

# Transformative Learning Streams Running Through Digital Theatre in Adult Education: The Case of a Second Chance Education School

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## Abstract

*The field of digital theatre in education (DTiE) has been gaining momentum in the last two decades in increasingly diverse learning contexts. Applications pertaining to the field can be described as educational interventions in which theatre/drama-based teaching and learning methods combine with digital technologies, thus organically integrating physical and digital content. DTiE interventions currently focus on other subjects of the curriculum besides the subject of theatre/drama, such as language arts, language literacy, and foreign languages. Discerning the many possible affordances of DTiE in adult education settings, but also the transformative potential of learning experiences built upon the field's principles and practices, the author set out to investigate them systematically and in action. As part of the author's postdoctoral research, an alternative methodology for the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language was developed which brings together theatre tools with various digital means and conventions, and which is informed by the transformative learning theory and by the multiliteracies pedagogy. The methodology has so far been applied in the form of a short-term educational intervention in a Greek Second Chance School targeting at-risk adult learners. Besides assessing the contribution of the methodology to the promotion of the English, digital, and cultural literacy of the participants, the author sought to probe and respond to the following research questions: Does a DTiE intervention focused on English literacy involve transformative experiences for adult learners with regard to their perspectives on English language and literacy, digital technology and literacy, theatre, culture, and their sense of self in contemporary culture? To what extent does the intervention transform learners' perspectives on the above areas? The mixed-method analysis of data collected before, during, and after the intervention answered the former question in the affirmative and shed interesting light of the latter. The participants' learning outcomes and the overall research findings open new vistas of possibility for a socially responsive and critical educational praxis targeting adult learners from less privileged backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>*

*Keywords:* transformative learning, digital theatre in education, multiliteracies

## Introduction

The advent of the digital age and the torrential flow of new technologies have had profound effects on all areas of life and production, whose long-term import cannot yet be appraised with certainty. The impact of the digital paradigm for education, especially the affordances and dangers involved therein, has become a matter of concern for professionals and scholars of education, as discourses about learning and social engagement in *e*-culture are gaining in intensity (Anderson, Cameron, & Sutton, 2012). Besides educational circles, international organizations such as UNESCO underline the pressing need for effective and prospective responses on the part of education systems to the challenges attending the world's digital turn. A recent "concept note" published by UNESCO (2018) argues for educational initiatives centered on "developing capacities for anticipating the changing needs for digital skills for work and life" (p. 4). The urgency of that issue for adult education actors, particularly for those targeting learners from less socially privileged backgrounds, is obvious considering that many of these learners are "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001, pp. 35–36),

who face the risks of job displacement and social exclusion if unable to keep up with the shifts and swerves of our digitally attuned social futures.

Incorporating digital literacy (usually framed as Information and Communications Technology or ICT training) as a separate course/module in the curriculum or in the study program, however, rarely proves an adequate strategy for addressing the imperative of digitally reskilling/upskilling less privileged adult learners. Three observations based on the author's experience as an adult educator regarding the foregoing point in fact propelled the conception of the research project on which this paper is based. First, the purposeful integration of digital technologies in courses/modules other than ICT is usually neglected. This results in lost opportunities vis-à-vis the learners' acquisition of digital competences, on the one hand, and their understanding and appreciation of the affordances of digital technologies in diverse content areas and areas of life on the other. Second, even when digital technologies are integrated in the teaching and learning routines for non-ICT subjects, these "new technologies" are often used, as the multiliteracies pedagogy scholars Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis have put it (2009b), "to learn old things in old ways" (p. 88). In these cases, computers, new media devices, visuals, and other digital learning objects are basically used to "re-create traditional, transmission pedagogies [...] : absorb the theories, practice the formulae, learn the facts, appreciate the greats of the canon, internalize the socio-moral truths that others have deemed will be good for us" (p. 88). The third observation is causally related to the first two: adult learners may learn how to use some of the available digital technologies by means of the ICT-centered training they receive without really attaining functional and critical digital literacy. "[T]he limited nature of much so-called digital learning," as David Buckingham terms it (2007, p. 15), frequently creates the semblance of the attainment of digital literacy (Anderson et al., 2009) but leaves learners unable to employ the tools of digital creation across their lifeworld, critically, and to their benefit.

The above observations triggered a process of investigating creative, interdisciplinary ways of supporting at-risk adult learners<sup>2</sup> to gain access to the tools of digital creation so that they can gain also access to "the social capital on offer" across economic and cultural divides (Anderson et al., 2012). The author's experimentation, in the same period as the said observations were made, with forms of integration of digital technologies in English as a foreign language (EFL) courses and theatre education courses almost inevitably oriented the investigation toward the nascent field of digital theatre in education. These inquiring efforts issued into a postdoctoral research project that centers on developing, applying, and assessing an alternative methodology for the teaching and learning of English literacy in which strategies from theatre/drama-based pedagogies together with material from the resources of myth reception are interlaced with digital means and conventions. The methodology seeks to facilitate the learners' acquisition of English language skills, promote their digital literacy and cultural literacy, while also enhancing their role as active agents and co-creators of culture. The transformative learning theory and the multiliteracies pedagogy were ideally fitted to buttress the design and application of the methodology as well as advance the foregoing objectives.

