sense of belonging are community-building activities, where students can get to know other students and develop social-emotional connections to their academic programs, and the teaching of skills related to mindfulness and reflection ([Gravett & Winstone, 2020](#); [Skahill, 2002](#); [Wilcox & Fyve-Gauld, 2005](#)).

In recent years, many institutions of higher education have taken the initiative to address students' sense of well-being and belonging. Some of these efforts focus on creating welcoming spaces on campuses where students feel safe and comfortable, especially students who have been historically marginalized within education. Often the chosen spaces are those shared by the broader student body, such as libraries (e.g., [Chapman et al. 2020](#); [Poljak et al. 2023](#)). In one study by [Poljak et al. \(2023\)](#) photovoice data analysis, i.e. a method that combines visual and narrative elements to analyze community engagement ([Luo, 2017](#)), was used to evoke students' feelings in particular spaces. Findings highlight that beyond a sense of safety, students valued multisensory stimuli such as color, light, texture, sounds and scent. Furthermore, spaces that offered a shared sense of purpose provided them a sense of ownership that helped them feel empowered, valued, respected, and optimistic.

While many studies to date have focused on the well-being and sense of belonging of university students across majors and areas of study, a smaller body of research from the field of second

language teaching considers the social-emotional dimensions of second language learning. Scholars and educators in language education have long seen the need to mediate learner's affective experiences, such as motivation and anxiety, as part of the work of teaching (e.g., [Arnold, 2011](#); [Krashen, 1982](#)). Language learning itself may conjure quite intense emotions; while it is inherently stressful for some ([Horwitz, 2017](#)), it can be a source of pleasure and joy for others (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Based on interviews with EFL teachers, Gkonou & Miller ([2019, 2021](#)) and [Miller & Gkonou \(2018\)](#) have shown that *emotion labor*, in the sense of institutionalized expectations of emotional management associated with specific professional roles (Hochschild, 2012[1983]), is a key part of what teachers perceive as *good* language teaching. In a set of interviews conducted with teachers of languages other than English at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Warner & Diao ([2022, 2024](#)) similarly found that both educators and their students often placed the responsibility for learners' well-being in and out of the classroom on the teaching faculty. While this was not unique to language education, the role of teachers in looking after students in a moment of crisis seemed to be more pronounced, in part due to the overtly social-emotional nature of language pedagogy. To cite one example of what emotion labor looked like in practice, multiple teachers reported that students had told them that the language class was the only time each day that someone would ask "how are you doing?"—a standard warm-up question in many meaning-oriented classrooms. While these studies do not directly examine student perspectives, they suggest that language classrooms may have a unique role to play in student well-being and belonging on university campuses in the US.

One of our primary inspirations for this project was thus the desire to provide a space where learners could experience a sense of belonging in connection with new languages they were learning. In a way, this approach turns the notion of the *foreign* language classroom on its head by connecting belonging to meaningful and joyful experiences with new languages. By centering poetry and aesthetics, we also wanted to cast language learning as a potentially mindful activity; through opportunities for sensing and feeling through the alternate resources for expression afforded by the languages they were learning, students might be able to step outside of their ordinary lives and away from the stressors associated with them. Furthermore, inspired in part by the previously cited research on space and student well-being (e.g. [Poljak et al, 2023](#)), we wanted to create a space, even fleetingly, where students would feel empowered, while also experiencing a positive multisensory experience.

This attention to belonging and sensoriality was not, for us, an addendum to the rightful pedagogical desiderata of the classroom but was very much a manifestation of our shared understanding of what language education entails. In the following section we summarize key discussions within second language teaching and learning and adjacent fields that emphasize learners' subjectivities and their creative, aesthetic engagements with new languages as means

of fostering linguistic development alongside a sense of belonging vis-a-vis the new language and the meaning making systems connected to it. Based on this body of work, we advocate for a view of language learning as intrinsically about the capacity to step outside of one's normal ways of thinking and being and imagine alternate ways of engaging with(in) the world. We then describe a one-year project wherein we attempted to realize this approach within an extracurricular poetry club for students of Italian and German. In addition to sharing the scope and structure of the club, we present some of the most successful activities and examples of student work created within them. Finally, we share student perceptions of the experience. Our hope is that this might inspire others to try out similar projects in their classrooms and beyond.

Multilingual identity/subjectivity

To emphasize the multilingual identities and subjectivities of learners in second language education is in large part a recognition that becoming a speaker of a new language is more than just the acquisition of a system of rules and structures; in learning a new language, we are socialized in new ways of making sense of and expressing ourselves in the world. Language learners, insofar as they develop more than just a scholarly relationship to a language, have to consider new potential versions of themselves, who speak, sound, and act differently. At times, this results in second language speakers having a sense that they are discovering a *more authentic* version of themselves; at times they may feel that they are *imitating* or *imposturing* other, more legitimate speakers.

Our understanding of multilingual identities and subjectivities has been heavily informed by the work of two scholars of applied linguistics, whose work in this area is seminal and long lasting.

Bonny Norton's theories of identity and investment have been highly influential for shaping conversations in which language learners are not reduced to the idealized position of "learner." For Norton, identity is defined relationally by "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000: 5). To focus on only the identity of the learner limits an individual's complex identity to one specific context, while neglecting the web of relationships that may have landed them in that position in the first place (see also [Firth & Wagner, 1997](#)). Drawing from Bourdieu's (1977) sociological concept of symbolic capital and on feminist theorist Weedon's (1987) poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity, Norton proposed the accompanying notion of *investment* to describe how learners negotiate not only the meanings they express but their place in the social world and sense of themselves through language. Norton also saw investment as an alternative to the notion of motivation. While the former is primarily a psychological construct that roots behavior in individual dispositions and personality traits, the latter is more sociological and recognizes the complex and dynamic sets of factors that may shape a person's relationship to language and language learning. For example, learners may resist speaking and refuse to invest in language learning in contexts where they perceive limited potential for realizing their envisioned identities ([Darvin and Norton, 2016](#)). Likewise, they may invest in the language practices of a given context (such as a classroom or club), when they see potential for returns in relation to the future self they imagine.

Claire Kramersch's thinking on multilingual subjectivities has likewise been a significant influence in the field and on our thinking. Kramersch's work on subjectivity developed from the thinking she began in *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (1993), where she started to consider the

complexity, fluidity, and oftentimes ambivalence of the positions taken up by teachers and learners in the “third space” of the classroom, which does not belong to a clearly delineated first language/culture or second language/culture but is characterized by hybridity. In her later work on multilingual subjectivities, Kramersch (e.g. [2006](#), 2009, [2011](#)), like Norton, is concerned with how one’s sense of self is ensnared in struggles for recognition and symbolic power. At the same time, Kramersch is more attentive to the place of aesthetic and affective dimensions of language. Teaching to the multilingual subject, according to her view, requires not only the development of communicative competencies but also and perhaps even more importantly symbolic awareness, of the sort that is fostered by capitalizing on the potential of playfulness and of the heightened reflectivity and aesthetic sensibilities of people who experience life in more than one language.

In short, the theories of subjectivity and identity espoused here conceptualize the individuals in our language classrooms not primarily as *learners* and not just speakers with clearly defined communicative problems to solve, but as whole humans with hearts, bodies, and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities. Symbolic forms are not just items of vocabulary or communication strategies, but embodied experiences, emotional resonances, and moral imaginings (see [Kramersch 2006: 251](#)). This recognition calls for not only but also an updated view of the individuals who partake in language learning, but the kinds of experiences that might be needed to help them develop—which will be the focus of the next section.

When we attend to learners’ complex identities and subjectivities, we emphasize the multidimensional nature of language use and learning. This includes the shared feelings and emotions, i.e., the intersubjective dimensions of language, that are part of language as a lived experience rather than an abstract system of structures or communicative patterns. It also involves the intricately woven, dynamic, expressive fabrics of symbolic forms that constitute language. In what follows, we will expand upon the former as what we describe as “living together in/through language” and the latter as “multilingual making.” Because we are primarily interested in these engaged and embedded activities through which language use manifests in people’s lives, we will often use the term *linguaging* in this handbook as an alternative to language or language use. While attention to systems of language and linguistic forms can be beneficial as a means of fostering language awareness and reflectivity, it is through opportunities to language in and through new languages that learners develop their capacities as active meaning makers and their sense of themselves as speakers of multiple languages.

Multilingual making

A second core concept for our design of the poetry club was the notion of *multilingual making*. The term *making* here is borrowed from the culture of maker spaces, community sites where participants share supplies, ideas, and skills and they work on creative projects. Multilingual making, as an activity for language learning, focuses attention on the creative and active dimensions of language use, thus centering students' place as multilingual subjects. Instead of beginning with a deficit framework of what they do not yet know, the maker mentality pushes educators to ask what resources and capabilities learners have and what additional forms of support and materials they can be given to enable them to expand their scope of expression and understanding. In that some scholarship has suggested that learners' interactions with particular objects may help them navigate and learn how to move between the spaces of the culture (Phipps, 2006: 101-104), the attention to *making* and the physical objects that are central to this form of activity may also have benefits in terms of intercultural awareness.

Language: Living in and through language

One of the underlying tenets of this project was that while language is used in communication, it is much more than that. *Languaging*, that is actively engaging with language, is one of the primary ways in which we interact with and make sense of the world around us. Through language and our other systems of meaning, we also position ourselves within the social worlds and roles we occupy, and in so doing make sense of ourselves.

In addition to the already cited scholarship on multilingual subjectivities and identities of second language learners, another area within which this notion of languages as not only spoken but *lived* has been emphasized in recent years is in literacy studies. In the introduction to a special volume of the *L2 Journal*, with the title [*Living Literacies: L2 Learning, Textuality, and Social Life*](#), Warner and Michelson (2018) highlighted a body of scholarship inspirational to and represented within the issue they had guest edited. This they characterized as approaches that see second language literacy “not merely as the interpretation and production of material texts, but also as *lived experience*.” In a book with a resonant title, [*Living Literacies: Literacy for Social Change*](#), education scholars Pahl and Rowsell (2020) define *living literacies* as a felt, sensory experience; it is “being in and of the world” (13). Living in and through literacies involves a variety of ways of engaging with the world, according to Pahl and Rowsell, including seeing, disrupting, knowing, making and creating. To facilitate engagement with literacy in this complex, holistic, multisensory way, Pahl, Rowsell and their collaborators emphasize activities that are less linear in nature, for example work with poetry, art, and within maker spaces that offer multimodal resources.

