

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Teaching Romanian as a foreign language is a new and challenging field of activity in education in Romania, a field that is growing with the arrival in our country of many students from neighboring countries or as far away as possible, people belonging to other cultures, civilizations, ethnicities, religions, which bring with them their own mentality and vision of the world. Formal and curricular activities are important for language, morpho-syntactic acquisitions regarding the Romanian language, but for the student to develop optimally and to integrate in the new society in which he entered to continue his studies, it is necessary to implement extracurricular activities complementary to the others. These are meant to develop students other skills necessary to continue their studies in a new country in educational contexts different from those in their home country by interacting with both Romanians and other colleagues as foreign to the Romanian language and culture as them. The projects and activities of linguistic and cultural integration of foreign students are defining for the development of the intercultural communication competence that must be developed for them. This paper aims to highlight the impact that extracurricular activities in the field of dramatic art contribute to the development of students both linguistically and from the perspective of expressing emotions, feelings in order to overcome the cultural blockages inherent in a foreign country.

Keywords: *Acquisitions, cultures, extracurricular, linguistically, mentality.*

1. Introduction

Extracurricular activities, by their very definition, presuppose some learning objectives, and, as long as they are well outlined, the educational function of these actions achieves its purpose, manifesting itself in plenary. When it comes to developing language skills, but also discursive and intercultural communication to foreign students, formal and non-formal content and activities must be alternated, and extracurricular activities are clearly highlighted in the non-formal sphere. These take place in well-defined coordinates, most often in the form of a project or independent activity. The present study highlights the way in which the Forum Theater, The Community Service Project or The Living Library contributes to the development of the intercultural dimension of communication, providing linguistic elements, but also attitudinal-behavioral discursive skills. The preparatory year for Romanian as a foreign language is an eloquent space for what we can call cultural diversity: "Cultural diversity in the educational environment is an extraordinary source of progress and innovation in terms of teaching methodology, but also pedagogical relationships and communication." (Pricope, M., p. 11). Thus, in such a context, the pedagogical mastery must take into account several variables, the extracurricular contributing to a real progress.

Forum Theater is a well-known non-formal method, which involves the idea of interactions between the actors, but also the possibility of sharing some concepts. However, this method, in order to be used in the case of B2 speakers, must be made accessible, simplified, adapted to the needs of foreign students. If in the case of the native speaker the method was addressed to a disadvantaged community, in the case of a foreign speaker, the method concerns him directly, not because he would be vulnerable, but especially because he more or less goes through a cultural shock due to unknown situations. Thus, the students bring on stage crumbs from everyday reality, concrete, life situations, sometimes harsh, all these metamorphosed from various angles. The foreign student can always intervene on artistically reflected behaviors, and that "STOP" can mean a reversal of the situation, the end being moralizing. The

conclusions drawn at the end could highlight the fact that if the decision-maker had been involved, the final situation would have been different. Therefore, the play resumes, the scenes are remade, the spectator students can be inserted in the story, they can be actors at any time, they can take over the coordinates of the action, so that they can see the best solution, the most suitable ending. The Forum Theater applied to foreign students, and not only, should not bring together the features of a real theater show, it is not even recommended to take place in a performance hall or to be done through interaction with professionals. This activity takes place in a classroom, familiar, decorated and personalized taking into account the particularities of the group, in which everyone can express themselves freely, without fear, to overcome some fears, some complex, to then integrate optimally into the adoption community. Interesting is the way in which the Forum Theater is applied, on the one hand, to the group of foreign students, and, on the other hand, to the group of native students/pupils, as well as to a heterogeneous group, consisting of both foreigners and Romanians. Surprising will be the perception of the foreigner towards the life situation he exposes, the situation lived in a foreign country, the way Romanians will perceive the same real situation exposed on the "stage" and the way the heterogeneous team manages to change the end, because it gathers subjective perceptions, objective perceptions, not involved, detached.

This method is a unique opportunity to speak publicly about a problem encountered in the context of reality, to develop oral expression, critical thinking, why not, to develop empathy, openness to the different, to accept it, to tolerate it, or, why not, to correct his mistakes. Thus, the ending can be different every time, thus generating civic behaviors, optimally developing communication skills and dramatization skills, contributing to the spontaneity and naturalness of the foreign speaker. The learning experience through Forum Theater is relevant because it relies on experiential learning contributing to the cohesion of the group, each finding easier its place, role, understanding, in the future, how to deal with problems, but also helping it to be more understanding with others that he considered perhaps insensitive to his situation, careless, passive, learning to think from another perspective. In this context, students not only face culture shock, but also become more responsible for what happens to them or what does not happen to them precisely because they did not take action at the right time or because they themselves had preconceptions, stereotypes.

