

# LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES THROUGH THE GLOTTODRAMA METHOD IN HIGHER EDUCATION

## ÎNVĂȚAREA LIMBILOR STRĂINE PRIN METODA GLOTTODRAMA ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR

*COLIBABA Anca*<sup>1</sup>, *COLIBABA Ș.*<sup>2</sup>, *GHEORGHIU I.*<sup>3</sup>,  
*CLEMINTE A.*<sup>4</sup>, *GARDIKIOTIS R.*<sup>5</sup>, *DINU C.*<sup>5</sup>

e-mail: acolib@euroed.ro

**Abstract.** *The Glottodrama project is a project approved and financed by the Life Long Learning Programme of the European Union. The project is coordinated by the Laboratory of Linguistics of Culturiana Publishing Company. It aims to develop and test an innovative methodology for teaching foreign languages that will integrate communicative learning processes with techniques of Theatre Arts. The project plans to devise courses based on in-class workshops carried out by two teachers, one of languages and one of drama. The course programme relies on both linguistic and theatrical activities derived from in-depth explorations of mini-texts under the guidance of the teachers. The acting performance is not only the objective and but also the didactic content.*

**Key words:** *drama, role play, act, innovation, languages, didactic*

**Rezumat.** *Glottodrama este un proiect de cercetare multilaterală aprobat și co-finanțat de Programul Lifelong Learning al Uniunii Europene. Proiectul este coordonat de Laboratorul de Cercetare Lingvistică al editurii Culturiana și își propune să formuleze și să experimenteze o metodologie inovatoare pentru predarea limbilor străine, care să integreze glotodidactica comunicativă cu dinamica și tehnicile laboratorului teatral. Proiectul prevede organizarea de cursuri bazate pe conceptul de "clase-laborator" de artă dramatică într-o limbă străină, conduse de doi profesori - unul de limbă străină și altul de artă dramatică. Programa cursurilor prevede, după faza de activitate în laborator, punerea în scenă a unui text dramatic sau a unui scenariu.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *joc de rol, inovație, limbi, didactic, teatru*

### INTRODUCTION

Dramatization and role-play are very common nowadays in foreign language teaching and learning. The Glottodrama project (project number-2012-1-IT1-LEO05-02861; CUP code: G82F12000190006) was born from the

---

<sup>1</sup> "Gr.T.Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy & Fundatia EuroEd Iasi, Romania

<sup>2</sup> "Al. I. Cuza" University & Fundatia EuroEd Iasi, Romania

<sup>3</sup> "Albert Ludwigs" Freiburg University of Germany

<sup>4</sup> Fundatia EuroEd, Iasi, Romania

<sup>5</sup> "Gr.T.Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy Iasi, Romania

recognition of national and international experience in the application of theatre to language teaching.

The Glottodrama project tries to maximize experiences from the use of drama resources in the foreign language learning process. Its novelty lies in that it fully exploits the potential of the theatrical techniques frequently used in drama workshops. Unlike the traditional use of drama in language teaching the Glottodrama gives equal chances to both acting and language teaching techniques. Classes provide deep insights into theatrical and linguistic aspects.

The Glottodrama is a flexible methodology suitable for any level of knowledge and to any educational context: from beginners (familiarizing them with the language) to advanced learners (interested in mastering the language). Therefore, the Glottodrama can be used as a main language course but also as a parallel activity, which gives learners plenty of captivating practice and challenging opportunities to improve their speaking skills.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the Glottodrama method is to make foreign language learning more challenging and attractive to students. The school class changes into a theatre company, united by a common goal (project-work) which develops a strong sense of belonging. Communication flows naturally relying on verbal and non-verbal solutions; it is no longer an exchange of information but part of social interaction and negotiation in pursuit of a goal.

The intercultural objective should also be highlighted: the profound understanding of a dramatic text means to present a culture in action perceived both explicitly and implicitly.

### **Targets of the project**

The first language targeted by the project has been Italian for foreigners. The core of the project has been the implementation of a methodology for foreign language teaching through theatrical resources. The successful results obtained with the learning of the Italian language through the Glottodrama have encouraged the coordinators to apply the methodology to the teaching of other European languages, among which Romanian.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The methodology of the Glottodrama project functions according to ten pedagogical principles:

1. *Supremacy of the student's personality.* In the language learning process the entire student's personality is transferred to the second language. The learning pace and manner of the entire process are personal characteristics of each individual.

2. *Language teaching is interdisciplinary* by its nature.

3. *The pleasure of "learning by doing" is the best motivation.* Without the pleasure of learning and the satisfaction acquired through the achievement of the communicative goal, there is no satisfaction and motivational reinforcement.

4. *Glottodrama is based on project work.* The drama-based class is a specific project work (text project) based on tasks which lead to communicative performance.

5. *The holistic principle:* learning to communicate involves body and mind. Successful language learning is possible if the whole person, body and mind, is involved in the learning activity.

6. *Priority of intercultural and social dimension.* From the others' language to my language. The learners evolve from the perception of the second language as "a foreign- the others' language", to the perception as "our own language", as another personal tool to communicate in the context of a real or virtual community of speakers to which they belong.

7. *Primacy of semantics in language pedagogy.* Form is better learned when the student's attention is directed to meaning. Therefore the semantic and pragmatic dimension (the intensive understanding of its texts) should be a priority when compared with the extensive learning of its grammar and vocabulary (morphological-syntactic dimension).

8. *Pragmatic principle of communication:* language is a form of action aimed at the achievement of goals. Since every form of communication is directed towards a goal, language learning cannot be limited to grammar and vocabulary learning, but must be related to the pragmatic purposes and uses of the language, which involve the skills of decoding and encoding communicative purposes and super-purposes of a text.