Multiliteracies: Design and desires

Our concept for *multilingual making* was inspired in large part by a series of conversations within language education and applied linguistics in recent decades, which envision language as a dynamic repertoire of resources for making meaning in and out of the world (e.g., Kern 2000; Kramsch, 1993, 2006; van Lier, 2004). Of particular importance for our project were those pedagogical frameworks associated with *multiliteracies* (e.g. Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy 2016; Swaffar and Arens, 2005; [Warner & Dupuy, 2018](#)). Borrowing the term and much of their theoretical underpinnings from a collective of education scholars publishing as the New London Group (1996; see also [Cope and Kalantzis, 2009](#)), multiliteracies pedagogies in second language teaching and learning treat language as complex systems for meaning making that intersect with other elements, such as those that are spatial, gestural, visual, and audial. These multimodal elements are not merely seen as support systems for language teaching—as in communicative language teaching where gesture or images are often used as props—but they are understood as essential part of the cultural systems of meaning making within which languages are interwoven; and thus, attention to these other modalities is integral rather than incidental.

Meaning making within multiliteracies frameworks is conceptualized as *design*, a word that in English is ambiguously both verb and noun. This semantic potential allowed the New London Group to highlight that meaning making is always both dynamic, in that it is creative and somewhat unpredictable, and that it is conventional, in that it relies on existing resources and familiar ways of combining linguistic and other elements. Design, in this model, has three interconnected dimensions: (1) the available designs, all resources—linguistic, social, and cultural—that a language user employs to construct meaning; (2) designing, the act of taking up available designed in situated moments of meaning making; (3) re-designing, the creation of new available designs through every new act of designing. Cope and Kalantzis (2009), two members of the original New London Group who have developed the framework extensively since the framework was introduced, also highlight that there is a transformative dimension of re-designing for language users. “The act of representing to oneself the world and others’ representations of it, transforms the learner themselves. The act of Designing leaves the designer Redesigned” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009: 12).

The notion of design is helpful for viewing languaging and other dimensions of meaning making as generative, creative, and agentful. Language learners are understood not as deficient second language speakers but as resourceful multilingual designers. Language teaching is then about helping learners to expand the scope of their meaning making repertoires while also fostering the kinds of linguistic, multimodal, and intercultural awareness that will help them to navigate new situations.

At the same time, some scholars working within literacy and language studies have argued that design, as theorized within multiliteracies, can risk an impression that language use is primarily goal-directed and rational. This in turn risks downplaying the fluidity, creativity, and playfulness inherent in meaning making. While the notion of design can help to conceptualize the complexity of language use as it intersects with other systems of meaning making, it does not quite account for the affective intensities of languaging that are produced in moments of contingency and collision as unexpected elements come into play. This experience of languaging was captured well by one of our participants who described the process of creating poetry in the following way:

I have some ideas of when I'm walking in and then when I start doing it, it kind of sidetracks and becomes its own thing. (Silvio, interview)

In their critical re-reading of the New London Group's original work, Leander and Boldt (2013) propose the concept of *desires*, to capture what is missing from the original conceptualization of design. Desire, in their understanding, arises as the potential "both more of the same along with the inevitability of something new" (37) in moments of what we might describe as inspiration or improvisation. Warner (2024) argues that second language education needs a model that balances both these dimensions of languaging. While designs are teachable ways of taking up meaning making resources in ways that are shaped through convention and creativity, desires are the aesthetic and affective impulses that give language life. Without desires, designs, especially in the second language context, can end up feeling like artifacts that hold meanings but are not meaningful.

Warner (2024) proposes what she calls *multiliteracy play* as an approach that attempts to foster attention to both designs and desires. Multiliteracy play, as she defines it, entails "an openness to meanings, sensations, the world, and their ways of thinking, feeling, and moving within it being different from what they are or what they are expected to be" (20). Multiliteracy play can be understood as a way of realizing *living literacies* within instructional spaces with all their particular affordances and constraints. Because multiliteracy play is relational—it is aesthetic and affective as much as it is designed—it can be fostered and encouraged through specific pedagogical activities but not designed into them. It was this balance that we worked to achieve in the poetry club, which we begin to describe in the next section.

Core principles for the multilingual poetry club

Drawing from the scholarship and conceptual thinking previously discussed, we developed a set of principles for language pedagogical practice that guided the choices we made while designing and hosting the poetry club.

- ★ Language learning is not only a linguistic activity, but an inherently social and emotional activity, and language education must provide safe spaces for living in and through the interpersonal and affective dimensions of languaging in a new language.
- ★ Relatedly, linguistic practices are reduced of their richness and vitality when they are dissected from multimodality and multisensoriality.
- ★ Students must be given opportunities to develop a sense of belonging in a new language that goes beyond the idealized communities of “native” speakers and their linguistic norms. This entails putting them in the position of legitimate designers and re-designers of meaning.
- ★ One of the most powerful aspects of learning a new language is the potential to “resituate ways of knowing” ([Rogers, 2018: 87](#)); this capacity can and should be fostered by engaging in playful, creative literacy practices, because it is through languaging that we make sense of ourselves, the world, and our place within it.

One final principle that guided our work was less broadly about language pedagogy and more about the specific positionality we were inviting participants to take in the poetry club. For many of our students, poetry was associated with academic contexts such as high school English classes and not a category they viewed themselves as belonging to. Therefore, the principle that...

- ★ A poet can be anyone

...was the one that we deliberately expressed in student-facing promotional materials

A poet can be (will become) anyone who is...

- engaged in creating poetry – without any requirements for previous knowledge or experience;
- Interested in experimenting with language (in our case German or Italian) to create multimodal poetry;
- wanting to learn a new language and is up for playing with the sounds, structures, feelings, and rhythms that different languages offer;
- open to co-creating a non-judgmental community of language learners.



Creating the poetry club

In this section we describe the choices that went into creating the poetry club that we facilitated on our campus in the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023. Through this story of the club, we show how the concepts and principles from the previous section were realized in practice. We will also discuss some of the difficulties we faced in trying to turn our ideals into reality.

Recruitment to the club

Participants for the poetry club were primarily recruited from Italian and German courses being taught at the University of Arizona, where both Borbala and Chantelle are faculty members. At the time of the project, Borbala was teaching beginning and intermediate Italian and was serving as the faculty supervisor to the Italian student club, so she was able to recruit from her own classes and those of her colleagues. Chantelle was the language program director for the German language program, which encompassed the first two years of instruction. She worked with instructors in the program to promote the club.

To get the word out about the club, we created the flyer pictured below:



Figure 1: Flyer advertising the poetry club

Over the course of promoting the events, we experimented with different ways of naming the club. At times we used the title from the flier, “Living Together with Poetry.” In other moments and increasingly more frequently as the initiative developed, we used the name “Playful Poetry Club.” The shiftiness here reflects our attempts to communicate to students that the events were not intended only for those who would self-identify as poets, and that the activities would not resemble the kinds of literary analysis and interpretation that they might associate with schoolwork.

To preempt our concerns that students might not immediately be interested in poetry, we also created a one-page mission statement that included a description of us and our belief in the power of poetry and play to create meaningful connections and joyful experiences in a new language. It also outlined our goals for the club, to give participants an opportunity to engage creatively with language so that they can develop a sense of belonging and can express emotions while connecting with others locally and globally. We also illustrated our broad definition of poetry by showcasing some of the varied forms of poetry including songs, slam poetry, free verse, haiku, rhymed poetry, and acrostic poetry, (digital) collage poetry among others. Although poetry is a verbal art, it is inherently multimodal, combining sounds, rhythms, visual displays, and movement. Finally, we expressed our vision that anyone who engages in creating poetry can be considered a poet, and that all that participants need is to be open to co-creating in a non-judgmental community of language learners.

In addition to sharing the call for participants through web sites and listservs, we went to visit classes and used these materials and a PowerPoint presentation with examples of multimodal poetry to convey what we had in mind. We included a variety of different visual poetry examples to showcase students the possibilities and help them view poetry under a different light. For example, thanks to an Italian artist, Paolo Albani, we were able to show a rich set of examples

such as his work titled “Miele di dubbio” (Honey of doubt) featuring three Italian words: no (no), sì (yes) and forse (maybe). This artwork served as a great example for learners to say that you do not need many words to create something artistic, meaningful and socially relevant.

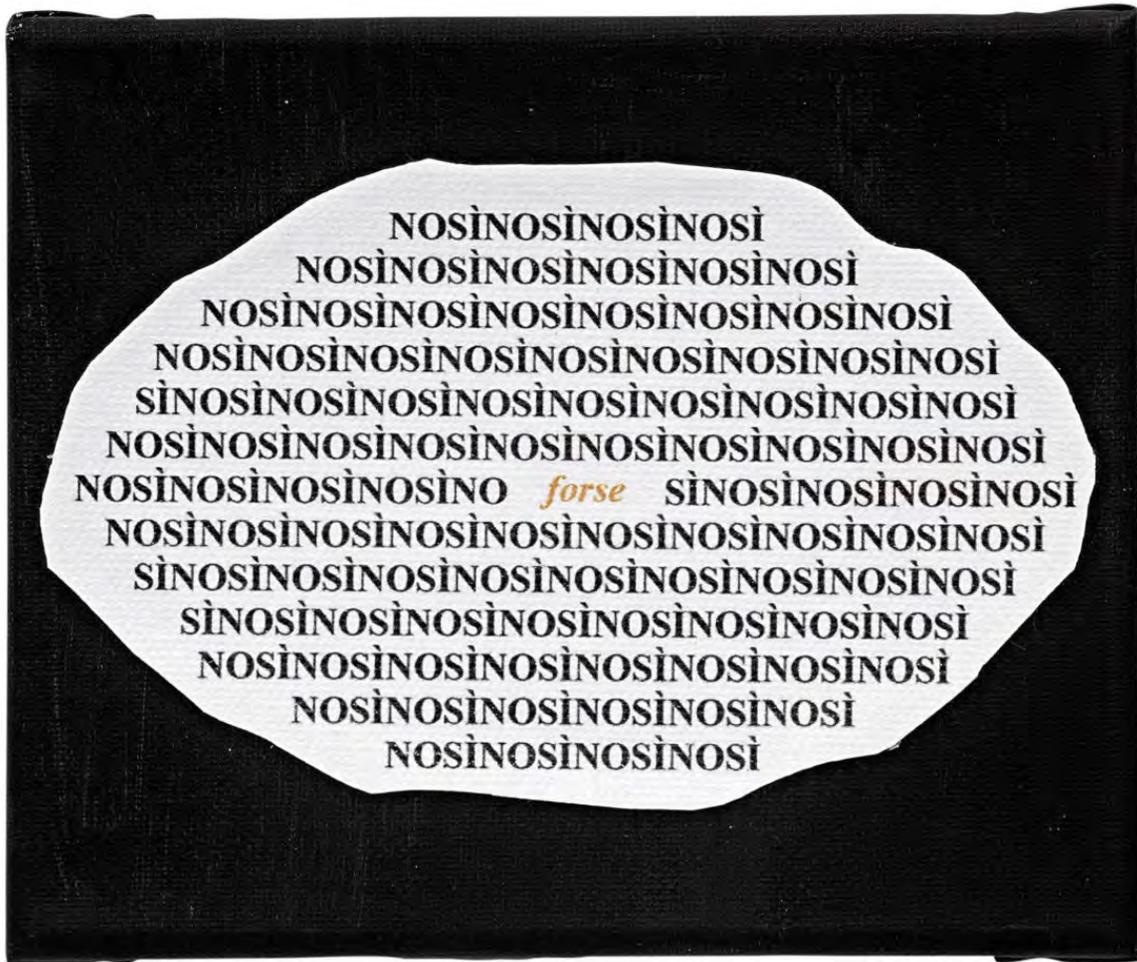


Figure 2: An example of of a simple poem used in recruitment, “[Miele di dubbio](#)” (The Honey of Doubt, 2015) by Paolo Albani (shared with permission of the author)

