

## LEARN FOREIGN LANGUAGES THROUGH DRAMA

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### ***Abstract***

*This article addresses a diffused need of pedagogical innovation shared by the Glottodrama project partnership. Moreover it tries to challenge a common critical issue concerning the language programmes offered by European educational systems and often underlined in the pedagogical literature: the unbalanced and weaker development of oral skills, crucial in real interactions, compared with grammar and written skills. The Glottodrama Method is aimed at a progressive and integrated development of linguistic and acting skills, by a sequence of key activities involving increasing grades of communicative autonomy: dramatization, role-taking, role-play, creative writing, monologues and improvisations.*

***Keywords:*** drama, foreign languages, acting, verbal and nonverbal codes

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### ***1. About the GLOTTODRAMA project***

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GLO-TOI (Glottodrama Transfer of Innovation - project number 2012-1-IT1-LEO05-02861, CUP code: G82F12000190006) is the third stage in devising a new methodology for teaching foreign languages through drama. The main objective of the method is to enhance students' motivation by getting their whole personality involved in challenging activities. Students improve their language competence and communication skills by using verbal and non-verbal codes when performing context-based and pragmatic tasks.

It all started with a Multilateral LLP project, GLOTTODRAMA (KA2-2007). The project established a methodology whose results were compared with other approaches. The comparison highlighted the contribution of the new methodology to the field of foreign language learning/ teaching. (1).

After the successful demonstration of the method's effectiveness, our work has led us to a second step, the Dissemination LLP Project, GLODISS (KA2-2009). Also, in 2010 the Glottodrama project was awarded with the European Language Label

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by the National Agency of the European Commission for its results and its contribution to innovation.

The main objective of GLO-TOI is transferring the Glottodrama method from Italian as a target language to the teaching of eight other European languages: French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish and English (Pilot Class for Actors).

The project consortium is made up of 8 partners representing 8 countries from Western and Eastern Europe. It brings together two universities, Ankara University Tomer (Turkey) and Technical university of Valencia (Spain), two language schools, Perugia Language School (Greece), CIAL Centro de Línguas (Portugal), two research centers, Novacultur Srl (Italy), CREI Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Italiennes (France), a language consultant, Euroinform LTD (Bulgaria) and a nongovernmental organisation, EuroEd (Romania).

The main objectives of the project are:

- 1) Transferring the outcomes and the procedures of the Glottodrama Method to the teaching of 8 foreign languages: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish;
- 2) Publishing specific teaching materials for these languages;
- 3) Consolidating the reliability of the Glottodrama methodology by increasing the number and the quality of the teaching experiments in order to bear further scientific evidence of its effectiveness;
- 4) Establishing an eight-country network of Glottodrama teaching centres offering courses in local and foreign languages;
- 5) Increasing the number of the teachers training in the Glottodrama Method;
- 6) Setting up a European Association for Drama & Theatre Applied to Language Learning, with a view to enlarging the action of the network, involving more countries and educational institutions and reinforcing the long lasting effects of the project.

The GLO-TOI project is expected to produce the following results:

- a) promoting an updated methodology of existing teaching drama programmes;
- b) applying the latest research results in teaching foreign languages to the teaching of less frequently spoken European languages;
- c) increasing both students' and teachers' motivation;
- d) promoting CLIL and interdisciplinary approaches in language learning/teaching;
- e) encouraging a communicative approach with a humanistic orientation by reducing the use of the language with a meta-linguistic function and directing

language teaching towards the achievement of more authentic communicative purposes.

The last issue summarizes the main pedagogical assumptions inspiring our partnership. This is the core of the project and represents our shared interpretation of the CEFR recommendations. The Glottodrama Method, which is based on some key concepts from the CEFR, is deeply rooted in recent developments of language learning and is innovative in its own right.

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## ***2. The Glottodrama Method***

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The Glottodrama Method is aimed at a progressive and integrated development of linguistic and acting skills, by a sequence of key activities involving increasing levels of communicative autonomy: dramatization, role-taking, role-play, creative writing, monologues and improvisations.

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### ***2.1. Relationship between teaching language and acting***

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Although “communicative performance” represents the common ground and the common goal of Drama and Language Teaching, it is also necessary to underline the difference between a professional drama course and a Glottodrama course. In the first case, the purpose is to train a professional actor to play a role on stage, namely a “character” in the best possible way and before a theatre audience, in the second case the aim is to enable a person to act his own role in interacting with people.

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### ***2.2. Psycholinguistic and intercultural barriers***

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The Glottodrama method challenges psychological and intercultural critical issues from different methodological solutions at advanced stages of the language learning processes: for instance, the difficult psychological transition from the perception of the foreign language as someone else’s language to the perception of the second language as one’s own language: by using the Glottodrama method the second language can become a personal communication tool to be used even in emotionally challenging situations where it is necessary to employ linguistic creativity.

