Children and foreign languages: Observe, get to know and understand them (Didactic units for children)

Dr. Aida Gjinali

University of Tirana,

Faculty of Foreign Languages,

Department of Italian language

aidagjinali@yahoo.it

Abstract

Teaching a foreign language to children is not as simple as it seems, taking into consideration the general opinion that children are more adaptable than grown ups. Without any doubt, it is easier for a child than for an adult to learn a foreign language, due to many factors which we will go through briefly in this research, but the most important thing is how to present the learning of a foreign language to children. The global glottodidactics offers adequate and detailed information on this, providing teachers of foreign languages not only with the theoretical framework, but also with the practical one. It is proved by many important researches that a child, due to many psycho-physical and neuropsychological factors is capable of learning a foreign language as a native Italian or British, but what happens in practice is that such a natural capability is not turned against the teacher, who is not so able to operate in this age and raise affective barriers that will compromise not only the teaching of a foreign language but also it will create a long-term or maybe a permanent repulsion of the child towards the foreign language. Therefore, it is very important for the foreign language teacher who works with children to be well-educated in didactics and psycho pedagogy, as well, in order to know how to act and adapt to the age and psychology of the child and know how to achieve the main purpose that is the teaching of the language. We already know that teaching children should be a natural and spontaneous process, but teachers are met with the challenge of how to realize this. As we mentioned previously, global glottodidactics provides a lot of tools, especially the ludic methodology, which uses games as the extraordinary tool to wholly engage children and offers them the possibility to learn a language through direct and spontaneous practice.

Based on what we said above, we are providing a didactic unit for children, which aims at teaching children how to know themselves and others through observation, teach them to interpret facial expressions and mimic, know how to ask and respond to specific expressions and compare between Albanian and foreign language children, learn the lexicon related to this aspect, and also raise the awareness regarding human feelings that are transmitted through facial expressions and mimic.

Keywords: children, teaching, foreign language, game.

> Semina un pensiero... e nascerà un carattere
> Semina un pensiero e nascerà un'azione,
> semina un'azione e nascerà un'abitudine,
> semina un'abitudine e nascerà un carattere,
> semina un carattere e nascerà un destino.
> Buddha
> (Guglielmi A., Il linguaggio segreto del volto, 2012)

Introduction

In most of the cases, our face is the mirror of our soul and mind. It reflects our interior world and it is true that human face is able to express emotions and opinions through its alternations, which often cannot be consciously controlled. In fact, it is exactly the face that often betrays us and shows our internal spiritual and emotional situation to others.

Despite this, our face is important because it is our own individual emblem through which we represent ourselves and interact with the world. Our internal emotions and feelings that are reflected in our face are easily read from interlocutors and the people we interact with. That's why it is our duty that children acknowledge, understand and interpret them. Children

start to gradually learn them at an early age, and while growing up truly understand what they really mean and what does the face of the person express. This is the teaching goal and it is treated as such in kindergarten and further in schools, whose purpose is to raise individuals who are familiar, first with their own feelings, and then with those of the others. This will help them to create their personal identity, know themselves, be independent and know how to interpret emotions and personal opinions, and then those of the others.

As far as the foreign language teaching is concerned, and in our case it is Italian, this objective expands and becomes more complex, because the child should learn not only the facial expressions, but also name them in a foreign language, and verify whether this interpretations are the same or not in other children, and learn to verify whether they are the same to Italian children, as well (through pictures, videos).

Teaching children how to know themselves and their own emotions through facial expressions and interpret or express such emotions is important for a better psycho-social-pragmatic development. This is due to the fact that often a child might not properly identify or distinguish such expressions that can lead him to an incorrect interpretation and, as a consequence, misunderstandings can arise.

This becomes even more important when it deals with the teaching of a foreign language, because the goal becomes more complicated especially when the child has to realize it in another language. It would be really helpful the usage of the ludic methodology. The values and the importance of this method, and the application of games as an efficient technique where the child is wholly involved, body and mind, has made such a methodology more famous than global glottodidactics. Game as a teaching object dates back to earlier ages and it still continues to be used as the most efficient tool through which the child can learn spontaneously, in freedom and complex-free, enabling thus a positive psychological progress without creating communication and interaction barriers.

Therefore, we cannot act differently, but use this methodology and games as the most essential tool in our lesson, taking into consideration the age and the psychology.

A well-known researcher claims:

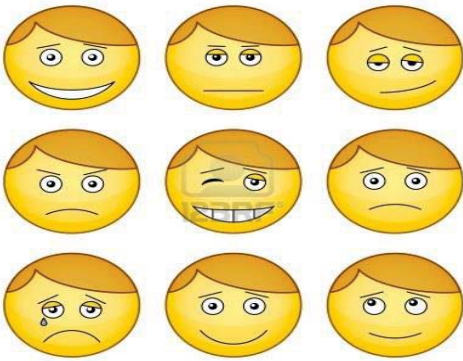"Games are actions that build the world" (Goffman, 2006)

Starting from this quote, let's build our world of emotions and feelings by playing and by knowing ourselves and the others.