When we first presented the club to students, we frequently encountered reluctant responses such as, “Oh, I am not good at poetry” or “I am not sure about poetry”. Additionally, in a conversation, a colleague from the Italian department mentioned how whenever she presented the poetry club to her students, she could notice how students immediately expressed their disinterest as soon as she uttered the word “poetry,” and would tell them “Wait, guys it is not what you are thinking.” These and similar encounters made us worry about the attendance. To our surprise, we had 30 students attend the first event, and 25 students on average participated at all the following poetry events, including about a dozen people who came to every single poetry event.

At the same time, there was unevenness in participation. There were students who never came back after participating in one of the meetings of the club. To try to address attrition and to create a community between the events, we created a Groupme thread. This app allowed students to sign up to receive messages including information about upcoming events. On this platform we would send out reminders to students about our upcoming event, and we would send them a picture of our preparation, such as us preparing the focaccia or getting ready with setting up the typewriter.

The participation of students from Italian was also significantly higher than that from the German cohort. This was likely a result of a combination of factors, including the fact that many of the students from Italian knew Borbala from their current or previous Italian classes and that the German program had a regularly scheduled game night in the middle of the week, which may have been competing for students' time. And of course, the presence or absence of familiar faces was likely motivating for many students. There were a few groups of the Italian students who regularly attended in small groups of two or three. Lacking such a community, the German students had a higher rate of not returning.

Despite some of these challenges, we believe that taking advantage of opportunities to explain the club was helpful for those who had negative connotations about poetry. Showing examples and having students who attended the event tell each other about their experiences helped to assemble a solid group of participants at each event, including returnees and new members.

Designing a multisensory experience

One of our first considerations was the space. With the importance of sensory stimuli such as color, light, texture, sounds and scent (Poljak et al., 2023), we knew we did not want to host the club in a typical conference or classroom; however, all our most immediate, locally controlled spaces were much too small, much too un-atmospheric, or both. We thus sought out alternatives across campus and were delighted to discover an available collaborative learning space in the [Environmental and Natural Resources Building \(ENR2\)](#) at the University of Arizona.

Completed in 2015, ENR2 is an exemplum of environmental sustainability, both because it houses programs focusing on earth science, environmental science, and natural resources management, but also because sustainability practices are built into the structure. It contains classrooms, auditoriums, offices, a café, and a courtyard. The image below shows the stunning central courtyard that fosters gathering. The innovative design of this building incorporates various sustainable features aimed at enhancing energy efficiency and reducing environmental impact. The exterior features a courtyard inspired by a slot canyon, fostering natural air circulation, and

effectively lowering internal temperatures. The structure boasts durable materials such as unfinished metal fins providing shade; a five-story water harvesting system collects and stores rainwater runoff, irrigating plants throughout the building. Additionally, landscape beds on each level contribute to cooling and further environmental sustainability. Because this building strongly resembles the natural environment, in the past, local hummingbirds created their nests and raised their babies, feeling at home in the courtyard. Students entering the building courtyard are immediately surrounded by lush green plants, the sound of dripping water, and a sense of apartness from the bustle of the rest of campus.



Figure 3: Central Courtyard, Environmental and Natural Sciences Building, University of Arizona

The specific space we used for the poetry club was located upstairs, where the walkways and windows offer views of the mountains surrounding the center of Tucson. The spacious room has a setup with 15 tables and 35 chairs, one projector and screen, two display monitors and a house

computer. The room had many windows looking down the courtyard. The tables and chairs all had wheels, allowing us to do different and quick arrangements.



Figure 4: A view of the room during one session of the poetry club

We opted not to play music during the events. This was a deliberate choice recognizing our participants would include a neurodivergent collective of learners and while some might focus better with music, for others it is a distraction—and this is only exacerbated when lyrics are in a second language. The ambient sounds of the room thus included noises of cutting paper sounds, the sound of the typewriter when a student was typing on the typewriter and the peaceful buzz of conversations.

Students were presented with a variety of tactile options over the course of the poetry club. Students had regular access to markers, watercolor, air dry clay, magazines, books, glue, and scissors. Although these typically started out on a few of the tables at the front of the room, they quickly spread across all the working surfaces in the room, resulting in a colorful display of textures. This contributed to the impression that this was more *makerspace* than classroom. The colors and shapes of these materials were also a core part of the visual landscape of the room.

Many of the same items also contributed to the smell of the room, like the clay and the glue. Even the magazines gave off a scent, especially some older Italian magazines that were donated

to the department that came with a particular smell. One of the students even responded to the unique fragrance of these textual objects by writing a poem titled “Naftalina” in which they talked about how the smell was haunting them and reminding them of their grandparents’ house where there was a strong smell of naphthalene. At every event there were also smells and tastes on offer in the form of freshly baked focaccia, pies, cakes, German and Italian chocolates, and at times oranges and even *affogato*. These also contributed to the tactile elements of the experience, as the foods were mostly held by hand. Wrappers, peels, and partially nibbled pieces of bread also mingled with the other tactile items on the tables.



Figure 5: Scents and tastes

Students moved freely around in the room to get supplies, check out resources, eat or chat with others. Their bodies were actively engaged in the process of making, as they gestured with their hands and arms searching for the right picture to use, cut out images, looked through resources, chatted with others, and typed with the typewriter, as captured in the images below. Students often sat in groups in tables close to each other as they each worked on their individual project, and they often shared resources or worked semi-collaboratively. In a few instances, students even opted to work together on their compositions, for example by co-authoring an “exquisite corpse” poem where each contributor adds a line and then folds over the paper so that the whole text is only revealed at the end.



Figure 6: Students interacting with the space and the available materials

Facilitating multilingual making

As already mentioned, students were presented with a range of materials that afforded them with textual, visual, and tactile options for expression. Students were immediately presented with the notion that poetry need not be restricted to written text alone. On the screen multimodal poetry examples in Italian and German were projected that were set to loop nonstop during the poetry event. Printed papers with QR codes were also distributed around the room, these included ideas for poetry creations. The QR codes led students to a google drive where audio recordings, poetry examples, ideas, and links to poetry podcasts could be found. These visual representations also reinforced the multilingualism of the activity. Additional written notes in English, Italian and German were written on the large white board at the front of the room, welcoming students to the poetry club.

The magazines distributed throughout the room contributed both to the visual elements of the room, but also to the multilingual fabric and affordances of the activities at hand. Through the magazines and books, Italian, German, and English were present in the form of printed pages. Most Italian magazines were donated and were from the eighties and nineties. The dominant periodical in the collection was *L'Espresso*, a progressive leaning weekly news magazine. The German magazines were largely a selection of more contemporary current events and popular science magazines, including *Der Spiegel* and *GeoWissen*. The books were taken from our own collections and represented a mixture of literary genres. These provided models and inspirations for students as they worked on their compositions. We also included a few English-language books with poetry prompts, and some of these informed the choices made during those activities.

The images below showcase some of these multimodal and multilingual elements.



Figure 7: Multimodal and multilingual elements in the room

Spoken language in the poetry club was a combination of English, Italian and German. Students often used English to communicate among themselves, although in several instances there was a group who consistently spoke in Italian. Notably that group of students included some who had lived or studied in Italy and one person with an Italian significant other. Most of the students were enrolled in the first four semesters of language study. Fostering spoken language proficiency was not a focus of the poetry club, although both the Italian and German programs from which the participants came are heavily communicatively oriented. While we encouraged students to use the languages they were learning and as facilitators often engaged students in conversation in Italian and German, there were no attempts to coerce their language choices and code switching and translingualism were welcomed.



Figure 8: Books in multiple languages strewn across the table



Sample activities

The activities in the club were loosely organized into stations, each marked with a prompt and a QR code leading to additional examples; however, students tended to cluster in groups or to sit alone at the tables, moving to the stations when they needed inspiration. We did not impose rules about how much or little text participants needed to include or about which of the materials they needed to use, and although there were thirteen different activities on offer over the course of the year, students were not required to complete any of them. The rationale for this choice was based on our view of literacy. As discussed in the earlier sections of this handbook, our focus was not on the use of specific linguistic forms, functions, or designs but on creating a space where students felt a sense of belonging and within their new languages. The activities we promoted were thus oriented towards self-expression and perspective-taking in the languages the students were learning.

In this section, we highlight some of the most popular poetry activities that students tried during our playful poetry event. For each, we provide a brief introduction, a description of the materials needed, and examples from our participants.

The following are the poetic activities included in this section:

- Collage
- Blackout poetry
- Arts-based responses to poetry
- Multimedia poetic compositions
- Poetic responses to the space

The first three categories here were activities that were prompted by us using the stations described previously. The latter two categories were emergent types of activity that were driven by the students.

Collage

Materials: scissors, glue, thick paper, a selection of old magazines and newspapers, additional media such as markers, watercolors, colored pencils, and quick dry clay, and examples of poetry collages for inspiration

Collage was by far the most popular activity among our poetry club participants. This is likely because many of our participants were beginning-level language learners, and the emphasis on the visual and the repurposing of existing texts from the magazines and from old books allowed them to express themselves using their more limited linguistic repertoire in the new languages. Students were offered prompts for two different kinds of collage: magazine collages, which emphasized the visual elements available from these existing texts, and multimedia collages, which incorporated additional materials and required students to add textual and visual elements beyond what they could find in the periodicals.



Figure 9: Collages in the making

Magazine collages

The prompt provided to students for the magazine collage activity included the following text:

Take a look at the visual poetry examples that use images and text. Browse through the magazines and choose and cut out images, words, titles, letters that you would like to use for your composition. Using the glue, design your collage, feel free to recreate images by gluing other images on top, or words. Enjoy the process of creating your own collage!