This concept intends to match the political and cultural principle supported by the Common European Framework for foreign languages, according to which multilingualism can only be achieved if during the learning process not only some elements, restricted to particular areas of usage, but the entire personality of the student is transferred to the new language. If this process is not carried out entirely then the capacity for social interaction is diminished and personal autonomy reduced.

The method, based on the operating principle of “project-work”, requires the development of a procedural syllabus where content is not artificially imposed by a course book, but gradually developed from the teaching experience. The tasks will determine the linguistic content. Nevertheless, as a procedural syllabus risks being partial and incomplete in terms of grammar and vocabulary, we will pay particular attention to choosing and elaborating linguistic and situational inputs in order to generate, with a high degree of predictability, all the necessary linguistic content for the learning purpose. AS it is the Glottodrama Method is based on a semi-procedural syllabus.

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### *2.3. Syndrome of the Invisible Mask*

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This is another common point between the experiences of acting and learning a foreign language. Like the actor who usually wears a costume on stage in order to convince the audience of his status as a character, so the student “wears” the foreign language as a psychological mask, a new communicative “dress” of his personality. This experience can represent a very contradictory psychological moment, marked both by a sense of non-involvement towards the new language and, at the same time, a sensation of increasing familiarity. Frustration, embarrassment, stress but also satisfaction and growth of self-esteem represent the emotional framework of a foreign language learning experience.

All the students at an early stage of learning tend to “act” when speaking the foreign language, which means that they are very rationally controlled trying to follow a normative model. They concentrate more on the efficiency of the speech than on the effectiveness of their communication in order to achieve a purpose. Often their linguistic behavior appears clumsy and artificial because they feel insecure. They feel uneasy and the foreign language is perceived as a “bottle-neck” that hinders or prevents the expression of their whole interior world: thoughts, feelings and emotions.

This is an unavoidable event that language pedagogy has to accept and confront because it represents a real life experience and it is a necessary step towards the naturalness of expression and the command of the language. When starting learning a foreign language the student is temporarily wearing a character’s mask, another “self”, like actors in plays. During the learning process the Glottodrama method tries to guide the student from artificiality to naturalness. The final goal of the Glottodrama Method is to take off the invisible mask. But during the learning process we treat this syndrome with a homeopathic approach. That is to say, we treat (artificial) acting with (natural) acting. We transform a critical aspect in a pedagogical resource. In a game-like workshop it is easier to make mistakes, to make a fool of oneself or look silly because you are playing a “character” and not yourself.

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#### *2.4. Glottodrama: How does it work?*

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Each course provides 90 hours of tuition and is divided into two parts. During the first part, the group works mostly with short texts to allow students to become familiar with acting activities. In the second one the class works with a more complex text (a complete theatre play or a script).

The relationship between the language teacher and the drama teacher is very important in the Glottodrama context. The cooperation between the two specialized teachers combines drama resources and language teaching in a new pedagogical experience, which leads to professional growth for both of them; the drama teacher has to manage the problems in the language teaching process and the language teacher has to deal with drama techniques. The Glottodrama project aims at building a synthesis between two different professional backgrounds.

In terms of the location where the language learning process takes place, a real theatre stage can be used if possible. Otherwise a normal classroom can be arranged in the typical style of a drama workshop: teachers and students sit in a circle (with or without a table in the middle) in order to avoid the idea of hierarchy (teacher sitting in front of the students). The stage is set up on one side or in the middle of the room, using a platform. The stage is the space where all scenes are acted out according to a set of precise rules to be followed. In this manner there is a distinction between activities and behaviors on and off-stage.

The classroom is equipped with grammar books and dictionaries (one copy for each student), which are used freely during the grammar corner phase. Finally, a video camera and various similar devices (DVD player, TV or video projector) play an important part in the lessons.

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### **3. Conclusions**

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The main European added value of this project comes from focusing on the method rather than on content, which means that the project outcomes can be applied in all European countries and in any language. The project itself is a practical step towards this general objective because it targets a total of 9 languages (8 new languages plus Italian targeted in the previous projects). In addition, the combination of foreign language and second language applications results in a programme of 72 combinations of Glottodrama teaching courses (8 x 9). E.g. French taught in Spain as a foreign language or French taught in France as a second language. Also the project deals with teaching English as a foreign language in all 8 countries, resulting in a total of 72 combinations of Glottodrama courses.

Another important benefit of implementing the project at a European level is the achievement of a general transfer of knowledge, experience and outcomes both on a geographical level (8 countries) and on a cross-cultural level (9 languages). The foundation of a specific European Association (EATALL) will ensure a broader European dimension attracting new potential partners and end users and valorising experiences beyond the borders of the consortium.

Moreover, this exchange of experiences and good practices includes countries where less frequently used languages are spoken. These countries have only recently started to develop specific research in the field of "Foreign Language Pedagogy" applied to the local language as a foreign language and a second language. Another important European added value of the GLO-TOI project is the fulfillment of the following objectives: "Improving the quality and increasing the volume of cooperation between institutions or organisations providing learning opportunities, enterprises, social partners and other relevant bodies throughout Europe" and "Encouraging the learning of modern foreign languages (2)".

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