## **Literature Review**

### **Digital Theatre in Education**

The influence of the digital paradigm and its sweeping progress in the past four decades led to an interesting development in the field of theatre in education, which can be broadly defined as the theory and practice that revolves around the application of theatre/drama-based pedagogies and methods for the teaching and learning of various subjects besides the subject of theatre/drama itself. The experimentation of theatre in education, combined with the integration of digital technologies, dates back to the 1990s (Anderson et al., 2009). Gradually, as the synergy between theatre and digital "toolboxes" for educational purposes began gaining momentum as well as some theoretical and conceptual grounding, digital theatre in education emerged as a distinct subfield. Today, digital theatre in education (DTiE) usually refers to the integration of digital theatre methods in diverse educational settings as well as the integration of digital learning environments, processes, and objects in theatre education (Anderson et al. 2009; Anderson, Cameron, & Sutton, 2012).

All around the world, more and more educational interventions resting on time-tested theatre/drama-based methods, such as process drama, materialize through digital technologies (Carroll & Cameron, 2003). Although most of these early interventions were designed to inspire learning

about theatre/drama, the past decade has witnessed an increase of interventions designed to encourage learning about other subjects: from social sciences and history to language arts and foreign languages, with the method of process drama being preferred in language-centered interventions (Bowell & Heap 2013, 2017; Winston, 2012; Winston & Stinson, 2014). In these cases, digital means are combined with strategies belonging to the repertoire of theatre-grown educational approaches in order to support the learning community, the learning process, and the achievement of set learning outcomes within the frame of diverse educational programmes and contexts.

Although the field has not yet received ample theorization, a recent volume by Cleio Fanouraki (2016) has shown that its practices are grounded in some of the most significant theories of learning, from Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Fanouraki convincingly argues that influential approaches to education such as those found in Carl Rogers' person-centered model of education (1989), Ira Shor's and Paulo Freire's transformative pedagogy (1987), or Jonathan Neelands' work on theatre/drama pedagogies (1984), fortify the field's theoretical underpinnings. With a talent for advocating the field's solid premises and breadth of potential, Neelands (2009) has claimed that it can fulfill the need of embracing and integrating "the benign and empowering uses of technologies" to further learner-centered and pro-social objectives (xiv). For Neelands, using new technologies in their "representations of a technology-saturated world," DTiE interventions can help learners make sense of as well as "more accurately describe and communicate their lived experiences and responses" to "a world in which the human and the technological, the real and the mediated have become increasingly blurred and inseparable" (xiv). Thus, they will have more meaningful opportunities to develop ownership, responsibility, and control "over the means and uses of technology" and to, ultimately, become critically aware of the ways in which new technologies shape their personal and social identities, as well as of ways to become their own authors and authority (xv).

Interestingly, this is a constellation of objectives aligned with the core ideas of transformative learning theory, as set down by its architect, Jack Mezirow (1991a); it is to these ideas—which we will return to—that Neelands nods, albeit unintentionally. Several contemporary studies that describe and document the results of DTiE interventions targeting adult learners lend credence to Neelands' arguments. Indicatively, the research studies of Kirsty McGeoch and John Hughes (2009) and McGeoch (2012), based on interventions where theatre and digital tools are jointly used in the frame of English as foreign language education, showcase the multiple benefits learners reaped therefrom. The success of such intrepid endeavors served as an additional incentive for the research project that is presented in what follows.

### **Myth Reception in DTiE**

Besides the aforementioned studies, the author's prior research on the theatre reception of ancient Greek tragic myth and on the myth's educational uses in applied theatre contexts furnished inspiration for this project, and, specifically, for the incorporation of material from the resources of myth reception in the methodology. Moreover, two recent studies which testified to the benefits entailed in the inclusion of the said material in DTiE interventions shored up the project's orientation and the methodology's composition. These are the "Antigone Project" by Lynn Winters, Theresa Rogers, and Andrew Schofield (2006) and "E-Antigone through Drama Education with the Use of Digital Technologies" by Fanouraki (2017). Both succeeded in fostering the language literacy (English and Greek respectively) and cultural literacy of non-adult participants through an inventive combination of the myth of Antigone and theatre-grown techniques which were digitally supported and enhanced. More than that, evidently influenced by the legacy of transformative pedagogy, both sought to empower participants by cultivating their critical (self)consciousness through but also toward novel forms of meaning-making and representation. Therein the author discerned sound possibilities of bringing myth-inflected DTiE into fruitful alliance with the theory of transformative learning and the multiliteracies pedagogy, on whose special place in the project we will expound in the section about the intervention's design.

In light of the above, the decision was made to build the methodology for this research project on the "intersection" of process drama strategies, digital technologies, and mythical, or myth-derived, material, but also to orient it toward adult learning and attend to the latter's particularities and challenges. In our project, the myth-derived material was intended to offer—and did offer—various

con/texts and themes for inciting critical reflection and self-reflection among the participants, which would also draw on their capital of knowledge and experience in accordance with the key tenets of transformative theory (Mezirow, 2000), thus enhancing the educational and sociocultural import of the endeavor. It was also intended to offer revisionary approaches and patterns that would enrich the corpus of strategies available in the method of process drama, thus rendering the learning experience more aesthetically and poetically rewarding for the participants, and, by extension, strengthening their commitment to learning so that they could gain more from it as a result (Bowell & Heap, 2013).

