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MOTHER TONGUE THEMA:GREED PARADIGM IN SWEDISH PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a part of research conducted in 2009 in Stockholm to explore process drama as pedagogy in a mother tongue tuition program. There is an extend presentation of the Swedish policy towards mother tongue, focusing in Greek language, by the use of alternative didactic methods such as puppetry, drama and storytelling. Results suggest that a judicious and systematic use of drama techniques may present the teacher with opportunities for equipping the learners with explicit knowledge of the target language systems. This in turn may help students to develop their mother tongue skills from pre-school age. Therefore, as studies indicates, their academic performance at school will be better, as their mother tongue proficiency functions as a bridge between the language spoken at school and the language they speak at home.

Key words: mother tongue, drama, language acquisition, puppetry

1. Introduction-Context

For centuries, Greece has been a country that exports immigrants. There are now as many Greeks living across the world as live in Greece (Katsikas, 1993). Such a Diaspora has led to the formation of well-established and still locally important Greek communities. Generally, Greek communities are well organized and provide many activities and services, especially for the education of the younger members. As with other ethnic minority groups, hosted in a majority culture, Greek families and their children face the issue of language learning. That is, the need to learn the language and understand the culture of the country that hosts them and, at the same time, to maintain their own language and culture. Usually the statutory educational system of the host country takes responsibility for the first issue, whereas the second remains the responsibility of the family and/or the community (Damanakis, 1997).

As an exception, in Sweden there is a policy for tuition in student's mother tongues, where mother tongue tuition in the Swedish context refers to tuition for foreign background. The Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) has taken a decision that all pupils whose mother tongue is not Swedish will be able to study their mother tongue during their nine-year compulsory school period and at upper secondary level. Mother tongue tuition is a question for the municipality, and not decided by the school, which is obliged to offer the tuition to students with a mother tongue other than Swedish. Some conditions regulate this offer. In order to participate, the students are required to have a basic knowledge in their mother tongue and it must constitute a daily spoken language (Skolverket, 2009).

Beside the above Greek communities have established community schools, which operate largely in the early evenings, during weekdays, and on Saturdays, both morning and afternoon. Financially, they are supported by the Greek community of each town/city. Schools are recognized by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in Greece. Greek community schools are mainly staffed by qualified teachers, seconded by the Greek governments (Damanakis, 2003).

Even though there are alternative choices in learning, there are increasing concerns that gradually fewer children attend the schools and attendance patterns are irregular. My own personal experience and observations from a double role (that of a teacher and a parent indicates that contributing factors include such as parental conflicting attitudes and uncertainties about the value and importance of learning the mother tongue; lack of inappropriate learning resources of teaching the mother tongue to young children; between children's educational experiences in Swedish schools and the Greek

community schools; The impact of parental conflict and confusion on the learning of the mother tongue is further clouded by the dated, mainly traditional didactic, methods of teaching and learning in the Greek community schools.

For some parents - learning Greek and understanding Greek culture and traditions - means that the language becomes part of, or even the whole of, the child's identity. For these parents language and identity are closely related and interwoven and they insist that their children are taught and learn the mother tongue (Bialystok, 2001). However, for another group of parents, the Greek language is less of a priority of fear of confusing languages. Yet research evidence has shown that bilingualism promotes flexibility of thinking and information processing and furthermore, the mother tongue and the language of instruction in school become interdependent and they nurture each other (Baker, 2000; Cummins, 2000).

The experiences of children living in Stockholm are likely to be more different than similar to the experiences of children living in Greece. In this context, the teaching of the Greek language becomes de-contextualized, with children failing to understand and comprehend the language. This problem is exacerbated by the use of phonetic only approaches to teaching and learning Greek. There is now strong evidence that, though phonetic approaches may help children acquire the mechanisms of the structure, syntax and spelling of a language, they may contribute very little to understanding and comprehension (Wyse, 2006).

Greek language for most of the parents is important as learning a second language, implicitly making the link between language, cultural heritage and identity.