Examples:

Many of the student collages worked with words and images that were taken directly from the magazines. The following two examples, taken from two intermediate students of Italian, are representative of these. Often these compositions responded to social discourses and/or conveyed aspects of the students' identities and desires.

The example on the left of Figure 10 (below) falls into the latter category. At the top left of this collage, the words read, *Essere vero* (to be true), *Avere coraggio* (to have courage) with an image of a woman sitting on a boat on blue waters with an Italian flag at the prow. In the middle, there is an image of dark blue waters, with a bare-backed woman facing away from the camera and holding a book out in front of her. The text above states, *Immergersi nel mondo* (Immersing yourself in the world). In the lower right-hand corner, an image of a photo booth with a person's body peeking out under the curtain, is positioned with the following imperative in red at the top: *Sii tu. Nessuna eccezione* (Be yourself, no exception). And in the lower left, a photo of two women playing chess on a wall near the ocean, proclaims: *Fai ciò che ti rende felice* (Do what makes you happy). Together these inspirational quotes and the images of a carefree life by the sea form a text.

The collage featured on the right of Figure 10 falls into the former category. The large text that crosses the page reads: *Non di solo look, vive il rock* (It isn't about just the look, long live rock!) Peeking out on either side of the word "look" is a woman's body, with hair and clothing styles associated with classic Hollywood. Her legs run vertical and her torso and head horizontal, which gives a slightly disjointed impression to her body. Leaning against the right side of the paper is a male figure wearing a suit and dress coat, with slicked back black hair. Behind the words "vive il rock" there is an old-fashioned stereo set up with a turntable and amplifier.



Figure 10: Examples of magazine collages

Multimedia collages

In addition to the magazine collages, we wanted to encourage students to work with additional media to add their own elements. To encourage this, students were offered the following adaptation of the previous prompt:

Take a look at the visual poetry examples that use mixed media. Browse through the magazines and choose and cut out images, words, titles, letters that you would like to use for your composition. Think of ways you would like to incorporate different media in your work, such as clay, watercolor, markers, text and so on. Enjoy the process of creating your own collage!

Examples:

In the two sample collages below (Figure 11), each by intermediate learners of Italian, students incorporated new elements to the texts they borrowed from the magazines: markers (left side) and clay (right side). In the composition on the left, the text is constructed primarily from cut out letters. It reads, "Prima il buio poi un po' di colore porta la vita" (First the darkness, then a bit of color that life brings). It is decorated and augmented with colored markers to add visuals that

accentuate the meanings of the text, i.e. the reference to darkness has a heavy black backdrop, the word for color has a rainbow partially surrounding it, and the word for life has what appears to be a cloud outlined in red below and a riverlike stream of blue running behind it.



Figure 11: Examples of collages with mixed media

In the collage on the right above, a cut out magazine text with black outlines of Italy and Eastern Europe is attached to a clay base. The representations of the two countries are next to each other but disconnected. These images are superimposed on a couple of bits of text taken from news articles, which include phrases like “è arrivata la guerra” (the war has arrived) and “profughi ucraini” (Ukrainian refugees). The intermediate-level Italian student who created this artwork recounted to Borbala in an interview that he was planning to create a double-sided coin to represent both the good and the bad side of Italy, but was unable to complete the back side the way he wanted and left it blank. Reflecting on the thinking behind this piece, the student-artist said the following during the interview:

I know that Italy has had a history of bad men doing bad things at the sake of the people and I saw that reflected in the Ukraine war. The paragraphs were all taken from an article about the Ukraine war. I wanted it to be two sides of one coin, but I messed up the back. I wanted something more positive because Italy overcame its fascist regime.

By remixing existent texts and adding visual and physical elements, the student was able to begin to express these complex ideas working with Italian to do so and connecting their emergent understandings of European history in the process.

Arts-based responses to poetry

Materials: written and/or audio examples of poetry, paper, multimedia such as watercolors, markers, colored pencils, and quick dry clay

This activity is relatively simple in concept—learners are invited to choose from a selection of poems and then to create their own response to one in the form of a work of art. The prompt provided to participants for this activity was as follows:

For the response to poetry activity read, translate, or create a response to the poetry in an art form chosen by you.

Because the activity is very open-ended, students at a variety of levels can engage with it and consequently in poetry without some of the limitations or frustrations that beginning and intermediate level learners may experience when moving between textual experience and analysis in a new language.

Example:

The example we have chosen for this section, portrayed in Figure 12, was a response to the poem “A Silvia” (1997) by Giacomo Leopardi. The poem is an expression of admiration for the beauty of Silvia, the poet’s unattainable love interest. The student who worked on this clay was an intermediate Italian student, who is blind. She worked with an audio version of the poem before sculpting her response, and the use of the clay enabled her to create an interpretation that was both visual and tactile. The student decided to create the female body without the head, because she felt that the poem overemphasizes Silvia’s physical beauty. In the sculpture, the female body is represented much larger than the poet. The female body is lying down on a heart shaped surface, while the poet is looking away from the body from the above. When asked about the sculpture and its representation, the student shared that through the averted gaze of the male figure and his position on top, she wanted to show what she saw as the two parallel perspectives represented in the poem.

The student pointed out that the poet misses “seeing” Silvia’s true self. She wanted to represent the poem this way because as she was reading it, she felt like the focus of the author was on the external characteristics of Silvia, her beauty, not her internal beauty.



Figure 11:: Clay response to “A Silvia”

Blackout poetry

Materials: magazines, newspaper, old book pages, markers, highlighters

Blackout poetry is a form of found poetry, wherein compositions are created by erasing or redacting parts of an existing text, thereby retaining others which form a new text. Like collage, an advantage of blackout poetry is that linguistic resources are provided to the creator, which can be helpful for supporting beginning and intermediate level languages; however, unlike collage, blackout poetry requires that the creator navigate longer stretches of text.

The following was the prompt provided for the blackout poetry activity:

Blackout poetry is when you use a written text of a topic that you enjoy, or want to read, engage with and you redact words to create your own poetry.

First, select the text that you want to read and are curious about. Scan through the text and select the keywords that you like and want to keep in your poetry. After you select the words, reduce them more if you have too many of them, or add more if you want to have more words. Decide what design you will use for your poetry and start realizing it. Before completing your blackout poetry take a look at some examples that might inspire you for design or ways of creating your own. Enjoy the process!

Examples:

The two compositions below (Figure 13) are examples of blackout poetry done in two different ways.

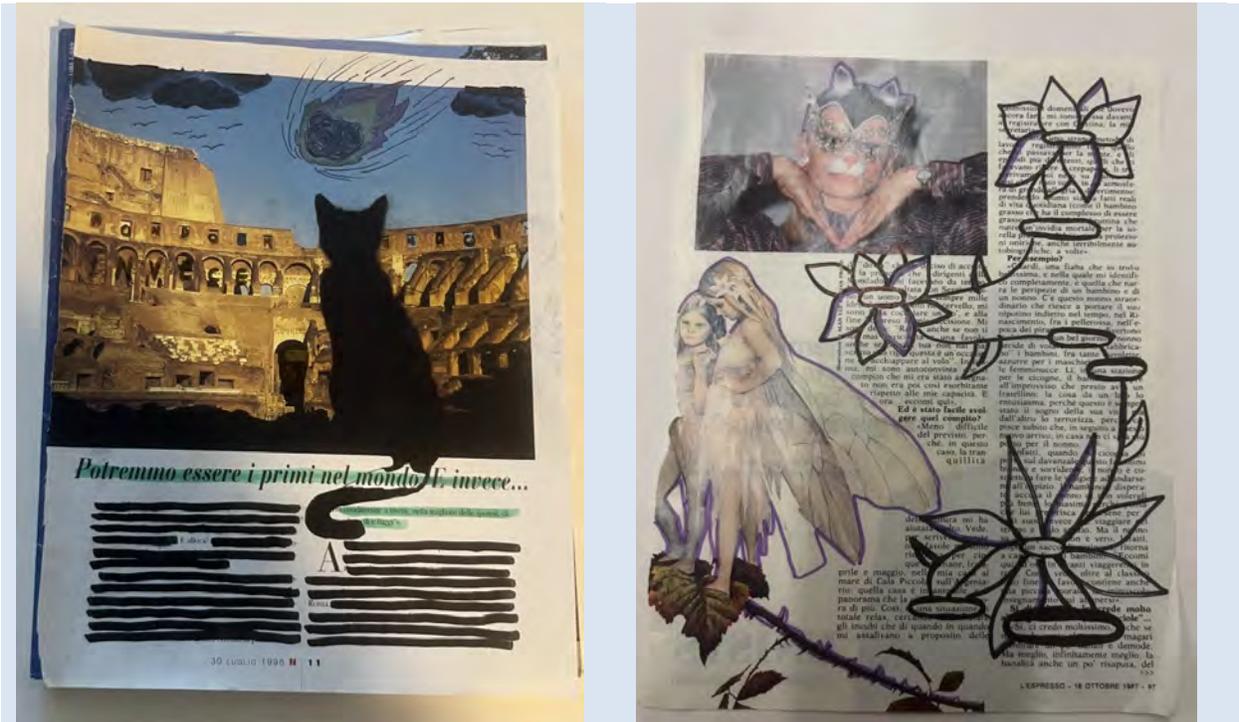


Figure 13: Examples of blackout poetry

Both students worked with the text provided on the page and included the existing illustrations as part of their remixed poems, while also including additional images. The first is a more traditional use of blackout poetry in that the additional words are completely redacted using a black marker. The original title of the article was *Potremmo essere i primi del mondo e invece...* (We could be the first in the world, and instead...). This suggestion of an unfulfilled potential is reflected in the student's decision to blackout almost the entire body text. The student chose to

erase most of the text of the article. What is left behind in the text is the question *E allora?* (And then what?) and the word *Roma*. The subtitle also mostly remains; this reads “Condannate a vivere nella migliore delle ipotesi di ***di e fuggi (Sentenced to live in the best-case scenario of a *** getaway.” The asterisks here appear to cover the word “mordi,” which would complete the expression “quick getaway”; however, the omission of the first part results in the emphasis on the escape, getting away. In Italian *mordi* literally means “you bite” and *fuggi* means “you flee” and the *mordi e fuggi* as an idiomatic expression means “quick getaway”. To the original photo of the colosseum, the student added a black cat, positioned just to the right of center in the photo, sitting and facing outward into the image. The student also added dark clouds and a falling asteroid. Together these evoke a possible sense of foreboding.

