



ISSUE 3 · MARCH 2022

RLL IN THE CLASSROOM

Featuring RLL instructors, teaching resources,
and other events of interest

Welcome to RLL in the Classroom! This is the March edition of our new monthly newsletter, designed to highlight the great teaching going on around RLL, share ideas and resources, spark discussion, and build community around teaching in the department.

We hope you enjoy!

Juan Arias and Luca Politi
Bok Pedagogy Fellows in RLL



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Spotlight of the month

GIULIA PELLIZZATO

For this month's spotlight, we had the pleasure to sit down with Giulia Pellizzato, Teaching Assistant in Italian.

Having taught for many years in different settings, Giulia reflects on how teaching the Italian language and culture this year continues to enrich her identity as a scholar and an educator. Inspired by the Value-Creation philosophy of the Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Giulia shares her practice of helping students to "make meaning" in the classroom. Leading a one-on-one class this semester with a student with special needs prompts Giulia to reflect critically on enhancing the experiences of all students.

As you will find from her responses to our questions, Giulia is a reflective and generous interlocutor. We are grateful for the chance to learn more about her journey and the ways she has impacted those of her students, and to now share her reflections with you.

Giulia wrote down her responses to our questions. We hope that by reading the interview, you can find inspiration for your own experiences "in the classroom."



"I see my future as inextricably linked to fostering learning as a form of empowerment and emancipation through language and literature"



Giulia, we normally let our guests start by introducing themselves. Other than teaching, what else is going on in your life?

A lot, in fact! I didn't expect my postdoctoral years to be so varied. It is exciting to see how the interests I had as a young student keep unfolding in ways I couldn't foresee at first.

One of the things I enjoy most right now is pursuing a master's in Value-Creating Education for Global Citizenship at DePaul University. While as a researcher and as a scholar I already have space and relationships nurturing my growth, I realized I wanted to invest more time and study for picturing the educator I wanted to become. Based on the schooling I received in Europe, I had a rather clear picture of the professor I didn't want to be, but less so the professor I wanted to become. I am grateful for having been awarded a scholarship that allowed me to start this journey. The late evenings and Sundays I spend in dialogue with professors and my cohort, alongside the time I am teaching and learning here at Harvard, are the moments I am most grateful for.

PREZZOLINI E PARISE: UN'AMICIZIA TRANSOCEANICA

Edizione critica e commentata del carteggio
(1951-1976)

See Giulia's book on the publisher's website



How would you describe yourself to the audience of our newsletter?

In a nutshell, studying has been the ultimate means of emancipation for me, and I see my future as inextricably linked to fostering learning as a form of empowerment and emancipation through language and literature.

My passion for human connections and revealing details led me to work on archives and research literary exchanges from the beginning of my doctoral studies. My research sprang from a transoceanic epistolary friendship which I was able to locate, study, reconstruct, and prepare for publication. In this process I came to focus on the transatlantic circulation of books during the second half of the twentieth century, the transformations and workings of the Italian publishing system, and the women intellectuals and writers who were involved in these processes but don't appear yet (or enough) in scholarship on the topic. I wrote about this in my first monograph, [Prezzolini e Parise: un'amicizia transoceanica](#) [Giuseppe Prezzolini and Goffredo Parise: a transoceanic friendship], which was published a few months ago by Leo S. Olschki.



Working on an epistolary friendship bridging Italy and the United States led me to my present research on transatlantic publishing during the half of the Twentieth century. I am studying the relationships and routes through which post-war Italian fiction reached publishers in the United States, and how geopolitical, cultural, sociological, gendered, and literary factors affected the choice of books to be translated and their reception. Maybe at the beginning of my Ph.D. I wouldn't have been able to articulate it, but it's clear to me now that this work stems from the curiosity to see what literature looks like if we examine it from the vantage point of dialogues and interactions, instead of single individuals and works. It is this research which led me to the United States, first at Brown University and now at Harvard.

Another thing I'm invested in is seeking ways to interact with the general public. After completing my university studies in Italy, I was seeking a way to bring the abilities and the vision I had gained to Italian industry. To my surprise, I found an organization which was already doing what I was dreaming about: working towards spreading humanistic values in management. I became a classroom tutor for this organization, Assoetica, which has pioneered humanistic management in Italy with groundbreaking yearly seminars since 2002. Now, ten years after my first encounter with this organization, and twenty years since its first inception, I continue to collaborate with Assoetica for seminars and dissemination events bringing together literature, value-creating education, and humanistic management.