9. *Decisive function of paralinguistic aspects.* Paralinguistic elements in communication have a decisive role in the efficiency of communication. The importance of non-verbal aspects of communication is widely underestimated in the language teaching practice although research studies have demonstrated that messages are strongly affected by para- and extra-linguistic elements that together form 83% of the whole vocal message.

10. *Professional actors and social actors.* In acting as a professional the goal is to interpret a character "different from oneself" in front of an audience. In the Glottodrama learning process the goal is to give the social audience an improved interpretation of oneself.

#### **How a Glottodrama course works**

The course aims at gradually developing both linguistic and acting skills by making use of a wide range of activities such as dramatization, role-play, story-telling, monologues, and improvisation.

The course is made up of two distinctive sections: the first section is the basic actor's training using micro-texts whereas the work in the second section focuses on a more complex text (a complete theatre play or a script), already available or produced by the class.

#### **Essential elements**

- The Glottodrama course requires two teachers, language and drama, who have to achieve a harmonious osmosis between theatre and language teaching. Their common goal is to train "social actors". They both work together towards the same goal, having different roles: one leads the acting activities and the other one focuses more on language exploration and learning.

- The course takes place in a workshop-classroom with a "stage" area; teachers and students sit in a circle. The classroom needs a stage, a slightly

raised platform, used for every staging activity. Therefore, there is a clear distinction between on stage and off stage activities and behaviours.

- A video-camera
- An equipped grammar corner: the classroom is equipped with grammar textbooks and dictionaries (one copy for each student; students can freely consult them during the stage of the grammar corner).

### **The programme**

A GlottoDrama course needs about 90 hours. The programme has two distinctive sections. In the first section the course uses “micro-texts”, letting the students get to know each other, work as a group, and familiarize with acting activities. Attention is focused on the connection gesture and word. Teachers encourage free experimentation; everything happens within the group; the audience is made up of other students; everybody is alternately actor and spectator, including the teachers. At this stage, when they are prepared, the students can start writing the play which will be used in the next stage.

In the second part of the course the students work on more complex texts based on the existing materials or written by the class. The course takes on a “project-work” character and the main goal is the “performance” before an audience (other school students, teachers, friends and acquaintances...). Everybody’s attention concentrates on the success of performance (script, acting, costumes, gestures, lights, music).

The final performance is filmed, and a copy of the film is given to the students together with their certificates to remind them of the time spent with their group.

The course is divided into teaching units having the following structure:

- Presentation of the textual or situational input
- Performance
- Linguistic reflection (grammar corner)
- Actor Studio (rehearsal)
- Back to the performance

Each lesson has a pattern, which develops in line with the “learning by doing” philosophy.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Iasi experience so far**

We have implemented the method with foreign students from several countries studying Romanian as foreign language. They were first administered a test to assess their knowledge of Romanian and also to highlight their motivation and need to learn the language.

According to the test findings, spending up to six months in a Romanian university environment seems to raise interest in learning our language and even makes it possible but support is considered necessary. Moreover, the European Union policy encourages multilingualism, which has often proved to be a personal advantage under the circumstances of the economic crisis, which is why some are even interested in getting a certificate of linguistic competence.

The findings also showed a low level of the Romanian language as students did not benefit from any exposure to our language before coming to Romania. We selected those students who were interested in our Glottodrama project course and expressed their agreement to the experiment.

The materials and texts to be used during the course were selected taking into consideration the students' field of interest (medicine), linguistic difficulty and attractiveness of the story. The mini-texts of the first units focus on funny sketches carefully chosen to engage the group and to be appropriate in terms of linguistic and cultural aspects.

We have involved our students in a wide range of activities with a view to working on and improving both their acting and language skills. Throughout the whole course we have often filmed lesson sequences in order to allow the students and teachers to watch, reflect, and comment upon the performances.

We have noticed a higher degree of participation and involvement in the activities on behalf of the students; they also contribute more to the lessons and their fluency has improved; they are more spontaneous and are no longer inhibited by their mistakes as long as their message is understood. They have also learned to use the films as useful tools of reflection and error correction. They have started to work on writing and extending the mini-texts with a view to preparing the final event. We are planning to put on their final performance in May in front of an audience.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Glottodrama project involves spheres which have been neglected so far and it is getting closer to achieving an efficient communication in another language.

First of all, Glottodrama's goals include decreasing the use of language in a metalinguistic function, and directing it towards the achievement of more genuine communicative purposes.

Secondly, Glottodrama draws attention to the language as we use daily, which is rich in rhetorical expressions, implicit meanings, gestures or intonation. If the target of a language course is "communicative competence in the foreign language", learning can neither neglect paralinguistic aspects nor isolate the linguistic code from the rest of the signs that form the communicative act. A linguistic act, as a communicative act, is complex based on the interaction of different sign codes: linguistic, paralinguistic (suprasegmental and intonational aspects), kinesic (expression and gestures), proxemic (posture and special position) and so on. Communicative efficiency depends on the ability to combine these codes in a proper way.

Thirdly, according to Glottodrama, linguistic competence becomes communicative competence as the learner uses the language in a wide range of fields, from the personal to the social, improving his abilities to interact with

the other people, and engaging social and cultural experiences beyond the classroom.

### REFERENCES

1. **Krashen S.M. 1982** - *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Prentice-Hall International, London
2. **Maley A., Duff A. 2005** - *Drama Techniques*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
3. **Nofri Carlo, 2009** - *Guide to Glottodrama method*, Novacultur, Rome