The second composition is a found poem featuring elements of blackout poetry. The original text is a magazine page from an interview with an author of fables, where the featured author is recounting one of her favorite tales. Instead of blacking out parts of the text, certain words are circled: *uno strano* (a strange), *un’invidia mortale* (deadly jealousy), *una stazione* (a station), *a un uomo* (a man), *una situazione* (a situation), *un sacco* (a lot), *sì, ci credo moltissimo* (I believe it very much). The circled words are integrated into a line drawing of three flowers with vines connecting them, which stretches across the length of the page. The two images from the original article seem to have inspired the choices in the text: one appears at the top left and one along the left side. These depict female images: a young girl dressed as a cat and two female-presenting fairies respectively. The resulting multimodal poem can reasonably be interpreted as a statement about a relationship or relationships with men and as an expression of girlhood.

Dice Poetry

Materials: dice, a list of frequently used words or dictionary, multimedia such as watercolors, markers, colored pencils, and quick dry clay

This activity is geared towards evoking free association on a particular theme. The concept is very simple, students roll a dice and turn to a word or page corresponding to the number. They are then presented with a word or set of words and use this as the inspiration for a new creative work.

This was the prompt students were given for this poetry activity:

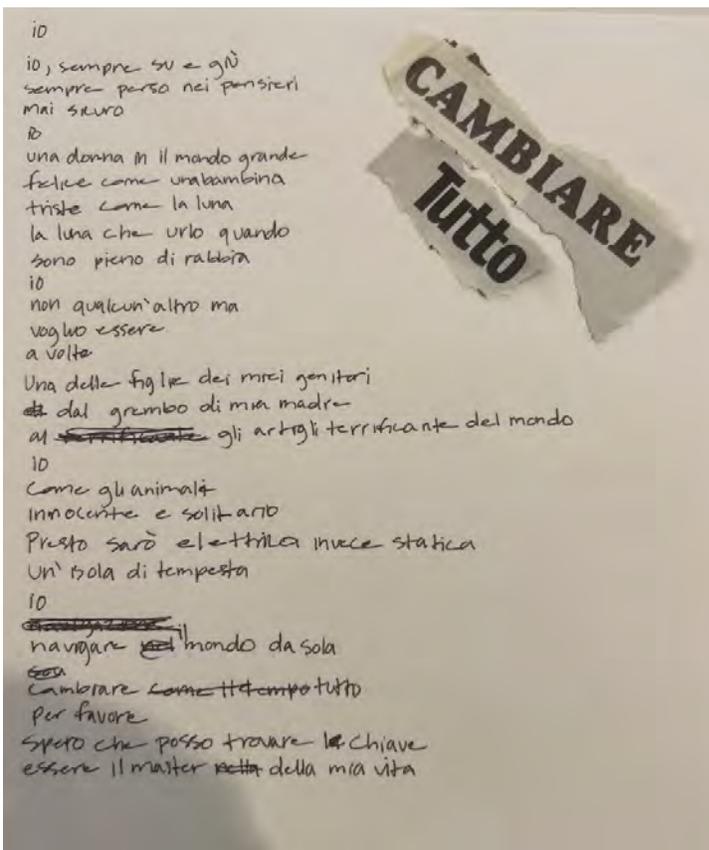
Roll 1-2 dice and turn to the page that corresponds to your number. That is your theme and at the bottom of the page are some words to get you started. (If you need help expressing those in German or Italian, just let us know!)

You can also use the 1000 most commonly used words in Italian and German to help you add some fun words.

Examples:

The two examples featured here were created by intermediate level learners of Italian. Although both students started with the activity as described above, they also expanded upon it, by continuing to roll to new entries in a list of 1000 most commonly used Italian words, which they then tried to work into their text. They also decided to augment their written texts with visuals, in the form of words or images taken from the magazines.

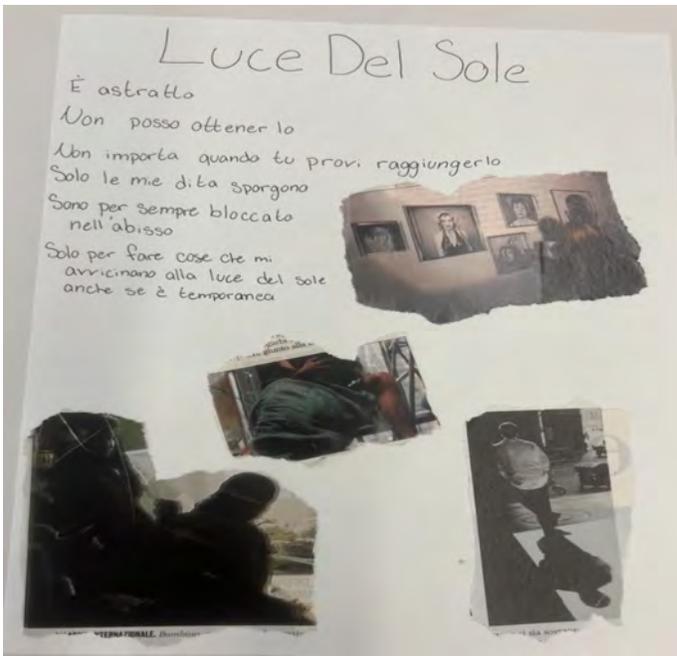
The first example (Figure 14) features the words *Cambiare tutto* (Changing everything) running diagonally on the right-hand side; each word is cut from a magazine and because these are the only part of the text that is not handwritten, they stand out. The poem describes the desire to take control of one's own life, while feeling angry, scared, and overwhelmed by the world.



I,
I, always up and down
always lost in thoughts
never sure.
I,
a woman in the big world
happy like a child
sad like the moon
the moon that I scream when
I am full of anger.
I,
not someone else but
want to be
sometimes
one of my parents' daughters
from my mother's womb
to the terrifying claws of the world.
I,
like innocent and solitary animals
soon I will be electric instead of static
a storm island
I sail the world alone
changing everything
please
I hope I can find the key
be the master of my life.

Figure 14 "Cambiare tutto" - a dice poem

The second poem, “Luce del Sole” (Sunlight), has four images in total, each with rough edges, giving the appearance they were torn by hand. The images portray people in black and white photos, that have been captured from the back. Because the facial expressions and identifying details are hidden in these images, the human figures are suggestive rather than clearly defined. The text expresses attempts to get at something abstract, something like sunlight, that slips through the fingers every time the first-person voice in the poem reaches for it.



Sunlight

It's abstract
 I can't get it
 No matter when you try to reach it
 Only my fingers protrude
 I'm forever stuck
 In the abyss
 Just to do things that bring me closer
 to the sunlight
 Even if it's temporary.

Figure 15 "Luce del sole" - A dice poem

We had an opportunity to interview both of these student-art creators after the club had ended. The author of “Cambiare tutto” (Changing everything) explained that she had initially felt anxiety about creating a poem in Italian, but then the invitation to use dice and play with the language, suddenly eased her fears and helped her unleash her creativity and freedom to write in Italian:

Um, I remember before the first poetry club I was really nervous about it. Was I going to be able to create anything and if not, should I like, come prepared with something like that. You know, like the perfectionist in me, just like feeling like I should come prepared for it. And ultimately, I didn't choose to do that. And I just kind of. Um. Just kind of let go, um, and decided to just play around with it. [...]

When asked if this was the student’s first experience writing like this, they replied,

Um, I think the first session I was still really nervous as I was writing it. Like I was just feeling like, is this going to make sense? Is it okay grammatically? Like, is it? This or is it that? But as I kept writing, I felt like a bit of freedom, maybe in using the language in my own way. And that was revitalizing, I think.

The author of “Luce del Sole” described their process as a more deliberate attempt to express something of their personality.

And then the first word was like sunshine or something. So, I'm like, okay, let me write about that. Um, and then I'm not really like a happy person, so I'm like, I do. I do good with depressive stuff. So let me make this depressing.

In describing the choice to add the images, the author indicated that they were motivated by the appearance of the page:

And then I'm like, Oh, the page isn't done. Like it's there's a lot of empty space. Let me put some pictures in here.

These accounts from the students help to show how the combination of structure and freedom, concept and material enabled these two students to experiment with expressing themselves in Italian while engaging in the dice poem activity.

Multimodal poems by typewriter

Materials: typewriter, paper

Beginning in the second session of the poetry club, Borbala began to bring in a vintage *Olivetti Studio 45* typewriter from home. This was placed on one of the tables near the front of the classroom. The clicking of the typewriter keys became part of the soundscape of the classroom, and students often commented on how much they enjoyed the sounds. Composing on the typewriter also created a different tactile experience for the students, most of whom had never actually used a typewriter before. When first testing out the typewriter, the students needed help loading the paper, adjusting the carriage or pushing hard enough on the keys so it actually printed on the paper. Engaging with the material, this sensory experience of composing on a typewriter, invited students to approach writing differently.



Figure 16: Vintage typewriter used in the club

Examples:

In this first example (Figure 17), the student, an intermediate Italian learner, typed a series of simple statements of her likes:

*mi piace mangiare, mi piace dormire, mi piace leggere, mi piace yoga, mi piace scrivere,
mi piace vivere, voglio vivere e posso vivere, mi piace vivere.*

I like to eat, I like to sleep, I like to read, I like yoga, I like to write, I like to live, I want to live and I can live, I like to live.

After playing with the feel of the typewriter, the student took the resulting text, cut it out and glued it onto a watercolor painting she created, representing a red heart with a purple background. The result is a simple, expressive poem, working with familiar forms and vocabulary items.



Figure 17: *Mi piace vivere (I like to live)*

The second example of working with the typewriter comes from a beginning Italian learner, who decided to write a poem about their cat.

*il mio
piccolo nera gatto, mi lamentoso perche
il mio
piccolo nera gatto e forte e sporca. la amo, piccola nera gatto e mia amica
Sono anche (il mio) forte e sporca. siamo forti e
sporchi la amo il mio piccola nera gatto. :)*

My own
small black cat I complain because
My own
small black cat is strong and dirty. I love her, small black cat, my friend.
I am also strong and dirty. we are strong and
dirty, I love her, my small black cat. :)

The blacked-out words in the text are likely instances where they made a typing mistake. After composing the text on the typewriter, the student used black watercolor paint to add an illustration of a cat with four paw prints below. After completing the poem, this student shared it with Borbala, and then showed her pictures of the cat on her phone and confided that her pet had provided emotional support, while living alone in an apartment.

What the simple textual artifact does not convey is the experience of sitting at the typewriter. We observed this student sitting, quietly and patiently experimenting with the physical sensations of typing out Italian words for quite some time. At one point, she asked for some help with how to adjust the carriage. Mostly she appeared to be lost in thought as she engaged with the sensations of typing on the machine as they converged with the equally new feel of Italian.