### **The Intervention: Methodological Caveats**

#### **Context and Pretext**

Once the first application of the methodology was set up in a Greek Second Chance School—specifically, a group of 16 at-risk adult learners in their second year of study<sup>3</sup>—and the intervention was put into action, the stage of diagnosis of the learners’ educational needs revealed that the myth of Antigone was more familiar than other myths among them: 13 out of 16 participants were cognizant of the myth’s basic narrative core. Soon after the completion of the stage of diagnosis and the subsequent adjustment of the content of the intervention to its findings—and in accordance with the school’s specific context, material/technical resources, and timetable—the myth of Antigone was introduced in the initial session to the group. It is worth stressing that, since that first session, the group was framed as a learning community in which the facilitator/researcher and the students would act as collaborative learners, in keeping with a principle central to both the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991b) and the multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope & Pullen, 2009).

The myth served as what Cecily O’Neill terms “pretext” (1995, p. 20); that is, as the launching strategy, “source or impulse for the drama process” that the learning community pursued in the course of the intervention (Taylor & Warner, 2006, pp. 5–6). To borrow from Philip Taylor’s and Christine Warner’s (2006) analysis of the specific functions of the pretext in process drama, throughout the intervention, the myth of Antigone would “[ring] up the curtain by framing the participants effectively and economically in roles that have a firm association with the potential action”; it suggested purposes and tasks; it had a structural function as it set up expectations, hinted at previous events and foreshadowed future ones, established patterns, implied roles, and a setting; it set in motion “the weaving of drama,” feeding into the collaborative development of a (non-written) dramatic text by the participants; and it gave birth to various themes on which the participants reflected (pp. 6–7). Once the functions of the myth as pre-text were explained to the participants in the initial session, and they understood that during the intervention they would basically attempt to develop a revision of the myth through theatre/drama-based strategies and digital technologies using the English language, most were keen to contribute to the creative endeavor. By the end of the initial session, they had all consensually agreed to transpose the myth of Antigone to their familiar contemporary context: their version of the myth would be set in a dystopic, fictional Greece in the year 2020.

Here we should underline that the decision of the entire group to join in the endeavor was positively surprising considering the findings that issued from the diagnosis. The latter comprised a short questionnaire to capture each learner’s educational profile; adapted EFL placement tests to assess their level of English literacy with respect to hard skills; another more extensive and comprehensive questionnaire to find out more about their level of English literacy with respect to soft skills, digital literacy, and cultural literacy; as well as semi-structured interviews to probe into the above areas of competence, but also to focus more closely on their perspectives on culture and their sense of self within contemporary culture. The analysis that ensued revealed that, in the terms set by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages<sup>4</sup>, only 3 of 16 participants were above the level of “Basic User” in English literacy, while the other 3 could be described as “Independent Users.” Regarding their level of digital literacy, determined in the light of E.U.’s Digital Competence Framework<sup>5</sup>, 12 out of 16 participants had low and only 4 relatively high digital skills. To this we should add that 5 of them stated during the diagnosis that they were not interested in the incorporation of digital technologies in educational practices and admitted that they were negatively predisposed toward that prospect. As for the participants’ cultural literacy, for which the project drew on the E.U.’s Cultural Analysis Framework<sup>6</sup> while also including a theatre-specific dimension, the group

was found to hold diverse but relatively positive attitudes toward some of the central components of cultural literacy, such as cultural heritages, tolerance, inclusion, empathy, and social responsibility. However, none of the participants had prior experience of the theatre's use in education, 12 stated that they have little to no knowledge about theatre in general, and 4 that they were not interested in using theatre tools for educational purposes and that they could not see how theatre/drama-based strategies could promote learning and the acquisition of useful skills. Still, even those who expressed disinterest in the use of digital technologies and theatre tools resolved by the end of the initial session to give this unfamiliar learning experience a chance.

### **Design**

Within the frame of the intervention, application of the methodology was designed to consist of a series of 40-minute sessions, or sequence of linked episodes in process drama terminology (Bowell & Heap, 2013, p. 116). Throughout the episodes the participants actively engaged in the development of a multimodal and transmedial revision of the myth of Antigone using an integrated combination of the English language, process drama strategies, material drawn from the reception of the myth, and digital technologies. The language content of the episodes corresponded to the regular English literacy curriculum the school had planned for second-year students, but went beyond it to accommodate the diverse language needs of the participants in the mixed-ability group, as well as align with the thematic foci of the episodes and the more general thematic content of the intervention.

### ***Process Drama***

With respect to the method of process drama that was employed, the design drew on the six principles of planning set forth by Pamela Bowell and Brian S. Heap (2013), which are presented, for reasons of clarity, in Table 1:

Table 1

#### *Process Drama Planning Principles of the Design*

<b>Principle of planning</b>	<b>Translation into the design</b>
<b>Theme</b>	The plural and myth-inflected learning area.
<b>Dramatic context</b>	The fictional circumstances in which the themes are explored.
<b>Roles</b>	The roles that the facilitator and the learners take on in the drama, while engaged in dramatic playing and improvisations in order to explore the themes and propel the action forward.
<b>Frame</b>	The point of view of different roles, the communication frames they shape, and the dramatic tension they generate as a result.
<b>Sign</b>	All signs used to engage and stimulate learners by bringing significance to the drama, such as learning objects, including digital technologies, images, sounds, documents, and so on.
<b>Strategies</b>	Different ways of working based on performance forms and known theatre/drama-based learning techniques, that make the drama happen, move it forward, and enable contemplation on it and on the themes explored through it.