The Community Service Project is another extracurricular, non-formal activity, also defining for language acquisitions, but especially for redefining the personality of foreign students in a different than familiar environment, when they have to integrate into another community, initially, the academic one, and, later, in the social one. Beyond the systematization of Romanian language skills, the project also comes with the development of management and leadership skills, because team members learn to communicate assertively with each other, interact to set roles at the group level, set goals / tasks, then some categories of activities that must be implemented within a well-established timeframe. They become, therefore, more pragmatic, more responsible, themselves for their actions, but also for those of their peers in the country where they arrived and with whom, more recently, they interact. The academic community that they form themselves becomes itself a context of learning. As the phrase that defines this type of activity also captures, The Project of Service Learning for the benefit of the community is a method that involves, in the case of foreign students, the systematization of Romanian language knowledge, also helping them to integrate in the community, optimally identifying and solving problems. Supported by teachers, students identify the needs of their community, initially analyze potential solutions, position themselves around a common goal, and act according to a plan. With the help of a reflection diary, the progress in learning is noted: how many new words in Romanian have been assimilated, what positive attitudes have been formed, what is the way of involvement at the community level.

The Living Library is a non-formal learning method that has been chosen to be used in preparatory courses for students in the Preparatory Year as a complementary method of systematizing language acquisition, but also to highlight the intercultural and multicultural dimension of learning. Through this project-type activity, respect for human dignity is promoted, attention is drawn to diversity in all its forms of manifestation, and dialogue between people is cultivated. The specificity of the Living Library is given by the fact that, on the shelves, the books are represented by people, in this context the students from the mentioned academic program who encounter preconceptions, stereotypes and who initiate a conversation or even more with the reader, detailing his story. The Living Library is a normal library, the reader-student borrows the book for an hour, reads it, establishes a dialogue with it and returns it to be borrowed by the next reader. When the activity of this type was designed, the learning objectives that became of the library were taken into account, the environment in which the action took place, the way of selecting the "book", promoting the elements in the library, establishing and scoring the degree of relevance that this method had on the works, but also on the lecturers.

2. Objectives

The paper aims to capture how some extracurricular activities also contribute to the development of oral and written communication skills, but also to the development of discursive communication skills, as they form attitudes, facilitating the expression of both foreign language ideas on which educators assimilate, as well as the expression of feelings that go beyond communication barriers, the impact that sometimes generates the inability to formulate an idea for fear of making mistakes. Often, when the student tries to express himself in the language he is learning from scratch, sometimes he feels the fear of not making a mistake, of not making disagreements, of not pronouncing erroneously. Therefore, The Forum Theater, as a non-formal method of cultivating certain attitudes and the service project, for the benefit of the small community, respectively of the group of students, contributes both to the acquisition of a casualness in expression, but also to the plenary manifestation of each personality, which in a foreign country, comes in contact with the Other who is different in terms of culture, religion, mentality. Thus, not only the idiom is unknown, but also the customs of the new people are an enigma, and, not infrequently, the traditions, the habits of colleagues, of those who study together are also unknown. Cohesion at the level of intercultural groups is more difficult to achieve, they are heterogeneous and extremely different, consequently, a common code of communication is not enough, the Romanian language, a multitude of cultural and emotional elements are needed, which foreign students must to find them in each other, but also in those in the local community with which they come into contact, with the native speakers. Therefore, the present case study proposed two categories of activities: extracurricular activities such as Forum Theater and Service Project for the benefit of the academic community, at a small level, of the group of foreign students and extracurricular activities such as Living Library and impact projects, in collaboration with native speakers, so that they feel an integral part of the adoption community as well. Thus, these types of activities have as objective an initial integration in the academic group in which any student carries out their daily activity and a subsequent integration in the social environment in the country where they arrived, in this case, in Romania. Intercultural communication theorists Samovar L. and Porter R. consider the interpersonal environment to be all the more relevant when it comes to developing intercultural competence, as a culture learns, focuses on symbol, perpetually metamorphoses.

3. Methods and results

The three types of extracurricular activities presented above were attended by the 50 students from the Preparatory Year of Romanian as a Foreign Language, during the month of May, from the academic year 2020-2021. The methods were applied towards the end of the academic year for students in the Preparatory Year, when they have already reached the language level B1, B1 +. All three categories of activities aim at systematizing the knowledge of the Romanian language, as well as the development of life skills, intercultural communication, discursive skills, project management, but also group management. The greatest needs of these educators are those related to integration, socialization, transcendence of language barriers, fears.