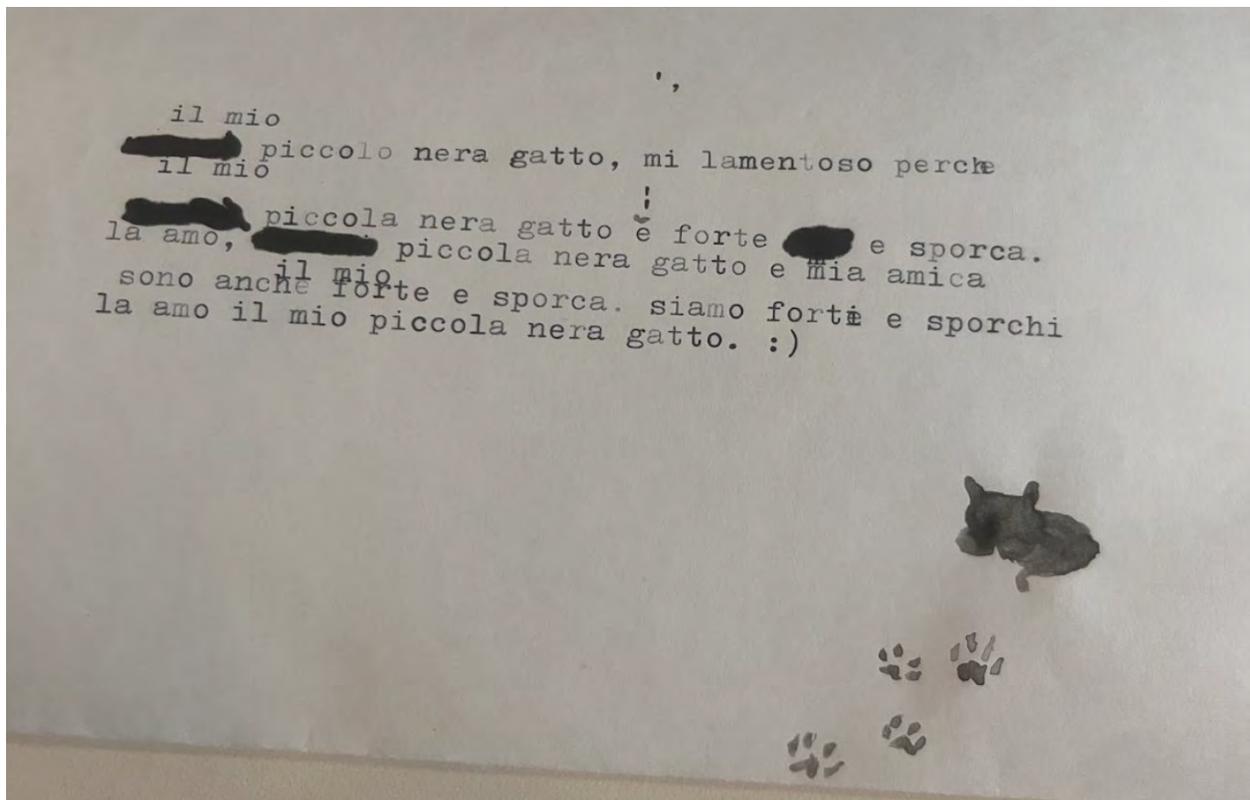


Figure 18: il mio piccolo nero gatto

Limerick

Materials: writing implements, possibly a rhyming dictionary

What is a limerick?

RIME: The first, the second and the fifth verse rimes with each other. The third one rhymes with the fourth one.

1. First step: Pick a protagonist in the first verse.
2. Indicate a quantity, express it with an action in the second verse.
3. Realize the predicate in the third and fourth verse
4. Last step: choose in the fifth verse a remark that characterizes the name, indicating its characteristics as a finale.

Sul Duomo di Como

Gianni Rodari

Un signore molto piccolo di Como,
una volta salì in cima al Duomo.
E quando fu in cima
era alto come prima
quel signore micro piccolo di Como.

On the Cathedral of Como

Gianni Rodari

A very small man of Como,
went once to the top of the duomo.
And when he was at the crest,
he was as tall as previous,
that micro small man of Como.

Both examples we have for this activity come from the same beginning level student who was one of the few who tried out Limerick. In the first example, we can see how he tried to follow the example we provided for the limerick and wrote about a man named Pablo.

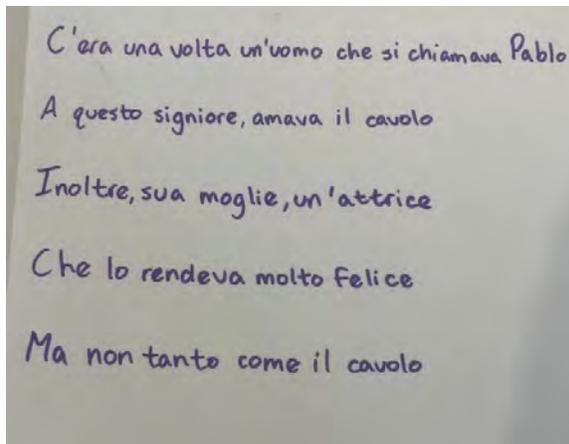


Figure 19: A typical limerick poem from a student

Once upon a time there was a man called Pablo
this man loved cabbage
besides he had a wife, an actress
that made him very happy
but not as happy as the cabbage.

In the second limerick, the student-poet worked to personalize the structure. Here the typical form of the limerick serves as a way of organizing thoughts about what this author enjoys studying and doing in his everyday life. The opening line of the poem references the limerick structure, while also questioning whether what is presented here is really a poem. Although the student seems to be playing a bit with their discomfort writing poetry, expressing a preference for numbers and math, at the same time they are clearly using the resource of the limerick format to express some things about themselves using the Italian they have learned thus far.

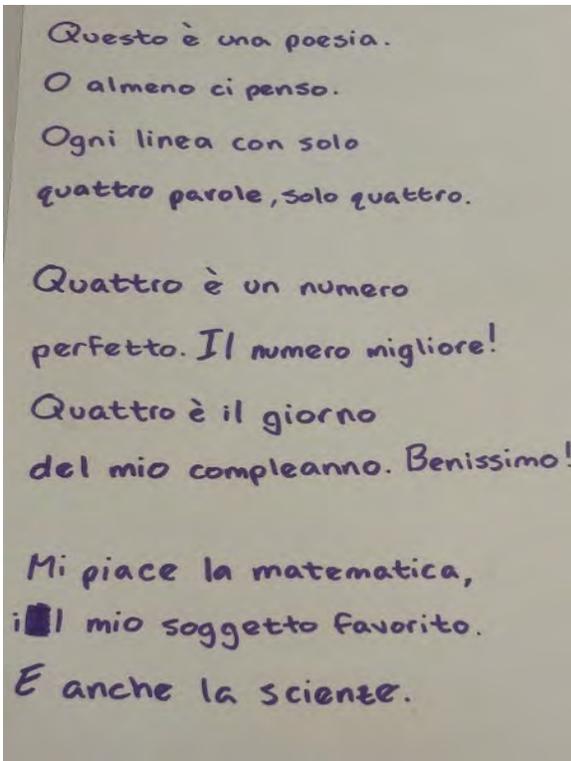


Figure 20: Example of playing with the limerick form

This is a poem.
Or at least I think so.
Each line with just
four words, only four.

Four is a number
perfect. The best number!
Four is the day
of my birthday. Beautiful!

I like mathematics,
my favorite subject.
And also science.

Multimedia poetic compositions

In addition to the prompts provided by the facilitators, students were actively encouraged to play with the materials available. This resulted in many multimedia poetic compositions that fell outside of the prompts and activities that we had planned for the students. Although these were quite varied, there were three trends that stood out to us, which we will use as examples in this section: those responding to pop culture fandoms, those responding to current events, and those responding to the space.

Pop culture and fandoms

We noticed some students incorporated in their work their favorite anime or video game themes or characters that they enjoyed. One of the students, from an intermediate second semester, recreated the main character called *Italy*, from the Anime series created by Hidekazu Himaruya, titled *Hetalia*. This character, according to the student, is a stereotypical representation of Italians: e.g., someone who loves pasta, pizza, and cheese. The image displayed on the phone shows the character Italy holding a plate of pasta. In their clay work, however, the student focused on the figure and decided to eliminate the stereotypes of their representation. When

asked about this work, the intermediate student said that she really likes [Hetalia](#), the Anime series, and she started laughing and was joyful when she started talking about the series. She mentioned with a big smile and with a bit of a laugh, that these characters are all stereotypical; as we can see in Figure 21, the character Italy is holding a plate of pasta.



Figure 21: *Hetalia* anime and clay fan response

In addition to the prompts, students had access to a rotating selection of books, which were intended to serve as sources of inspiration and as models. These included a few Italian comics and a book in Italian on how to write comic strips ([see resource list](#)). One student in the class, who had engaged with these books, created the artwork below, using a combination of ink drawings and clay.

The comic strip first represents a snake, who lies coiled and, in the background, stands a sign reading “odiamo i serpenti” (We hate snakes). In the second panel, the snake is depicted next to a book entitled, *Beauty Planet-Free Stars*. In the next, the snake is looking up towards the sky, where in the top left corner there is a written message “No SNAKES” (in English. This message is surrounded by short lines that suggest this may be speech coming from outside what is featured in the frame. The final strip shows the snake lying surrounded by what appear to be plants or mushrooms, with a spattering of stars overhead. The text below reads, “C’è speranza nella bellezza” (There is hope in beauty). The clay works complement the comic strip; there is a figure of the snake lying near some plants on the left and many stars.

The story seems to be a message of how to find belonging in the face of hate speech. Unfortunately, we did not have an opportunity to talk to the student about it as she left, leaving her claywork at the desk in the same arrangement you see displayed here. It therefore became a found poetry for us.