The foregoing principles of planning were used along Julie Dunn and John O' Toole's template for designing process dramas (2002), which includes three phases: In the phase of initiation, "a shared belief in roles and situations is negotiated with the students" (Piazzoli, 2012, p. 174). Although the phase of initiation corresponded more closely to the content of the initial session, where the pre-text was introduced and the learning/dramatic contract formed in collaboration with the learners, each individual episode included a brief initiation unit to remind learners of the content of the previous session/episode, resume the pre-text, facilitate their language and drama warm up, and

prepare them for what would follow. In the experiential phase, the participants experienced the interweaving of process drama strategies, digital means and conventions, as well as language learning and training. The theatre tools, technologies, and language items introduced and employed during this phase in each episode were adjusted to the creative and linguistic input of the learners. The reflective phase, where participants “process their experiences to make meaning from them” (Dunn & O’Toole, 2002, p. 24), was designed according to Erica C. Piazzoli’s (2012) approach to reflection in process drama. It involved four types of reflection exercised via a variety of means, as Table 2 shows.

Table 2

*Multifold Reflection Built into the Design*

<b>Type of reflection</b>	<b>Means</b>
<b>Dramatic reflection</b>	De-briefing activities, with the participants sometimes in role (“writing and/or speaking the thoughts of characters”) and sometimes out of role (“through discussion and analysis”), either collectively, in pairs, or individually (pp. 179–180).
<b>Linguistic reflection</b>	Analysis and review of the language items that were introduced and/or emerged during the drama facilitated by the teacher/researcher; provision of relevant feedback by the latter; exchange of peer-feedback; formation of conceptual links and patterns; and, when pertinent, introduction of useful and usable theory in relation to “grammar structures, semantic areas and idiomatic expressions,” enabled by the teacher/researcher (p. 180).
<b>Intercultural reflection</b>	Written and oral activities as well as informed discussions that pivoted on the participants’ views, assumptions, and values on various sociocultural issues related to the themes explored.
<b>Digital reflection</b> <sup>7</sup>	Provision of feedback by the teacher/researcher and peers regarding the use of digital technologies by the participants, the technologies’ contribution to learning, as well as critical review of other uses they have in contemporary culture.

It is worth noting that the reflective phase weaved in and through the episodes, usually occurring between units of action, to add depth and meaning to the experiential phase and thus promote learning.

***Multiliteracies pedagogy***

The influence of the multiliteracies pedagogy and of the transformative learning theory, both of which have been pivotal to the development of the methodology, was clearest in the experiential and reflective phase of the intervention. Aligned with the cornerstone ideas of the multiliteracies pedagogy, the design as well as the “in action” unfolding of the intervention placed emphasis on the multimodal and multilingual making and representation of meaning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a). The participants were encouraged and facilitated throughout to engage in meaning-making processes involving different modes, genres, discourses, and registers. Moreover, the intervention drew on the

model of knowledge processes that Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope have proposed (2015). Specifically, it incorporated activities and tasks corresponding to the categories of “pedagogical moves” that the scholars have identified and whose interweaving they have theorized as conducive to effective learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, pp. 15–22). These are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

*Knowledge Processes Accommodated by the Design*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Pedagogical moves</b>
<b>Experiencing</b>	<i>The known</i>	Drawing on existing knowledge, experience, and familiar forms of representation.
	<i>The new</i>	Encountering unfamiliar situations, texts, and information.
<b>Conceptualizing</b>	<i>By naming</i>	Categorizing information and concept development.
	<i>With theory</i>	Shaping interpretative frameworks and building mental models.
<b>Analyzing</b>	<i>Functionally</i>	Establishing functional relations and figuring out connections.
	<i>Critically</i>	Interrogating motives, interests, and thinking processes.
<b>Applying</b>	<i>Appropriately</i>	Using knowledge and skills in predictable and structured ways.
	<i>Creatively</i>	Using knowledge and skills in new and innovative ways to reflect learners’ needs and interests.

The intervention was also based on the view of multiliteracies pedagogy on the designing of meaning according to which the latter has three aspects (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a):

1. “Available Designs,” found/findable representation forms and resources of meaning that the learners already possess and those that are introduced in the learning process through the materials selected to support it (pp. 175–176).
2. The “Designing” learners do, or the work they perform in the process of representing meanings “to oneself in sense-making processes such as reading, listening or viewing, or to the world in communicative processes such as writing, speaking,” or creating multimodal/transmedial texts; how they “appropriate and transform Available Designs” (p. 177).
3. “The Redesigned,” or “how, through the act of Designing, the [social] world and the person are transformed” as “new resources for meaning” enrich “the open and dynamic play of subjectivities and meanings” (pp. 177–178).

The theory of transformative learning resonated with that last point, but it also served to qualify it in more adult-proper terms.