Working with professionals who are in their thirties, forties, fifties, and sixties made me reflect on what I wish to convey to students when we are in the classroom. I started to ask myself: to what will they look back in search of inspiration one, five, ten, thirty years down the line? Despite my own skepticism and the conflicting demands of today's academia, I believe a university course in the Humanities should be crafted with this timeframe in mind.

"I started to ask myself: to what will they look back in search of inspiration one, five, ten, thirty years down the line?"

So that readers get to know you better, can you give some background about your teaching experience before becoming a Teaching Assistant in RLL?

My previous experience in higher education has mostly to do with literature and research. During my Ph.D., while in Switzerland, I led sections in which students were to analyze literary texts from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Most of the students of those courses would soon teach their own students in high school. In this circumstance, I focused on helping learners become skillful readers, who can reflect critically on their own language as well as their own cultural heritage.



Subsequently, as a postdoctoral fellow of the inter-university transdisciplinary project Transatlantic Transfers: The Italian Presence in Postwar America (1949-1972), I directed the research work of two graduate students. Teaching research in my field of expertise was different! Negotiating between the necessities of maximizing results and ensuring these students had a formative experience made me look back at my Ph.D. from a new perspective. I asked myself what helped me most when I was struggling to establish a research methodology and was dissatisfied with the secondary literature with which I had to work.

I proposed a shared methodology for data collection, a timeline, and set weekly, then biweekly meetings. On these occasions we discussed practical issues, general questions, and further steps. How do we ensure our online bibliographical research is exhaustive? How do we get access to rare materials? How do we interrogate our sources critically? How do we evaluate the accuracy of scholarly work? All these questions were grounded in the work the assistants carried out towards populating an online Atlas of transatlantic cultural exchanges, whose literary section I designed during my fellowship for the project.

This is your first year as a Teaching Assistant at Harvard. What are you teaching this year? How is it going? How does it compare to how you thought it would be?

Some of the scholars I admire most taught language in a phase of their career, and they are all incredibly skillful teachers. My understanding was that teaching language had to do something with this, so I was really looking forward to teaching language this year. I am having so much fun! So far I have taught introductory and intermediate courses.

For sure, a key element in my positive experience has been the teamwork environment that is fostered in the Italian section. One can be the most creative and committed teacher in the world, but at some point we all reach our maximum capacity and struggle to move forward, especially during the second half of the semester. Those are the moments in which sharing and asking make the difference. During the fall term I was lucky enough to collaborate with two experienced TAs, Peter Lieberman and Elisa Tragni Maloney, who were always gracious in offering advice and sharing their ideas.

A BETA VERSION OF THE ONLINE ATLAS
IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#)



Another thing I particularly appreciate about teaching language is that it's allowing me to challenge what I'm learning in my graduate studies of education with a healthy dose of practice. Sometimes I can get just one step away from finding a good synthesis of what I wish to do and how to do it effectively. That's when being in dialogue with my course head, Chiara Trebaiocchi, is most precious. There's something powerful in thinking and problem-solving together. The result is always more creative than what I can think about myself and dissolves the sense of burden I sometimes feel.

I've been working intentionally on a few elements, based on my studies in education and pedagogy. A concept that I find fascinating is that of Value-Creation, as the Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) defined it. According to Makiguchi, the goal of education should be the creation of novel, contextually contingent meaning, born from the students' creativity, their engagement with others as well as their circumstances. From Makiguchi's point of view, as long as we're asking students to just memorize what they read we're leading them to become consumers of meaning. If instead we invite them to create a relationship with what they're working with, we're helping them become creators of value, and therefore life-long learners.



Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Japanese educator, author of "The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy," and founder of the Value-Creation Education Society (Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai)



Tell us more about your experiences teaching Italian at the beginning level (Italian 10) versus the intermediate level (Italian 20). What do you aim to help students to create in each?

I would say my underlying goals are the same: I want students to participate in Italian classes that are fun, refreshing, and that give them a sense of discovery. I want them to experience that they're capable, and have opportunities for challenging and reconsidering their own views. Then I have more specific goals: involving students in activities that are meaningful in and of themselves, scaffolding lessons in ways that make students collaborate in "making meaning," and inviting students to be the protagonists and leaders of their learning process. What changes with varying levels of proficiency, of course, is how we achieve these goals.

"I want them to experience that they're capable, and have opportunities for challenging and reconsidering their own views"

During the first half of my Italian 10 class, when students were still at the beginning of their Italian journey and transitioning into the lesson with small talk in Italian felt awkward, I invited them to take turns introducing a "word of the day." At the beginning of class, one of them shared a word of their choice, a couple of examples on how to use it, and why they chose it. Some added an icebreaker question, too! We had funny, practical, touching words of the day. This helped create a sense of community, while each student experimented presenting in Italian and leading the class for a few minutes. Asking to receive materials with a short advance allowed me to check the materials, foster one-on-one exchanges, provide corrective feedback, and find a way to integrate the word of the day in the lesson that would follow.

