

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION Teaching Methods, Learning Outcomes

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Not long ago, for the department of Modern Languages and Business Communication annual conference (2018, 7th edition), I did a presentation with my colleague, Dr. Mariana Nicolae, on professional development.

We were saying that, as educators, we should have an optimistic worldview. It is a matter of optic; we make an active choice to see the world as rather good and friendly. Moreover, we hope to change it for the better. That's why we are in this "business"- of education. Our mindset, our established set of attitudes, concentrates on the positives: growth mindset vs. fixed-mindset, positive vs. negative, abundant vs scarcity mindset. We tend to see people as fundamentally good/honest vs. thieves/criminals. These choices help us survive, adapt and develop.

Nevertheless, this type of mindset is also absolutely aware that we live in a rapid changing rhythm that the world is in a seemingly perpetual state of crisis. As Yuval Noah Harari aptly notes in *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2018), in 2012 about 56 million people died throughout the world; 620,000 of them due to human violence (war killed 120,000 people, and crime killed another 500,000). In contrast, 800,000 committed suicide, and 1.5 million died of diabetes. Sugar poses a threat more dangerous than gunpowder. Previously the main sources of wealth were material assets such as gold mines, wheat fields and oil wells. Today the main source of wealth is knowledge. And whereas you can conquer oil fields through war, you cannot acquire knowledge that way. If in 2010 obesity and related illnesses killed about 3 million people, terrorists killed a total of 7,697 people across the globe, most of them in developing countries. For the average American or European, Coca-Cola poses a far deadlier threat than Al-Qaeda. Or, in a nutshell, „Fire gave us power, farming made us hungry for more, money gave us purpose, science made us deadly” (Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, 2014).

Against this background, when it comes to education in Romania, for this is the framework of the present endeavor, the starting questions could be *where are we?*, *which are our coordinates?*, *what is point 0?*

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To briefly summarize a situation long debated in newspapers, talk shows and scientific papers, the idea that education is key for future development – as individuals and as communities, remains as valid as ever. In Romania, education begets mixed reviews, according to opinion, interest, side purpose or end goal (though more and more negative lately). Romanian education advanced on an up and down trajectory rather than keeping a, if not ascending, at least steady path; riding the waves of change certainly impacted the present profile of Romanian education. In its struggle to surpass the inherited difficulties (45 years of communism) while dealing with new ones brought about by a tough transitional process, the Romanian educational system had to emerge if not stronger, than at least a lot more resilient (Șerban-Oprescu and Șerban-Oprescu, 2017). The Romanian official discourse articulates the notion of investing in education as one of the essential constituents for a sustainable development of the country, whereas human capital is the reliable source of economic growth and national strength. Yet, the budget for education and R&D continues to remain the lowest in the EU.

Published within the book series ‘Multilingual Education’, the volume under review here - *Foreign Language Teaching in Romanian Higher Education Teaching Methods, Learning Outcomes* - respects the rationale of the series which includes empirical research on multilingual language acquisition, language contact and the roles of languages in contexts where the languages are not related and where the scenarios for language acquisition and use are different, so as to better understand mechanisms and issues at stake and make informed decisions in terms of language policy.

The book addresses foreign language teaching and learning using multiple perspectives: social-cultural, economic, political factors, or cognitive processes that dictate students’ process of knowledge acquisition at tertiary level – higher education. With this aim in mind, narrowing the scope to university level, *Foreign Language Teaching in Romanian Higher Education. Teaching Methods, Learning Outcomes* is a collective volume of carefully selected material (comprising twenty articles written by foreign language teachers and higher education professionals from nine universities in Romania), representative I would add, for Romanian foreign language education.

Directly connected to the introductory ideas on education and professional development of this review, the volume goes beyond a mere freeze-frame, well-documented analysis of foreign language teaching. It trails a unifying theme of how language learning strongly influences learners’ personal and professional development and how foreign language practitioners need to adapt methods to fit this educational trend. Likewise, the teaching and learning of more than one language are discussed, as well as the changing roles of foreign language practitioners involved in higher education.

The volume edited by Lucia-Mihaela Grosu-Rădulescu (herself a language instructor, higher education level) benefits from an in-depth explanation of

teaching methods and learning outcomes and highlights how regional experience (the Romanian one) in the field proves insightful to language professionals with similar profiles and research interests outside Romania. Relying on qualitative and quantitative research, the authors of the articles/chapters in the volume relate their own research to contemporary concerns in languages education such as: understanding and building on learners' internal/ cognitive processes regarding language learning; the impact of social factors on language learning; teachers' role in students' development of learning strategies– the case of languages with specific geographic use and of teaching formal linguistics to non-natives; the impact of international network facilities on language teaching and learning; transdisciplinarity and language teaching (in L.M. Grosu- Rădulescu in *Foreword*).

The articles/chapters of the volume split into two main Parts that cater to various aspects and concerns regarding foreign language teaching and learning. The First part aligns topics ranging from the Romanian context of foreign language education at university level - the process of becoming what it is today in the European framework (Lucia Grosu-Radulescu), to relevant syntheses of cases of educational policies and English textbook design (Mihaela Badea, Mihaela Suditu, and Diana Presadă); from different settings of teaching foreign languages - linguistics, visual literacy, MedLang MOOCs (Maria Aurelia Cotfas, Marina-Cristiana Rotaru, Anca Colibaba, Claudia Dinu, Irina Gheorghiu, and Ștefan Colibaba), to teaching Romanian as a foreign language (Roxana Magdalena Bârlea), to legislation and the impact of the CEFR (Ioana-Silvia Sonea). The second Part - in tune with the idea of human/professional development - focuses on student motivation (Gabriela Chefneux), autonomy/self-development (Irina David, Magdalena Ciubăncan), language education for democratic citizenship (Roxana-Elisabeta Marinescu), or professional ethics and moral education (Ioana Crețu) and new roles for teachers (Valentina Robu and Laura-Mihaela Mureșan).

The authors display recent research findings in the field of foreign language teaching in Romanian higher education relying on methodology and student learning outcomes. They present and talk from vast experience, as all of them have done extensive work as foreign language researchers and teachers. Given the experience in this field, their observations and conclusions become helpful for any foreign language professional working in tertiary education, as well as for policy makers at local or international level. As such, the book fills the gap for an up-to-date overview of foreign language teaching in Romanian universities and offers visibility to Romanian foreign language scholars.

Aside from putting together relevant aspects of foreign language acquisition and practice, the 'Romanian experience' in language teaching, although essentially connected to its European context, goes beyond its limitations (L.M. Grosu-Rădulescu in *Foreword*). It features practical examples that apply to a considerable array of contexts giving the volume global reach. The fact that examples and case studies scrutinize various languages (English, Romanian, Japanese) documents the

versatility of the material, speaks to a large audience and serves another aim of the writings here: that of connecting language professionals locally and internationally.

References and bibliography

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