Didactic units for children (Gjinali A. PhD Thesis, 2013)

Mimics and our expressions
You and I

Smileys, faces, emoticons	
Duration	5-6 hours
Recipients, public	Pupils of 2nd-3rd-4th degree
Field of expertise	You and I; expressions, phrases, creativity, fantasy
Method	Its principle is the theory of multiple Intelligences (Gardener)
Educational objectives	1. To increase the children awareness on own and others' emotions. 2. To become aware of own emotions and feelings and learn how to express and interpret them properly.
General objectives	Stimulation, encouragement and participation of all children in organized and properly defined discussions Motivation and continuously keep children highly interested General knowledge of main personal and others' emotions
Teaching objectives	1. Know and understand emotions expressed through face mimic 2. Know and understand emotions and the correct identification 3. Become aware of personal emotions 4. Acknowledge friend's emotions 5. Understand friends' emotions and getting to know a different viewpoint 6. Know the lexicon related to these emotional expressions 7. Know and use different expressions related to emotions 8. Know negative and positive mimic 9. Create critical sense and reasoning regarding different emotions
Linguistic objectives	Know the lexicon used with mimics: smiley, cheerful, passive, angry, accomplice, cunning, worried, disappointed, sad, pouting, shy, fearful, proud, shame, surprise, hopeful, etc. Learn how to ask someone about their feelings Learn how to response when asked Learn to express our feelings
Cultural objectives	Understanding whether the faces of Italian children express the same and if they are the same as those of Albanian children Emphasize same mimics and interpretations

	Emphasize their differences, if any
	Explain these differences, if any
	(note: Of course, the expressions, especially the basic ones, are universal, but this is a conclusion children have to reach by themselves)
Social-pragmatic objectives	Know friend's mimic:
	Understand it
	Feel empathy
	Share the same emotions, same feelings
	Reject contradictory and unclear emotions
	Share same viewpoints
Environment	Classroom
Materials	paper, ink, colourful chalks, blackboard, video-projector, computer, CD, DVD, internet (to get familiar with smiley, emoticons)
Activities	Being active, different games to achieve the above-mentioned objectives.
	Children watch a cartoon, for example: Pinocchio
	Teacher and pupils can be assured in Albanian on Pinocchio's father's emotions (Geppetto), Pinocchio's and different characters', by stopping the video time after time, in order for the pupils to observe better the actual facial expressions.
	Dramatization of different facial expressions as observed in the movie
	Possible explanation of observed mimics
	Group activities among two children
	Game 1. It deals with the representation of different emotions
	Pupils sit in front of one another and after find and expression the facial expressions of their friend have to draw it.
	The winner is the one who finds the most of expressions and correctly draws them.
	Game 2. Match facial expressions with expressions written in small paper labels under the teacher's supervision. That is, labelling.

ISSN 2039-2117 (online)
ISSN 2039-9340 (print)

Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences
MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy

Vol.5 No.22
September 2014

	Game 3. Children try to "read" expression on their friend's faces and on drawings. They try to identify it and express it verbally.
	Game 4. Each one of them gets a mirror and practices facial mimic and expressions according to the emotions their teacher indicates them to. The winner is the one who correctly guesses them.
	Game 5. With the help of internet, teacher shows children smiles, emoticons and faces.
	The class is divided into two groups
	The first group must find the negative mimics. First, they have to find what they are expressing and then verify them by reading the description and thus, find out whether their answer is correct or not.
	The second group should find positive mimics. First, they have to find what they are expressing and then verify them by reading the description and thus, find out whether their answer is correct or not.
	The winning group is the one who find more correct mimics.
	Game 6. Teacher associates every facial expression with a defined music tune and children must find out whether it fits or not.
	The winner is the one who manages to make more associations between image and music.
	Game 7. Teacher asks the pupils that for every defined mimic, the pupils draw something that they think corresponds to the facial expression: an image, a panorama or a famous figure, etc.
	After finishing, they have to discuss and explain why the image they chose to draw is related to the mimic assigned by the teacher.
	Game 8. Teacher asks children to draw familiar faces with different facial expressions, according to their character and nature.
	The winner is the one with the best representation and who explains clearly the relation between the face, mimic and its nature.
	Game 9. Create a short story through mimics.
	Work group.
	The winner is the group with the most clear and funny story.
Teacher's role	-To provide each group not only with the necessary materials, but also with the facial expression each group must perform
	-Clears the emotions expressed by each facial expression
	-Assists the working groups by clarifying them, in case of confusion
	- Assists individuals by orienting them to problem solving
Methodology	Based on the ludic one, active

Knowledge check	It will be performed via teacher's observation during the class, by paying attention to the given responses during the activity.
Evaluation	The evaluation is done personally done by the teacher
	He will do it by evaluating:
	The acknowledgment of emotions expressed in the story
	The acknowledgment of emotions through facial expressions (real, drawn or observed)
	The right correlation between the face and the respective drawn expression
	The acknowledgment of lexic and used expressions for such mimics.
	All the games

Conclusions:

The teaching of a language, but not only, must be conducted with children in various methods and pass through many sensory channels, in order to use all kinds of intelligence, styles and learning strategies that each one uses to profit the most of what is offered. Also, undoubtedly, teaching children should involve games and by game, we mean a teaching game, well-organized and properly defined by the teacher, so that we can achieve the desired objectives.

Bibliography:

Guglielmi A., 2012, Il linguaggio segreto del volto, http://api2.edizpiemme.it/uploads/2014/02/566-2242.pdf   pg. 10. Consulted 19.06.2014

Goffman E., (2006) Frame analysis. L'organizzazione dell'esperienza, Armando, Roma.

Gjinali A. (2013), PHD Thesis. Rëndësia dhe roli i metodave dhe teknikave të larmishme didaktike në mësimdhënien dhe nxënien e gjuhës italiane për grup - mosha të ndryshme. University of Tirana, Faculty of Foreign language, Albania.