When students are more proficient, such as in Italian 20, I invite them to collaborate actively in leading the class, using Italian to find out information they're interested in, and sharing their findings with equally interested student colleagues.

For discussing the main features of the genere rosa (romance genre), for example, I proposed to each student to research one of the major authors of the genre and present about them for a few minutes during the following class. Two days later they were engaged in sharing (and listening to) the striking stories of these individuals; during the following discussion, students themselves challenged the picture they previously had of romance as a cluster of commonplaces.



They recognized that some authors used this genre as a safe way to explore dark or taboo topics. They were surprised to find out that even if Italian culture is indeed male-dominated and mostly Catholic, romance literature was a space where resistance to mainstream discourse and innovation against (less optimistically: of) stereotypes took place. That was so much more than I expected.



Le fate ignoranti (2001), presented to students of Italian 20 for the 'rosa' module of the class, is a film by Ferzan Özpetek about a woman who discovers her late husband's male lover and his world of friends.

You are currently teaching two classes of ITA 20, one of which is a traditional group, and the other is a one-on-one class for a student with special needs. Can you say more about this?

I am teaching one-on-one to a deaf student who at the beginning of the semester had reached the entry level proficiency for an intermediate course. We talk to each other, use a notepad for writing and clarifications, and when in need we resort to an interpreter who translates from English into ASL (American Sign Language) and vice versa.

When the course started, we could not lean on any scholarly literature about language learning and teaching in such circumstances – it simply was not there. So I started keeping a teaching journal, seeking to improve the efficacy of my lessons based on daily observations. As I got to know my student better, I realized what an impressive feat their proficiency was, in and of itself: languages of signs are indeed separate languages, with grammar and words of their own. For a deaf person, interacting in a foreign language implies learning two more languages – the one commonly used by people, and the sign language used by the signing community of that specific Country – and constantly translating between four idioms: their first spoken and sign language, their foreign spoken and foreign sign language.



What this student understands when I speak is led by their lip reading ability, which means that they have to guess and infer an impressive amount of information. Words like BosCo (wood), PosTo (place), PosSo (I can), BosToN (no translation needed here) all look alike when we pronounce them. For this reason, I tailor lessons to ground interactions in context more strongly than in regular classes, and I use multiple surfaces (my laptop, our notepad, the blackboard, some handouts) for this student to have as much written linguistic input as possible whenever needed.

I swap videos without accurate subtitles and audios with other materials, and I dedicate more time to specific aspects, which I know are in line with this student's interests. And we allocate time to work on pronunciation, which needs intentionality, as it is a threefold challenge for this student. I dare you to reproduce a sound you cannot hear, while you cannot hear yourself in the act of uttering!

How has this one-on-one teaching experience influenced or challenged you?

Thanks to working with this student I am asking myself more concretely how I can contribute to enhancing my students' experiences. In Democracy and Education (1916), John Dewey wrote that learning means improving the quality of one's experience, or expanding the range and accuracy of one's perception of meanings. Reflecting on this journey, I started to ask myself: how can I help all of my students transform the quality of their experiences for the better?

The first piece of advice I received from my journaling activity was a more intentional focus on creating experiences of self-efficacy. When students feel capable, they can tackle challenging tasks with confidence and humor. As their instructor, I don't need to be a perfect model: I can be their imperfect companion in learning.

In the case of this student, I ask sincere questions about their experiences, and the expertise they developed because of their situation. I engage in activities and games with them. I point out and praise their improvement, which I realized is not always evident to them.

Teaching and learning are interactions with high stakes, which are not just intellectual, but also personal, emotional, and volitional. Emotion and volition need training just as our intellect does, but it's hard to offer this kind of training if we're not involved in a journey of emotional and volitional growth ourselves. Can I respond with a sincere, confidence-inspiring smile when I might feel tiredness and frustration from my students? Can I believe in that student's potential and appeal to it even (or especially) when they doubt it? I'm learning that these are indispensable abilities for the kind of teacher I want to be.



LEARNING MEANS
IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF
ONE'S EXPERIENCE

JOHN DEWEY [PARAPHRASED
BY GIULA].



As an instructor of Italian, what topics or materials have you been eager to address with students which weren't already a focus in the courses?

It depends on the students! During the semester I like to create diversified opportunities for them to express what they're interested in learning more about, as well as bring their interests into the classroom. As I get to know them better, I work on integrating these elements in the curriculum, and I look for possible intersections between their interests and mine.