1.1 The significance of mother tongue tuition

Mother tongue is used for the language that a person learnt as a child at home (usually from their parents). Children growing up in bilingual homes can, according to this definition, have more than one mother tongue or native language. The term mother tongue should not be interpreted to mean that it is the language of one's mother. In some paternal societies, the wife moves in with the husband and thus may have a different first language than the husband. Mother in this context originated from the use of "mother" to mean "origin" as in motherland (Viberg, 2001).

The mother tongue plays a very important part in a child's identity and self-esteem. The mother tongue provides the basis for the child's ability to learn. The child finds it easier to learn their second language and other school subjects.

Maintaining and developing language and literacy skills in the mother tongue ensures continuous cognitive development, and in parallel with the competence in the language of instruction, leads to additive bilingualism. Moreover, it is also crucial for maintaining cultural identity and emotional stability by enabling students to remain in touch with, and maintain esteem for the language, literature and culture of their home country. Finally, it makes it possible for students to readjust to life in their home community and education system should they return to their home country.

In short, bilingual children perform better in school when the school effectively promotes the mother tongue (Winsa, 2000).

1.1.1 The development of mother tongue education in Sweden

The development of mother tongue education in Sweden has to be seen against the background of public discussions at the beginning of the 1970s and the Immigrant Commission's report (SOU 1974) which led to the introduction of a general immigrant and minority policy in 1975. Here, the Swedish Riksdag (Parliament) decided to base migration and integration policy on the principles of equality, partnership and freedom of choice. The latter principle implies a rejection of cultural assimilation and underlies the right to mother tongue education. In 1977 the "home language reform" followed in response to a public campaign for immigrant rights in Swedish society. It gave immigrant and minority children the legal entitlement to mother tongue instruction in public schools. The reform was based on two diaverse motives: on the one hand it aimed to provide support for the retention of ethnic or cultural identity, on the other, it was intended to allow for a normal linguistic, academic and cognitive development of immigrant and minority students. This concern for the individual student's cognitive and academic development during school years was the main motive. Altogether, the reform was intended to help ensure equality between Swedes and persons from other ethnic backgrounds as well as cultural freedom of choice (Hult, 2004).

The Immigrant Commission's report (SOU 1974) reflected ideas already expressed in the UNESCO recommendation from 1953. This recommendation stated that all children should get their initial schooling in their mother tongue. It was based on the obvious fact that knowledge cannot be acquired in a language the student does not understand. Modern learning theories also assume that new knowledge can be acquired more easily if instruction is based on the known. Learning should thus start from the situation, the knowledge and proficiencies an individual already has. Based on these assumptions, mother tongue instruction has enjoyed the support of all major political parties in Sweden. Furthermore, it has since the 1970s been widely accepted that:

• it takes long, several years, before a second language works as efficiently for learning as the first language,

• an abrupt language shift will hamper a child's cognitive development during school years and diminish his or her potential academic achievement,

• children's attitudes about their first language – and through that also to their own culture and origin – will be affected by the role this language is accorded in society and at school,

• an individual's identity growth relies upon a person's experiencing positive affirmation of his or her cultural background (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2006).

Until now in Sweden, immigrant children in pre-school are entitled to mother language support. Immigrant students in compulsory education and in upper secondary education are formally entitled to mother language tuition as a school subject called "Mother Tongue Tuition" if they wish and certain other criteria are met, such as if there are more than five children in the school who want tuition in that language and a teacher can be found. The subject of the syllabus covers the literature, history and culture of the country of origin. The grades in this subject are considered equivalent to those in other subjects. It is in most cases an extracurricular activity outside normal timetabled lessons but students may be able to study the subject as an alternative to the second foreign language as a school option. At the end of year nine as well as in upper secondary education, there are nationally approved tests in the subjects of Swedish, Swedish as a Second Language, English and Mathematics. For years six to nine, there is diagnostic testing to form a basis on which to assess where an individual student stands in relation to the set goals, to help teachers to assess students and to support them in their learning. The materials used for the lower grades focus on language development and learning of basic mathematical concepts (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2009).