### ***Theory of transformative learning***

From the point of view of the multiliteracies pedagogy, the transformative potential of a learning process along the aforementioned lines resides in that “[t]he act of Designing leaves the designer Redesigned” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a, p. 177). “As the designer makes meanings, they exert their subjectivity in the representational process, and as these meanings are always new (‘insights,’ ‘expressions,’ ‘perspectives’), they remake themselves”; that is, their subjectivity is transformed (p. 178). Although the theory of transformative learning builds on the idea of learning as transformation, too, it places emphasis on the sociocultural dimension of adult learning, while also taking into account the factors that render adult learning distinctive from children’s learning (Mezirow, 1991b, 2000). According to Mezirow (2000), learning can contribute to the transformation of adults’ subjectivity by transforming their “taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning

perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (pp. 7–8). By extension, it can even contribute to beneficial social change over the long run (1991b, 2000). But in order to do that, it should engage adult learners in critically reflective discourse and critical (self)reflection upon (a) the content of an experience or area of concern; (b) the process by which the latter is being interpreted; and, most importantly, (c) on the underlying premises, beliefs, and assumptions on which current interpretative schemas hinge (1991b, 2000). A learning process that begins from a disorienting dilemma, or an experience that the person cannot integrate into the fabric of their lives due to the lack or inadequacies of existing frames of reference, and that involves that person in reflective discourse and in the exercise of critical (self)reflection can enable them to transform their current habits of mind and points of view which, due to the influence of various “biographical, historical, cultural” forces, compose their frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 16–17).

Although the research project and the methodology were already strongly invested into the tenets of transformative theory, the need to act upon them in the intervention was confirmed by the findings that issued from the stage of diagnosis. It became plainly evident both during the latter, but also during the initial session, that the combination of EFL education, theatre, and digital tools in the same educational program that was put forward to this group of learners constituted a disorienting experience, especially since most (12/16) held conservative assumptions about how teaching and learning were supposed to occur, owing to previous, negatively-colored educational experiences. As we have already noted, some were even disinterested in the use of theatre/drama-based strategies and digital technologies in their education. Thereby, every effort was made to lend the intervention the features and import of a transformative learning process along the tracks of the transformative learning theory, by setting up the conditions for reflective discourse to take place and by including numerous stimulæ and opportunities for the participants to exercise critical (self)reflection. Yet, reflective discourse and critical (self)reflection as they developed in the episodes were not only oriented toward the integration of English language learning, theatre and digital tools—which lied at the heart of the disorienting experience—and the specific meaning-making function(s) of each component in the units of action comprising the episodes. They were also oriented toward the various themes that were explored through(out) the participants’ multimodal and transmedial attempt to revise the myth of Antigone by all available means and in keeping with their concerns and interests; themes which related to the cultivation of the learners’ cultural literacy and sense of self in contemporary culture. In other words, the reflective phase of the intervention, on which we elaborated earlier, was purposefully geared to activate and sustain a transformative learning process targeting both learning and epistemic assumptions, and sociolinguistic, psychological, and aesthetic ones (Mezirow, 2000).

### **Findings: Transformative Experiences**

Although the intervention did not entail a one-to-one correspondence between the unfolding of the episodes and the progression of the transformative learning process (TLP) with respect to all areas of interest along the ten phases which Mezirow has identified (1991b, 2000), certain correspondences did emerge. These were more obvious in the case of the participants’ response to the integration discussed above; that is, to an interdisciplinary, multimodal, and transmedial educational praxis, with which all of them were unfamiliar. Table 4 presents the said correspondences drawing on the design<sup>8</sup> and on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data collected during the intervention’s monitoring and formative assessment through: video recordings, the participants’ portfolios, the facilitator/researcher’s self-assessment rubrics, and observation rubrics documenting the participants’ changing perspectives on English language and literacy, digital technology and literacy, theatre, culture, and their own sense of self in contemporary culture. However, it should be stressed that the response of the participants was not uniform but, rather, manifestly variant. Table 4 reflects this by also indicating the number of participants who transitioned from one phase into the next.



Table 4

*The Intervention in Terms of the TLP*

<b>Sessions</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Adapted TLP Phase</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>Initial Session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Negotiation of learning/dramatic contract</li> <li>▪ Launching the pre-text via anglophone digital story (animation) about the myth of Antigone</li> <li>▪ Critical analysis of the myth; reimagining/reconfiguration of the characters of Antigone, Creon, Polynices, Ismene, Haemon in small groups, using material from the digital story</li> </ul>	The participants acknowledge and start processing the disorienting dilemma/experience.	16/16
<b>Episode 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical and linguistic analysis of the “Ode to Man” based on a digital video from a contemporary theatre production of Sophocles’ <i>Antigone</i></li> <li>▪ Creation and presentation of a whole-group chorus-like structured improvisation, which draws on the above material and involves the participants’ interaction with it; critical reflection on the improvisation</li> </ul>	They examine their negative feelings that result from the discrepancy between what they know/expect/assume to be true about teaching and learning and the new experience.	16/16
<b>Episode 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical and linguistic analysis of the phenomenon of civil war and related language items in connection with the participants’ unfolding revision of the myth of Antigone based on the “Ode to Man” and on a digital video with the facilitator in the role of narrator</li> </ul>	They perform critical assessment of their existing epistemic assumptions and assumptions about teaching and learning.	14/16