The Forum Theater targeted the five groups of 10 students, the teams were created randomly, using 5 colors red, yellow, blue, white, purple. Each student drew a ticket and, depending on the color selected, it was associated with the intended group. For all the groups, a problem was formulated for their members to represent on the "stage": I. A foreign student encounters difficulties with the native speakers, because, still, he does not know the Romanian language, and also no language of international circulation, reaching to avoid contact with them and becoming isolated; II. A Congolese student cannot adapt to the conditions in the dormitory, she has a different time zone in her home country than that of her roommates, she often gets into conflict situations with them because they constantly have different activities and cannot rest, they learn some because of others; III. A student from Egypt considers the administrative rules in Romania far too complicated and often gets into problematic situations with public servants; IV. A student came later to classes for objective reasons and faces hostile attitudes from colleagues who are impatient with him to regain his language skills, he tends to isolate himself; V. Students of the Muslim religion find that there is no place of worship for their religion in the city where they are going to study and they acutely feel this lack, they feel misunderstood, they consider this aspect defining for them and cannot conceive of deviating from the weekly home routine. The five problem situations were assigned to each group, each of the students who was initially a spectator had the opportunity to intervene and become an actor. The problem situation did not target any of the team members, so that any dose of subjectivity is eliminated, the educators can think detached, not directly involved, which is the optimal solution for resolving internal or external conflicts of the main actors. Satisfaction was commensurate with the involvement because the "songs" were performed many times until the end was a satisfying one,

and the students in the "stories" were optimally integrated into the adoption society. The activity had a second part, more concentrated, the five teams had among the members not only foreign students, but also native speakers, from partner institutions in Romania, who had in turn, both the role of the spectator and the role of the protagonist for to observe the difference between the end obtained by the teams made up only of foreign students and the one obtained both by the heterogeneous teams. It was found that the involvement of native speakers changed the end to a small extent, the purpose being to integrate everyone in society among other foreign students, but also among locals only that the mentality and vision of those who are part of the adoptive community differed. They clarified, thus, that some perceptions of foreigners may be related to prejudices, stereotypes, or even a false impression, things easily knowing an adequate solution.

The Living Library is a selected method to complete the didactic strategy to develop skills of foreign students, intercultural, discursive, but also to determine a change in vocabulary, but also in the sphere of fluency in communication. The five teams described above in this study also participated in this activity, except that in this context 5 of the teammates are the lecturers and the other 5 are the books. In order for the teams to gain consistency, each team level determined how they divided their roles. The students briefly presented their experience, life, so that the book in the library is relevant to the learning objectives of this action. Each team had, therefore, a book that highlighted the success in one field, another that surprised the failure and the constructive way to start again, the third "work" focuses on the life of a student who has adapted very easy to the conditions imposed by the new climate, the fourth visa unadapted to the current environment and the diligent efforts to integrate, the fifth "book" captures the life of a student who came from another continent and talks about his large successful family at home, himself wanting to follow in the footsteps of his father and siblings to embrace his medical career.

The Living Library was an opportunity to observe how students are able to present their stories in the language they have recently learned, how they have made their speech accessible so that they can be understood by others. Also, each of the five readers had a personal view of the book they were reading, when they exposed the content of the book and could see differences in perspective generated either by the way they understood the story from the "book" read, or the way in which they perceived the meaning of the terms in Romanian. At the end of the activity, a joint activity was carried out with the 50 students, each of them presenting the impressions from this type of action, the lesson learned, as well as the words assimilated during the meetings within this activity.

Learning through Community Service Projects is relevant both for the sedimentation of Romanian language knowledge and for the development of project management and leadership skills. The five teams had the mission to meet to assign roles at the group level, then identify the problem at the community level, the causes and effects. Subsequent meetings focused on formulating the project idea, designing objectives and setting activities. The five teams had the following project ideas: I. Creating a relaxation space for the breaks from classes; II. Arranging a garden in the space outside the space where the courses take place; III. Providing a defining space for the image of their group with relevant aspects of learning throughout the year; IV. Equipping a mini-library with books from Romanian and mother culture; V. Arranging a place where students can leave letters/ notes with their wishes on how to improve the life of a foreign student in Romania, in Galați, suggestions, hopes that will be sent later to the competent people who can generate a change in this regard. At the end of the two weeks, during which the 5 teams had the task to formulate the project idea but also to implement it, they received a Reflection Journal to capture the linguistic, behavioral, attitudinal, group and project management acquisitions. The reflection journals can be kept to themselves or shared with others in the final stage.

REFLECTION JOURNAL

1. What are the 10 important words of the Romanian language that you used frequently during the meetings with the project team?

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2. What did you find out about yourself as a member of a project team? What was your role?

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3. What has been the change you have made in the community with your team and what are the benefits for the whole academic group?

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4. Make a top 10 of the values promoted by your team in the implementation of this project.

5. What did you learn new about the Other different from you, whether he is a native speaker of the Romanian language or a foreign speaker like you, in the interactions within the activities proposed at extracurricular level?

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, extracurricular activities such as Forum Theater, Living Library, Community Service Learning Project contribute to the sedimentation of Romanian language skills, level B1 +, B2, developing, equally, life skills necessary for foreign students both their socio-linguistic integration in the academic community, but also in the new social community with which he came into contact. They also acquire emotional comfort, well-being, overcome linguistic and ethnic barriers, realize the uniqueness of each, but also the natural diversity that surrounds them and that has become more than ever part of their lives. Critical thinking, empathy, tolerance, self-respect and fellowship are also values cultivated through these actions which also aimed at cultivating a strong intercultural component.

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