There is a range of topics I think it's important to present and discuss with students, such as environmental degradation and sustainability, discrimination and inclusivity, Italian local and transnational cultural traditions, relationships between people and the land in which they live. As much as I can, I approach these themes from a perspective that can interest my students.



As an additional criterion, I strive towards offering the broadest possible range of texts in each course: what students look forward to engaging with, such as a newly released movie or series, as well as what they might not even know is there, like a compelling graphic novel, the inspiring story of a historical character, or curious artwork from past ages.

Through working with these topics, what do you hope students can come away from the class with?

More than learning the languages, cultures, histories, and traditions of Italy, I hope to help my students become skilled explorers of complex and partly unknown geographies and find out from where to start when dealing with the unfamiliar. At the end of the class, I hope students will have taken a step forward in this primary and most sophisticated kind of literacy, which will keep developing and will serve them throughout their lives.

"I hope to help my students become skilled explorers of complex and partly unknown geographies and find out from where to start when dealing with the unfamiliar"



In addition to teaching, you are part of RLL’s Environmental Group (RLLEG). Some language classes in our department have recently taken an environmental turn (Spanish 11, Italian 30) What role do environmentalism and sustainability play in your classes and how do you envision a more environmentally focused teaching?

My goal is that each course I teach grants students some opportunities to learn more about environmental issues, and at least one opportunity to reflect collectively on what can be done from a place of agency....

This past semester, with my students of Italian 10, this conversation happened while working with modal verbs. We watched a piece of advertisement featuring a shopping cart, which freed hens from their cages, stopped tractors spreading pesticides, and bought lemonade for workers in the fields. With the help of some colleagues, the shopping cart even brought an iceberg back into its place in Antarctica! We discussed what we believe our shopping habits can and cannot do, critically reviewing the ad. Subsequently we discussed what we think we can, must, and wish to do to impact the planet positively. I was surprised by how some usually silent students were eager to speak and share what they had to say.

As a group, RLLEG elaborated a series of proposals for making our Department more sustainable as well as integrating sustainability in our teaching. Since the beginning of 2021 we held, co-hosted, and co-organized events within the Department, and we collected materials and recordings on a dedicated Canvas site – I’ll be delighted to add you if you email me at gpellizzato@fas.harvard.edu

The shared goal of the faculty involved in the group is to integrate at least one module related to environmental issues in each one of their courses. I hope more and more colleagues will join, until the discussion of environmental topics becomes a distinctive feature of RLL. And I hope the guidelines for sustainability we elaborated can be put into practice, now that we are progressively resuming in-person events.



Click on the image to go to the RLLEG Canvas site





Having shared about yourself and your teaching, what is the dream course you would like to design and teach in the future? How does this course bring together your research and teaching interests?

I would love to teach an advanced course, maybe titled Italian Language and Culture Beyond Borders. I have been working on this project while attending RL 230 (“Teaching Languages, Cultures and Literature”) in the Spring of 2021, and I have kept collecting materials ever since, in fact. Hopefully it will become an Italian 50 course next year!

Students who take advanced courses have a general understanding of Italian culture, which they constructed through what they experience and what they learn to be ‘typically Italian.’ I believe it is indispensable to bring nuance to the cultural and linguistic picture each student has of Italy and to accompany them to explore the complex interdependencies characterizing cultural phenomena.

ITALIAN BEYOND BORDERS



Tied together by the themes of travel and migration, this course would explore different forms of communication and registers in written and oral Italian, through the use (and creation of) comics, songs, interviews, art, podcasts; literary and academic writing; historical documents and fictional adaptations. Students would move across time and space to look at the routes traveled by people and ideas, from present times –with migrations to and through Italy, Italians of second generation– to past centuries –with the Grand Tour, geographical explorations of the Modern Era, and worldwide commerce in the Middle Ages.

On the linguistic side, students would interact with a variety of texts, genres, registers, and linguistic variants, and produce a diverse array of texts, narrating, summarizing, describing, comparing, evaluating, reporting, expressing positions, wishes, and hopes, in a differentiated set of situations. On the cultural side, they would learn to look at present Italy (and present time, more in general) from an expanded historical perspective, problematizing the present in the light of past or distant experiences. Of course, this project stems from my research in transnational literature, but I also see it as an opportunity to expand my research focus diachronically.



What takeaways do you have for teachers in RLL?

Serving as a member of the Ikeda Center Youth Steering Committee* led me to see more clearly how my growth as a teacher is fueled by reflecting on experiences and, most importantly, engaging in dialogue.