Table 4 Continued

*The Intervention in Terms of TLP*

<b>Sessions</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Adapted TLP Phase</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>Episode 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical reflection on digital images about civic and cultural life before and after the civil war</li> <li>▪ Creation and presentation of small-group structured improvisations based on the above images, which function as digital scenography, using the “freeze frame” technique; critical reflection on the improvisations</li> </ul>	They perform critical assessment of their existing epistemic assumptions and assumptions about teaching and learning.	14/16
<b>Episode 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical analysis of “before the civil war” and “after the civil war” digital photographs based on the improvisations in Episode 2 in connection with the revision</li> <li>▪ Creation and presentation of digital dramatic comic strips in small groups using Microsoft PowerPoint, in which the participants add dialogue to the above photographs; critical reflection on the task and its products</li> </ul>	<p>They negotiate their discontent and its sources with the facilitator and the participants; the process of transformation of existing assumptions is shared among the members of the learning community.</p> <p>They explore options for new or alternative assumptions about teaching and learning, roles in the learning process, relationships (with the facilitator, the other participants, the material), actions within and approaches to the unfamiliar learning experience.</p>	13/16
<b>Episode 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical reflection on the post-civil war context of their revision via digital videos with the facilitator in the role of narrator (1) and Creon (2); creation and presentation of individual semi-structured improvisations centered on citizens’ diverse responses to Creon’s decision to forbid Polynices’ burial in which the participants-as-citizens interact with the second digital video</li> </ul>	They explore options for new or alternative assumptions about teaching and learning, roles in the learning process, relationships (with the facilitator, the other participants, the material), actions within and approaches to the unfamiliar learning experience.	13/16

Table 4 Continued

*The Intervention in Terms of TLP*

<b>Sessions</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Adapted TLP Phase</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>Episode 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creation and presentation of digital “roles of the wall” for Creon and Antigone to elaborate on/add depth to the two characters in small groups using Microsoft Word, online search engines, and online interactive dictionaries; critical reflection on the task and its products</li> </ul>	They explore options for new or alternative assumptions about teaching and learning, roles in the learning process, relationships (with the facilitator, the other participants, the material), actions within and approaches to the unfamiliar learning experience.	13/16
<b>Episode 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creation and presentation of electronic correspondence between Antigone and Creon on the subject of Polynices’ burial in small groups, using free web-based email services, online search engines, and online interactive dictionaries; critical reflection on the task and its products</li> <li>▪ Critical and linguistic analysis of digital video in which Antigone (facilitator in role) and Ismene (colleague in role) disagree on how to respond to Creon’s decision; creative reinterpretation and reconstruction of the dialogue in the direction of negotiation and reconciliation to elaborate on the characters and their relationship in pairs; critical reflection on the task and its products</li> </ul>	<p>They plan courses of action, namely ways to proceed in the learning process and develop the revision using all available resources and means, in which they act upon the options that have emerged; they take initiatives, express a sense of ownership about their learning, and demonstrate greater commitment to it.</p> <p>They actively seek to acquire knowledge and skills that will enable them to put their plans into practice, or act upon the options that have emerged; they experiment more freely with the resources and means; their agency in looking for new sources of information to use is foregrounded.</p>	11/16
			10/16

Table 4 Continued

*The Intervention in Terms of TLP*

<b>Sessions</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Adapted TLP Phase</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>Episode 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical and linguistic analysis on Antigone's and Ismene's hidden thoughts as opposed to their actual words, based on the material of Episode 5 and on the participants' own insights; creation and presentation of small group improvisations for which the participants draw on their analysis and in which they interact with a digital music background</li> </ul>	They actively seek to acquire knowledge and skills that will enable them to put their plans into practice, or act upon the options that have emerged; they experiment more freely with the resources and means; their agency in looking for new sources of information to use is foregrounded.	10/16
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creation and presentation of a whole-group improvisation on Antigone's dilemma, based on the formulation of arguments in favor and against her compliance with Creon's decision, using the "corridor of conscience" technique and interaction with a digital music background; critical reflection on the improvisation</li> </ul>	They start to provisionally put their plans into practice; that is, act upon the new options that have emerged; their experimentation with the resources and means becomes bolder; the learning that takes place within the context of the intervention is extrapolated and starts influencing their out-of-school life and their more general outlook on teaching and learning and the latter's impact on life.	10/16
<b>Episode 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical and linguistic analysis of a digital mind map about the concepts of conflict and negotiation; critical reflection on the drama in relation to the above concepts and their derivatives</li> </ul>	They start to provisionally put their plans into practice; that is, act upon the new options that have emerged; their experimentation with the resources and means becomes bolder; the learning that takes place within the context of the intervention is extrapolated and starts influencing their out-of-school life and their more general outlook on teaching and learning and the latter's impact on life.	10/16