Teacher education programs are required to prepare students teachers for a multicultural society and to promote access to teacher education programs for students with different cultures (Norberg, Sundgren 2000). The teacher education reform of 2001 emphasized that future teachers have to be trained to work in multicultural schools. Intercultural education has become a subject in the general part of the teacher training, although an evaluation indicates that the approaches of intercultural/multicultural education vary from one teacher education program to another. For example, some institutes focus on recruiting students with different cultural backgrounds in teacher education program, while some institutes of offer obligatory courses for multicultural education for student teachers (Hult, 2004).

Mother tongue instruction in schools may take place in or outside the regular timetable in compulsory school; and as an individual option, a language option, or in the form of a remedial course in upper secondary education. If students study their mother tongue outside the regular timetable, they are entitled to a combined total of seven years in the public school system. Students wishing to take their mother tongue in upper secondary school must have a grade in that language from year nine of compulsory school, or equivalent (Wirén, 2009).

In practice, lessons are usually held outside regular timetable hours. In schools with students with limited knowledge in Swedish, some subjects may be offered in their mother tongue, while they learn Swedish. For instance, in Botkyrka, the review team interviewed students who were learning mathematics in Arabic through a mathematics teacher of the same immigrant background. Although calculations and mathematical formula are the same regardless of the language, the ways to do the calculations and solve the formula are different between the countries and, students preferred to continue to learn mathematics in the same way. Yet, learning the language of instruction was still important in mathematics as it helped in interpreting the questions (Enkvist, 2005).

Providing mother tongue tuition and support is expensive. Sharing the resources is of critical importance across all levels of education. An on-line resource site, *Tema Modersmål*, has been developed to primarily for those working in pre-school and school education. The website hosts different mother tongue rooms and provides tools for communicating in different languages. These rooms are run by mother tongue teachers at both pre-school and school level. As of July 2009, about 26 languages were covered (Winsa, 2000).

1.1.2 Pre School Mother Tongue Policy

According to the latest Swedish curriculum the preschool should take account of the fact that children have different living environments and that they try to create context and meaning out of their own experiences. Adults should give children support in developing trust and self-confidence. The child's curiosity, initiative and interests should be encouraged and their will and desire to learn should be stimulated. The task of the preschool involves not only developing the child's ability and cultural creativity, but also passing on a cultural heritage – its values, traditions and history, language and knowledge – from one generation to the next.

The internationalization of Swedish society imposes high demands on the ability of people to live with and understand values inherent in cultural diversity. The preschool is a social and cultural meeting place, which can reinforce this and prepare children for life in an increasingly internationalised community. Awareness of their own cultural heritage and participating in the culture of others should contribute to children's ability to understand and empathize with the circumstances and values of others. The preschool can help to ensure that children from national minorities and children with a foreign background receive support in developing a multicultural sense of identity (Wirén, 2009).

The goals of the curriculum include developing *"a rich and varied spoken language and the ability to communicate with others and to express their thoughts".* It articulates Sweden's high emphasis on developing children's vocabulary, to increase their ability to play with words, raise interest in the written language and train their communicative functions. The goals also include striving for tolerance, sensitivity and mutual respect for all forms of different backgrounds and cultures. It explicitly supports children whose first language is not Swedish, in developing their cultural identity as well as their ability to communicate in both Swedish and their first language. Language support for immigrant children in Sweden is regarded as important not only for their language learning in Swedish but also for the child's language and cultural learning of their own (Viberg, 2001).

The pre-school curriculum prescribes that pre-school must contribute to providing children whose first language is not Swedish with the opportunity of developing both Swedish and their own first language. During the 1980s, language support in pre-school was supported with grants. This resulted in about 60% of children with a mother tongue other than Swedish receiving language support. The number of children gaining support fell substantially after funding for school and pre-school was no longer made through ear-marked grants. With the curriculum for pre-school, introduced in 1998, the provision of mother language support was strengthened and as a consequence the number of supported children has increased slightly but steadily. According to data by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2006), in the case of one-to-five-year-olds, 15% of children in pre-schools and 5% of children in family day-care homes spoke a first language different from Swedish in 2005. Of these only 14% received first language support. For six-year-olds who attended the pre-school class in 2005, the proportion of pupils whose first language is not Swedish was 14.5%, and, of these, 46.6% received a first language support (Axelsson, 2005).