Whenever stuck or in doubt, I carve time to talk about it with someone from whom I feel I can learn. I'm finding out that a growing teacher cannot fail to inspire students to grow ;).

I hope we'll be able to meet and talk about this at length on [March 10](#) for our [RLL's TAs and TFs get together](#) [More info at the end of the newsletter]!

*Founded in 1993 by Buddhist philosopher, peacebuilder, and educator Daisaku Ikeda, the Ikeda Center's mission is to build cultures of peace through learning and dialogue. It hosts events, publishes books, and produces original resources.

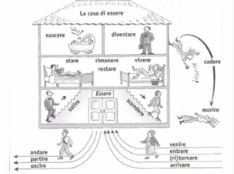
**If you want to take a sneak peek into some of
Giulia's class presentations,
click on the images to the right**

Che cosa ha fatto questo carrello?



- 1) Which auxiliary verb? **Avere** or **essere**?
- 2) **Conjugate the auxiliary verb**
- 3) **Add the participio passato**

- and agree it to the subject if I'm using **essere**



andare (in mare) - pulire (il mare)

È entrato in mare e **ha pulito** il mare.

Parola del giorno

**eroe (m.),
eroina (f.)**



La storia del genere **Rosa**

Luciana Peverelli (1902-1986)

Breve biografia, anni di attività,
argomenti delle opere, una citazione.





Some relevant news and resources from the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Podcasting

On February 4, our own Ignacio Azcueta (Media & Design Fellow in RLL) was featured in an article from the Bok Center. For the podcasting assignment of his Spanish 50 class, Ignacio brought students to the Learning Lab and led them through a close-reading of a podcast episode. “I saw that students were very creative in their use of music and the way they combined the different characters” in their own assignments, he says. The full article, “Flexibility in Form: Podcasting with Spanish 50” can be [found here](#).

Congratulations, Ignacio!



Mid-term Teaching Feedback

Mid-semester is an ideal moment to check in with your students, get feedback on how your class is going, and reflect on your own experience as a teacher.

- Review the Bok Center’s [Early Feedback resources](#).
- You can [sign up for a feedback consultation](#) for questions or support with any stage of this process.
- [Request a class observation or video consultation](#) to consider your class from an outside perspective and reflect on your own teaching.

Walking with the Bok Center

Looking for a way to get your day off to a good start, to enjoy the spring weather, and to connect with colleagues about your teaching victories and questions? Join a rotating crew of Bok Center staff for a twice-weekly morning walk, every Tuesday and Thursday morning from 9:00–9:30 (weather permitting). More info and optional RSVP [here](#).





RLL "Future Thinking" Discussion Series

The second half of the "Future Thinking" discussion series will be held this Spring! In the Fall, the themes discussed were "The Future of Translation" and "The Future of Interaction."

The first this term will be "The Future of Linguistic Communities"



**Upcoming
events
of interest**

THE FUTURE OF LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES

A virtual conversation with Josh Prada, Assistant Professor of Spanish Applied Linguistics at Indiana University, on new theories about contemporary linguistic communities -and how to integrate them in our curriculum.

This event is part of the "Future Thinking" series

**March 2nd
4:00 - 5:15 PM**

RLL
Romance Languages
& Literatures

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Contact information

Maria Luisa Parra
parra@fas.harvard.edu

Ignacio Azcueta
ignacioazcueta@g.harvard.edu

In the Area

The fourth Boston Area Pedagogy Conference, "Envisioning the Future of Learning and Teaching of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Cinema", will be held virtually on Friday, March 18, 8:30 AM - 5:00 PM. If you are interested in learning more about the conference or submitting a proposal, more information can be found [here](#)



ZOOM LINK [HERE](#)



Interested in being featured in
a future edition of
“RLL in the Classroom?”
Wish to nominate a TF/TA?

Please reach out to Luca Politi
(lpoliti@g.harvard.edu)
or Juan Arias
(juanarias@g.harvard.edu).

RLL



Join us for our next TF/TA get together!

The next social event will take place at [The Cellar](#) on Thursday, [March 10](#). Join us for [beers](#) starting at 6:30!

As we head into Spring break, let's take this chance to reconnect as a team of TFs and TAs. We look forward to seeing you!



We'd love your input...

What's on your mind lately regarding teaching? Do you wish to have a breakout discussion session to float an idea or discuss a recent teaching experience? We'd love to hear about your challenges, successes, or open questions.

No matter how small the comment, we encourage you to [submit this form](#) (anonymous responses are welcome). Your responses will help Juan and Luca to plan events, conversations, or future forum mailings. If it's on your mind, chances are it's on another's as well!