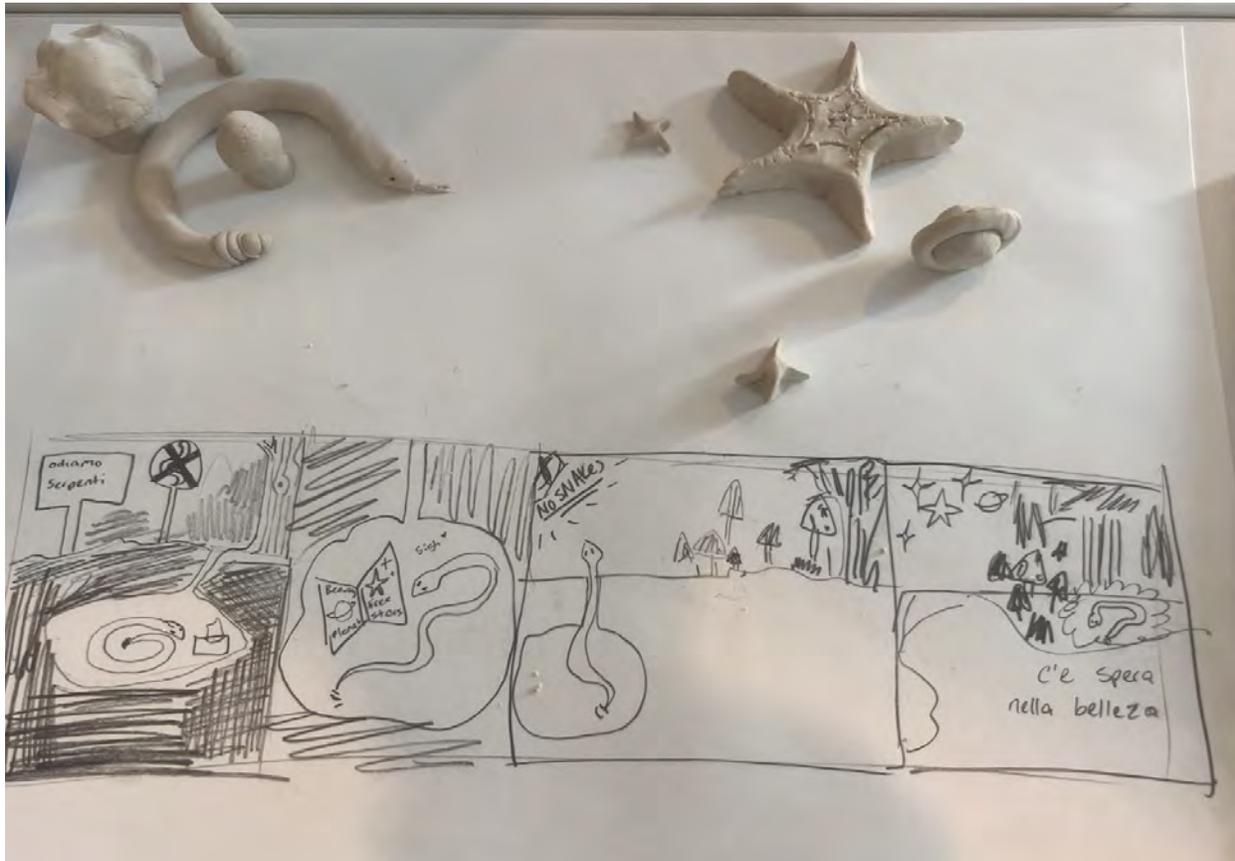


Figure 22: Comic and clay work by a student

Current events

Several of the students' creations were inspired by discourses around world events, specifically those that had been introduced as part of their language classes. The example below comes from a student who was enrolled in Borbala's intermediate-level Italian course, where issues related to the environment had been introduced. In the semi-structured interview however, the student poet mentioned how the topic of global warming and particularly Venice came up in one of his conversations with his friends. He could not remember exactly where he read about Venice, but combined with the topics discussed in class, the case of the sinking Venice was in his mind, and he wanted to further process it through his multimodal poetry. The student/artist here used watercolor paints to portray a bird's eye view of Venice sinking into

the ocean, engaged with the topic of global warming. Below the image are the words: Il riscaldamento globale porterà alla rovina la bellezza (Global warming will ruin the beauty). The poetry club appeared to give this student a space to reflect more on a complex topic from class and his personal interest in the case of sinking Venice and to emotionally engage with global warming in his own unique way.

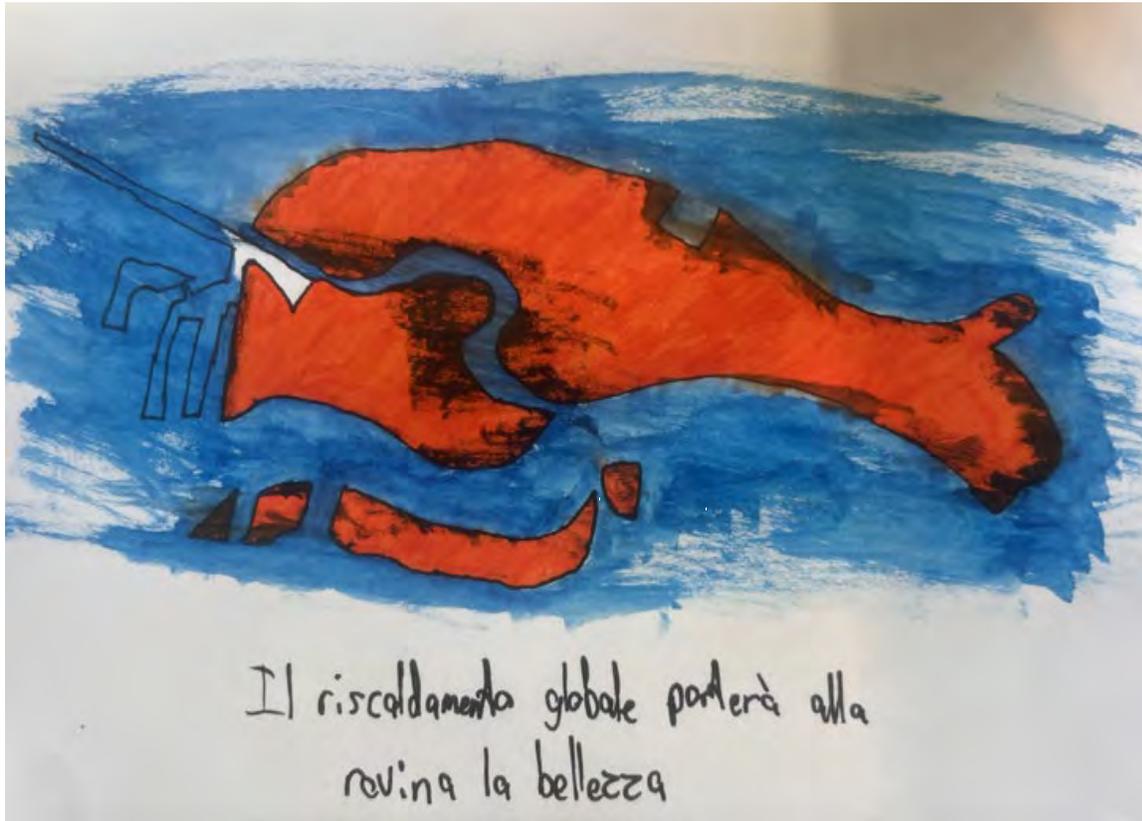


Figure 23: Poetic response to global warming

Poetic responses to the space

Some students responded directly to the space we had created and the affordances it offered. The following example shows how one student interacted with the tactile offerings, in this case the focaccia bread. Using cutout letters from the magazines, the student formed the single statement, “focaccia delizioso” (focaccia delicious). They then created a photo series over the course of the session, showing how a piece of the bread disappeared over the course of time.

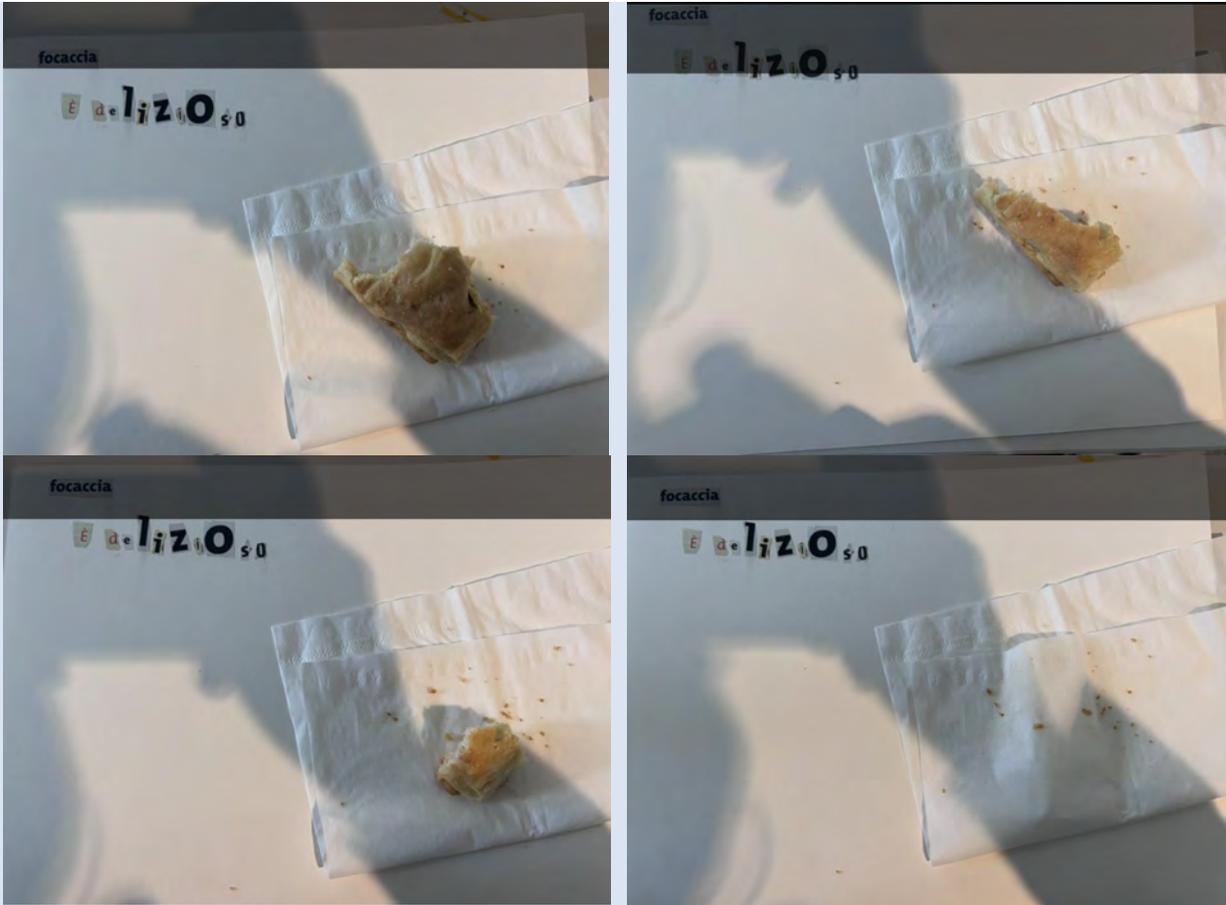


Figure 24: focaccia delizioso – a response to the space

The poem, titled *Naftalina*, is another example of how students interacted with multisensory aspects of the space. This student had mentioned that the smell of naphthalene from the old magazines reminded them of their childhood and their grandparents.