Overall, in almost all municipalities there are children in pre-school whose first language is not Swedish. However, only about seventy municipalities provide first language support. This is an increase compared with 2004 when only about fifty municipalities offered first language support (Skolverket, 2006).

There can be a mother tongue teacher specialising in teaching mother tongue at pre-school level who meets the children once or twice every week. As Garefalakis (1994) and Swedish Ministry of Education and Research mentioned in their research, mother tongue teachers usually use traditional didactic methods and therefore there is a big dropout of students. In order to improve the quality of teaching, the government initiated the "Boost for Teachers" program in 2007. It aims to provide current teachers with opportunities to attain qualifications. There were some problems in the initial phase of the initiative due to lack of demand from municipalities. In the last year, demand has increased and teachers who have taken part are satisfied with the in service training.

1.1.3 The use of drama in language acquisition

According to Shin-Mei and O'Neill (1998) drama has been used for language teaching since the middle ages. The last decade many teachers used to scoff at the idea of using drama to teach a second language. The change in attitude towards the use of drama in language teaching came about due to a greater emphasis on meaningful communicative activities instead of mechanical drills.

In a recent contribution to Tuttitalia, Boria (2003) discusses the role that literary texts can play in the foreign language classroom and provides some examples of how learners' linguistic awareness can

be enhanced by the use of literary texts. In the last two paragraphs she focuses on drama and argues that drama still offers the best literary source to present students with models of conversational interactions and discourse patterns. Dramatic dialogue can provide an excellent synthesis of some of the strategies that are used by speakers and listeners in conversations. (2003).

Language is used in meaningful situations (Liddicoat, 2008). Drama contextualizes the language in real or imagined situations in and out of the classroom. Language in the class that uses drama activities is explored, tried out and practiced in meaningful situations. Drama activities can be used as a means of reinforcement of language learnt (Mordecai, 1985; Fleming, 2003). It helps to extend, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure through role-play and communication games.

Drama improves oral communication. As a form of communication methodology, drama provides the opportunity for the student to use language meaningfully and appropriately. Alkistis (2008) states that drama puts back some of the forgotten emotional content into language. Appropriacy and meaning are more important than form or structure of the language. Drama can help restore the totality of the situation by reversing the learning process, beginning with meaning and moving towards language form. This makes language learning more meaningful and attempts to prepare the student for real-life situations. Learning a second language can be enjoyable, stimulating and meaningful when combined with drama activities (Holden, 1981, Haritos, 2003).

Educational drama, as an informal classroom improvisation, affects the ways students think and learn and has a powerful effect on thinking, reading, writing, and foreign-language learning (Bruner, 1983, Vygotsky, 1986).

2.   Research Methodology

Concerning all the above factors we decided to conduct a project using alternative methods of teaching Greek during Greek mother tongue tuition in the Swedish preschool classes. As part of the "Boost of Teachers" program a 10-week project was developed in 7 preschool day centers in the area of Solna-Stockholm, which included mother tongue instruction in Greek origin students. Our sample comprised of 12 boys and 16 girls, 4–6 years old, of Greek and Greek-Swedish origin. They were second- and third-generation immigrants, and some were of mixed parentage. The program was developed by the author who also was the class's teacher, posted by the Greek government.

2.1   Description of the intervention

The students were introduced to a variety of drama-in-education techniques such as improvisation, role- play, frozen image building, puppetry and storytelling. They were actively engaged in a range of practical activities, which enabled them to be active participants in the classroom. Initially, in an attempt to introduce the students to improvisation, we asked them to walk slowly around the room, to freeze and to act out various emotions. The emotions that they were required to act out included, amongst others, the following: *hate, love, anger, fear, courage, joy and sadness*. They were presented with various scenarios based on the emotions to enable them to provide a more realistic portrayal of their feelings.