Table 4

*The Intervention in Terms of TLP*

<b>Sessions</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Adapted TLP Phase</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>Episode 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction of the digital technology of the blog and of “Antigone’s blog,” which serves as her digital journal; creation and presentation of blog entries by the participants in the collective role of Antigone in small groups; critical reflection on the task and its products</li> </ul>	They actively seek to build competence and self-confidence in the new approaches, perspectives, and assumptions they have developed while practicing.	9/16
<b>Episode 8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical and linguistic analysis of the literal and symbolic use of five objects (red scarf, tan with dry soil, pitcher with wine, bouquet of withered flowers, some incense) in familiar and foreign cultural traditions by small-groups using the “objects and transformations” technique</li> <li>▪ Critical reflection on a digital excerpt from a documentary about ancient Greek burial practices in relation to contemporary practices, those of other cultural heritages, and their contribution to world culture; online search for more information on the above; documentation of findings in visually enriched “reports” using Microsoft PowerPoint; formulating connection between the objects and the drama using the “compound stimulus” technique</li> </ul>	<p>They actively seek to build competence and self-confidence in the new approaches, perspectives, and assumptions they have developed while practicing.</p> <p>They express their commitment to reintegrate into life on the basis of the conditions dictated by the new perspectives they have acquired.</p>	<p>9/16</p> <p>6/16</p>

Table 4

*The Intervention in Terms of TLP*

Sessions	Focus	Adapted TLP Phase	Number of Participants
<b>Episode 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction of the “mystery” of Polynices’ secret burial via a digital video with the facilitator in the role Creon’s guard; whole-group improvisation on the guard’s interrogation with the participants in the role of forensic experts</li> <li>▪ Critical and linguistic analysis of a digital video featuring the facilitator in the role of eyewitness to the burial; figuring the testimony’s connection with the five objects of Episode 8 and with the burial practices discussed therein using the “compound stimulus” technique</li> <li>▪ Creation and presentation of whole-group improvisation in the collective role of Antigone centered on the ritual use of each object, which involves the participants’ interaction with the digital video of the eyewitness’ testimony during the burial’s creative re-enactment; critical reflection on the improvisation</li> </ul>	They express their commitment to reintegrate into life on the basis of the conditions dictated by the new perspectives they have acquired.	6/16

At some point before the eighth episode, the upsurge of the COVID-19 pandemic started threatening the regular operation of the school and of all other educational institutions in Greece, as in other countries around the world. By the ninth episode we expected their shutdown to be announced soon, which it did, thus interrupting the intervention earlier than scheduled (the initial plan provided for sixteen episodes in total). Nevertheless, the support of the school’s principal, of digital technology, and, most importantly, of the participants themselves allowed for a final, summative assessment to be conducted smoothly. The data that was gathered while monitoring the intervention and in its formative assessment, together with those gathered in the final assessment by means of questionnaires (digitally delivered, completed, and collected), semi-structured interviews (by phone and the *Viber* platform), and the participants’ creative and reflective responses to the learning experience, permitted the author to draw sound conclusions despite the abrupt stop to the intervention’s progression.

According to the findings of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the collected data, the short-term, English literacy-focused DTiE intervention did involve transformative experiences for adult learners with regard to their perspectives on English language, digital technology, theatre,

culture, and their own sense of self in contemporary culture. Their perspectives on the said areas were, in fact, transformed to a significant extent. Although a detailed exposition of the findings that pertain to the development of the participants' knowledge and specific skills with regard to English, digital, and cultural literacy falls outside the scope of this paper, it is worth noting, before turning to their transformed perspectives, that 50% to 75% of the learners displayed marked improvement in the use of English literacy (4) hard skills and 81.25% to 100% of them improvement in a range of (7) English literacy soft skills. Additionally, 43.75% to 75% of the learners displayed improvement in the use of a range of (7) digital literacy hard and transversal skills corresponding to different competences. With respect to cultural literacy, 37.5% to 81.25% of them displayed improved ability to act upon a range of (7) skills, from acknowledging, respecting, and be willing to better understand other cultural heritages and values (37.5%) to critically reflecting on the influence, reception, and interaction of the Greek culture with other cultures (81.25%). The findings are quite promising when it comes to the transformed perspectives noted above:

#### ***Perspectives on English language and literacy***

- Due to the contribution of their learning experience in the context of the intervention, 13 out of 16 participants (81.25%) developed more positive perspectives toward learning the English language, training in English literacy, as well as toward the benefits involved therein in relation to different spheres of life and activity.
- 14 out of 16 participants (87.5%) would now prefer EFL education targeting themselves and others (including their children) to incorporate theatre/drama-based strategies over conventional EFL education methodologies.
- 16 out of 16 participants (100%) would now prefer EFL education targeting themselves and others (including their children) to incorporate digital technologies over conventional EFL education methodologies.

#### ***Perspectives on digital technology and literacy***

- 10 out of 16 participants (62.5%) developed more positive perspectives toward the benefits involved in the use of digital technology in various spheres of life and activity. Among them, 37.5% acknowledged that digital technology can facilitate their participation to social initiatives and actions of various kinds and 43.5% a more meaningful and purposeful access to cultural life in general.
- 10 out of 16 participants (62.5%) developed a more critical understanding of the challenges entailed in the use of digital technology across different domains.
- 14 out of 16 participants (87.5%) developed more positive perspectives toward the creative integration of digital technology in all levels of education targeting themselves and others (including their children).

#### ***Perspectives on theatre***

- 10 out of 16 participants (62.5%) developed more positive perspectives toward the benefits involved in the use of theatre/drama-based methods and/or techniques as educational tools besides artistic tools.
- 11 out of 16 participants (68.75%) developed more positive perspectives toward the creative integration of theatre/drama-based methods and/or techniques in all levels of education targeting themselves and others (including their children).
- 8 out of 16 participants (50%) found the connection between their unfolding revision of the myth of Antigone and the real world on which we reflected in each episode was the most constructive and personally rewarding component of the entire learning experience.

