

Homo Zappiens Challenges Language Education

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Abstract

When Wim Veen and Ben Vrakking published *Homo Zappiens* in 2006 I had already had a long (yet not necessarily successful) history of challenging the old pencil-and-paper view in language education in Romania. My student teachers remained clustered in the descriptive grammar paradigm despite the curricular and methodological reform and beyond the declared rhetoric of the learner-centered approach. Could a radically new perspective on knowledge and learning refuel the attempt to renovate language teaching? Was such change too big for our state of the arts?

My paper highlights an attempt to apply a "Homo Zappiens"- based approach to language education as a way to relate to a new generation of students and their needs.

Firstly I shall present a number of dangerous methodological stereotypes that Romanian (prospective) teachers inherit from their primary and secondary education: grammar drills, decontextualized assignments, translation to check/enhance comprehension, limitation to the linearity of the (text)book.

Secondly I shall make a portrait of nowadays students and their communication needs in the digital era.

Thirdly I shall compare two approaches to the "Homo Zappiens" phenomenon. One is a superficial understanding of the ICT benefits in the language class and in the training of language teachers which does not change very much the old pattern of misled communication. The other is a whole different approach to the cognitive abilities as they are fashioned by the digital media. The non-linear streams of information, the combination of a variety of symbolic codes in the cognitive process, the multi-tasking and collaborative habits of the new generation offer the teacher and the teacher educator an opportunity to facilitate deep understanding and effective language learning.

Last but not least I shall present some of the successes and failures of such an approach in teacher training programs.