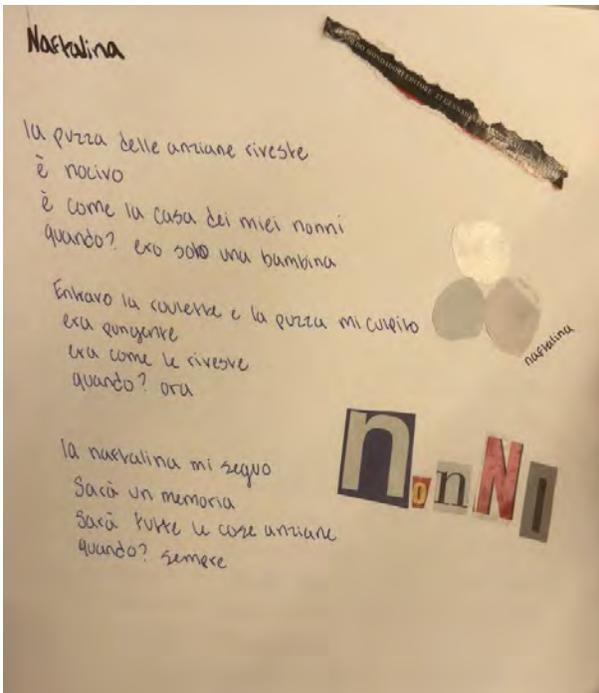


Figure 25: Naftalina - a response to the space

Naphthalene

The smell of old magazines
 is harmful
 it's like my grandparents' house
 when? I was just a child
 I entered the room, and the smell hit me
 it was pungent
 it was like the magazines.
 When? now
 the naphthalene follows me
 it will be a memory
 it will be all the old things
 when? Always

The smell, which is described as harmful, brings the student back to the past, but also connects with the present, as the odors of this university language club converge with the pungent memories of the author's grandparents' house. The final lines express how the "old things" of our childhoods remain with us always.



Student perceptions of the poetry club

Following the end of the club, we invited the poetry club members to complete a survey, which included a series of questions about their experience of the club and how their perceptions of poetry and their relationship with the languages they are learning might have changed. Participants were asked to rate each on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 was a little and 10 was a lot. We received 17 responses total, and those are summarized in the table below.

Survey Responses (17 participants)	
	Scale 0 = min, 10 = max
Before participating in the Multilingual Poetry Club, how much did you generally enjoy engaging with (any form of) poetry?	5.47
How much did you enjoy engaging with (any form of) poetry in the Multilingual Poetry Club?	9.06
How much did you enjoy participating in the Multilingual Poetry Club overall?	9.35
How much do you feel the poetry club helped you make social connections with other students?	8.00
How much do you feel poetry club helped you to feel more comfortable with the language you are learning?	8.53
How much do you think the Multilingual Poetry Club helped you in becoming more curious about the language and culture you are learning?	8.88

Overall, the survey results showcase a positive impact from this extracurricular experience. Participants reported an increase in enjoyment regarding their engagement with poetry. While the participants rated their enjoyment of poetry before joining the club at 5.47 out of 10, this number almost doubled after joining the club, to an impressive 9.06 score. This significant increase suggests that the club had successfully contributed to creating a social space that learners found engaging. Moreover, participants rated the overall enjoyment in the club highly (9.35). Another notable data point was the participants’ high rating of the club’s role in facilitating

social connections among students (8.0). These findings underscore the potential of a club like this for creating a sense of community and belonging.

Additionally, the survey results suggest that the poetry club had a significant impact on language learning and cultural exploration. Participants reported feeling more comfortable with language learning (8.53) and expressed an increased curiosity towards the language and culture (8.88). These findings indicate that these students saw that engagement in creative composition activities could enrich language and culture education and contribute to cultural appreciation and understanding.

In the survey, we also invited students to let us know if they would be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview. 15 students responded yes, and 7 were able to schedule interviews with Borbala in the summer following the club. All were learners of Italian. The students' interview responses help us to better understand the experiences behind the survey data. All reports of the students' statements in the interviews are presented using pseudonyms.

As part of the semi-structured interviews, we asked students to complete the sentence: *For me poetry is...* The responses of the students are summarized in the table:

Enlightening	<p>Enlightening. Fun. Relaxing and creative. <i>So, what I mean about enlightening, uh, definitely makes me think more about how to structure my words. And then with doing the research on it, I get to learn more about what's happening outside the US.</i></p> <p>Simone, Semi-structured interview</p>
Fun	<p><i>I couldn't get the typewriter to work the way I wanted it to. So I would just end up skipping lines and stuff, but it actually made the poem seem cooler, um, which I liked. Um. So it was fun to, like, just play around with different methods.</i></p> <p><i>I enjoyed the times that I was there, and I enjoyed seeing friends from classes prior that I hadn't seen in a while, like Sadie and, um, and Stefania was there for a lot of them, so it was a lot of fun.</i></p> <p>Giulia, Semi-structured interview</p> <p><i>Like, it's so pretty there. And the place you're doing the art, like the club at, it's. It's so open, like the windows everywhere. It doesn't feel like a classroom. It feels like an extra space, like a fun space I'd say.</i></p> <p>Beppe, Semi-structured interview</p>

Creative	<p><i>There's so few outlets for creative expression if you're not an art major and that's like a whole different story, so or, or minor, I guess so. Um. But it's important to nurture that side of yourself. And like I knew talking to you like in office hours and at class, that I was probably going to find that at the poetry club. And then I did when I showed up. So yeah.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Roberta, Semi-structured interview</p>
Relaxing	<p><i>I would always go kind of stressed, but it was nice to get like I've always been an artistic person and doing so much schoolwork, you kind of forget to get that outlet. So it was really nice to just kind of dump my brain out for an hour and a half and just work with my hands or do something, you know? So that was always really nice. I really enjoyed that aspect of it.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Beppe, Semi-structured interview</p>
Community	<p><i>For me, poetry is, um, community. It's all about people, um, kind of expressing themselves differently with different viewpoints, but together.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Serena, Semi-structured interview</p>
Focaccia	<p><i>For me, poetry is focaccia. It's a mix of a bunch of things. It's great, it's tasty, it's fun. It's meant to be shared. It's. It's Italian. It's. I think that's the best way. It's the first thing that popped into my head, and it's what I think of when I think of the Italian club. The big mix of stuff. Tasty. It's a little different every time. A little salty this time a little sweet. But it's always nice.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Beppe, Semi-structured interview</p>
Visual	<p><i>Poetry is like a photographic image of the slides that you would show when we were sitting there. Um, that's the immediate thing that comes to my head when I think about it more. I think about this poem that I read that I had to write about for my literature test in high school, because that was one of my favorite poems. And it was something about a saxophone player, um, or like Robert Frost. But I'm a visual person, so I think about looking up and seeing the projected images in Italian.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Roberta, Semi-structured interview</p>

Although this is a self-selected group of students who opted to continue with the club and then were willing to make the time for the interview, their reflections point to the richness of possibilities that poetry can afford language learners. The students' associations with poetry after participating in the club suggest that they were able to create new intellectual and experiences in connection with Italian, through the kinds of sensory and emotional engagements offered in the club. This resonated with our hope in the conception of the club, that we could create a space where participants could engage with the new languages bringing in their whole bodies, senses, the space (Leander and Boldt, 2013).

One of the participants, Sergio, reflected on how the club had changed his relationship to poetry during his interview.

I feel it's, uh, view it differently than how I used to. In the past. I never was a big reader, so I never would partake in reading poetry or making poetry. **But after doing this club, I find a fun in doing it.** Um. So, I might as I continue, I might become more comfortable with making more poems within my free time. (Sergio, Semi-structured interview)

Although he had not previously considered himself a “big reader,” based on the positive affective experience of the club, Sergio expressed his interest in continuing to explore this creative outlet independently beyond the club's activities. Sergio's experience indicates that there were students who did not come into the club enthusiastic about poetry per se, but who over the course of the year discovered that they enjoyed playing with language in this way.

Another student reflected on the ways the poetry club impacted her creative engagement with Italian. The poetry space was a deliberating space that helped her shift from self-perceived linguistic deficiencies to a sense of language as possibility and play.

Yeah, I think I think any time that you're put in a position where you kind of have to let go like in a creative space, I think it automatically kind of triggers your imagination, you know, because you're not super focused anymore on like all the things you're doing wrong or like, oh, I should have done it this way or I should do it this way. You're suddenly just like in a space where creative process just kind of takes hold. And I think with most creative processes, there's the imagination at play. And so, um, yeah, I think, I think by default it just kind of comes to the surface. Once you get past the mud of like not doing it a certain way, not having to do it a certain way. (Gianna, Semi-structured interview)



Conclusion

This handbook reports on a one-year experiment: we wanted to see if we could work with largely analog elements—e.g., glue sticks, magazines, printed poems, clay, and paints—to create a playful space in which students shape new forms of belonging in relationship to languages they were newly learning (Potter and McDougall, 2017). We were fortunate to have the support of CERCLL for the materials and the wonderful space provided by our campus, but generally the club ran on a low budget and minimal tech. For our students who are scheduled and plugged in most of their day, the poetry club provided a bit of respite. That gatherings around food help in building communities will likely come as no surprise to any educator who has worked on student recruitment, retention, and engagement; however, we also see evidence that engaging with a new language and culture can contribute to wellbeing and belonging in specific ways that took shape in the club. As many of the student reflections indicate, they were not only exploring what it meant to belong in this cadre of learners but also what it might mean to belong to multilingual communities of language users. In several of our examples, this involved cultural connections and references, including quite saliently the focaccia bread. Most often students were simply experimenting with the expression of emotions and experiences in the new language with the support of multimodal elements.

In the typical proficiency-oriented language class, learners are presented with ample chances to talk about themselves—their name, where they come from, who their relatives are, what they study, what they do in their free time. After one semester or one year of study, the average student is well-prepared to offer their own bio sketch. And yet, this emphasis on personalization obscures the reality that learners are rarely given space to consider what it means to “be themselves” in a new language, as individuals with complex thoughts and feelings. In full acknowledgement of the limitations of a short-term pilot and the unevenness in participation due to the extracurricular structure, the experience of hosting this poetry club has affirmed our

shared belief that we can engage students as whole humans even in the beginning and intermediate levels.

Our hope with this handbook is that we can inspire other educators to try some of the activities whether in the form of a club or in the context of the classroom to see how multilingual making can be a part of their and their students' practice.

Additional resources for educators

English resources:

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- *Create a Poem: Writing Prompts for Poets*. (2021). Chartwell Books.

German resources:

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