#### ***Perspectives on culture***

- 7 out of 16 participants (43.5%) developed a far more profound and broad understanding of contemporary culture, while 6 out of 16 (37.5%) an enriched and modified understanding of contemporary culture.

- 10 out of 16 participants (62.5%) actively reassessed and explicitly reconsidered prevalent ideological threads woven in and through contemporary culture.
- 9 out of 16 participants (56.25%) found that they came substantially closer to the Greek heritage, gaining a deeper and more intimate understanding of it.

#### *Perspectives on one's own place in contemporary culture*

- 12 out of 16 participants (75%) found that the learning experience reinforced their role as cultural agents in contemporary culture by making them think, feel, and act as co-creators of a significant cultural product.
- 5 out of 16 participants (31.25%) actively reassessed and explicitly reconsidered their stance toward their own potential to function as cultural agents and co-creators of culture.
- 6 out of 16 participants (37.5%) committed to find more outlets for acting upon their role as cultural agents based on the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they developed during the learning experience.

The above results, which form part of the larger corpus of findings that was derived from the analysis of intervention-based data, testify to the multiple affordances of digital theatre in education. If an intervention hosted by an under-resourced, albeit very hospitable, adult education institution targeting at-risk learners—an intervention applied amidst the onslaught of a world-wide health crisis no less—entailed transformative experiences and other significant benefits for the participants involved, one cannot but be optimistic as to the outcomes of more long-term applications of the methodology in more favorable circumstances. The interventions that have been planned for the next school year in different Second Chance Schools are expected to enrich the current corpus of findings, if not opening it up to new directions now that, under the pressure of the pandemic, the educational praxis in both public and private educational institutions invest more and more in the potential of the “phygital” mode to promote not only learning but also a much-needed critical sociocultural awareness.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we foregrounded the potential of digital theatre in education to support adult learning about other subjects besides the subject of theatre/drama, namely English as foreign language education, even in more demanding educational settings targeting at-risk learners. For this purpose, we focused on an educational intervention that was applied in a public Second Chance School as part of an ongoing postdoctoral research project that seeks to develop, implement, and assess an alternative methodology for the promotion of English literacy that also responds to the increasingly urgent need of equipping at-risk adult learners with transferable digital literacy and cultural literacy skills. The methodology on which we elaborated brings together theatre/drama-based strategies, specifically those commonly associated with the method of process drama, material from the resources of myth reception, and digital technologies, but it is also informed by the pedagogy of multiliteracies and the transformative learning theory. Based on the said methodology, the intervention engaged a group of 16 adult participants in the multimodal and transmedial revision of the Greek tragic myth of Antigone through an integrated combination of the above means.

The analysis of data collected in the stage of diagnosis, in the process of monitoring the intervention, and in its formative and summative assessment revealed that the intervention not only contributed to the improvement of the English, digital, and cultural literacy skills of learners, but it also involved transformative experiences with regard to their perspectives on English language and literacy, digital technology and literacy, theatre, culture, and their own place (or sense of self) in contemporary culture. By the end of the intervention, and despite its interruption under the pressure the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant number of the participants had reassessed and reconsidered prior assumptions they held in relation to the foregoing areas of interest, while some of them manifested transformed perspectives on them. Although only 6 of the 16 learners expressed strong commitment to take further action on the basis of their transformed perspectives, especially those that



concern their sense of self as cultural agents and co-creators of culture, we interpret these findings as far from negligible in view of the learners' existing frames of reference, background and the challenges they face due to the latter.

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Citation: Delikonstantinidou, A. (2021). Transformative learning streams running through digital theatre in adult education: The case of a second chance education school, *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 8(2), 81–99.

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to the Greek State Scholarship Foundation (IKY) for funding the research project on which the present paper is based and to Dr. Cleio Fanouraki for supporting the project.

<sup>2</sup> We employ Qing Li's and K. A. Edmonds' (2005) description of at-risk adult learners as those with some type of learning barrier, such as learning disabilities or risks, low literacy rates, language barriers, and/or life struggles, who have not completed their secondary education due to one or more of these barriers (p. 144).

<sup>3</sup> Second Chance Schools are educational institutions whose central mission is the fight against the social exclusion of individuals over 18 who did not complete their compulsory education. Their flexible curriculum is aimed at equipping adult learners with basic knowledge and skills, forging positive attitudes toward learning and the ability of learning to learn, as well as facilitating the learners' psychosocial development and access to the labor market. Those who complete the two-year educational programme are awarded a certificate equivalent to secondary school diploma.

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>.

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/measuring-digital-skills-across-eu-eu-wide-indicators-digital-competence>.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://dialls2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/resubmitted-cultural-analysis-framework-with-coversheet-.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Digital reflection was another thread added to enrich Piazzoli's approach to the reflective phase. It revolved around the digital technologies used in each episode and sought to advance the critical digital literacy of the learning community.

<sup>8</sup> Ideas about theatre/drama-based techniques to be adapted to the purposes of the design, some of which are mentioned below, were also drawn by Somers (1980) and Govas (2003).