The following are examples of scenarios presented to them:
- You have just heard that your dog has died. Act out your sadness.
- It is late at night and you are in the middle of a forest. Suddenly you hear a noise. Act out your fear.
- You have just discovered that your brother/sister took your favorite toy. Act out your anger.

The students were , also, introduced to the basics in frozen image building to enable them to work on a concept, which they could develop further. I discovered that it was a very effective technique in drawing the class together. Group frozen image building involved, amongst others, the following: "You are in circus. Think about who you are. Take up your position and freeze". This was an individual task. Then we moved around from one frozen statue to another asking them, amongst others, the following questions: *Who are you? What are you doing here? How old are you?*

The frozen image scenes eventually led to role- play as the participants had to portray various roles in the context of the playlets, which they created. It was evident that the students were acquiring invaluable oral communication skills and their ability to empathize with characters was developing in a meaningful and dynamic manner.

In addition, we used puppetry as a mediator tool to facilitate language learning. Children created their own puppets from multiple materials and used them in improvisations and in structured activities.

The puppet's linguistic potential emerges when the children communicating with the puppet mediate cultural and social experiences, express their conceptions of knowledge and learning and develop indicative, semiotic and rhetorical functions of language (Kaplan, 2005).

A favorite puppet read a story and a dialogue started between the puppet and children about the story, aiming to clarify key points, and asking questions, making predictions and summarizing the story. The story was role-played by incorporating Greek music, dance, or kinaesthetic activities. The basic idea was to introduce the Greek culture and blend it with cultural aspects of the children's current experiences from the Greek community and the host majority culture. Its aim was for young children to gain a holistic view of the world in which they live, rather than seeing distinct cultures within and between which they move and shift and drift (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, Miller, 2003).

2.2   Data analysis

For the implementation and evaluation of the project an ethnographic case-study methodology was used (David & Sutton, 2004). The researcher and teacher maintained an insider–outsider perspective in terms of the cultural context of the community, where the project was developed. We used participant observation, interviews, event-recording data collection sheets for free play, training observations, post-training observations, and follow-up observations were developed by the social skills instructor. Data were recorded on observation sheets using tally marks and anecdotal notations.

After the implementation of the project, data were collected to examine qualitatively the processes and the extent to which it addressed the aims of the project. Data collected included parents' informal feedback throughout the implementation of the project and via, a questionnaire administered after the implementation of the program and work produced by the children.

To be able to distinguish and identify drama's and puppets communicative potential and understand the empirical data in a qualitatively new way, the following concepts have played a prominent role throughout the analysis process: dialogue, subjectivisation, motive and mediation. Dialogue refers to linguistic contexts in which children talk with the puppet or during the role play or with each other and concerns the content of what is said and how it is said. Subjectivisation refers to puppet's and drama's sentimental value, i.e. how the process of the puppet's creation as a subject is developed and expressed in children's verbal and physical acts. Motive refers to communicative dynamics and the way the puppet's usage creates and generates knowledge-related and emotional motives. Mediation concerns how children construct and mediate their conceptual world, develop knowledge, exchange experiences, establish relationships and create new activities.

2.3   The communicative contexts of the analysis

The following contexts emerged as spontaneous arenas for children's communication and the drama's and puppet's communicative potential: improvisations, individual conversations, games with puppets inspired by the drama techniques and drawings that children produced of their own accord for certain puppets. Below, a description is given of what characterised these arenas.

Improvisations: Improvisation means that what is enacted emerges while the conversation/activity is in progress.

Individual conversations: Here, individual conversations refer to situations where children turn to me spontaneously and on their own initiative and want to talk about a specific drama scenario or puppets in general.

Games with puppets inspired by drama techniques: The children's games refers to children organizing a game of their own accord where the content of the game is partly an imitation of the puppet's movements on the stage and partly a development of new movement patterns that arise in the interaction.

Spontaneous drawings: Here, spontaneous drawings refers to the drawings children made of their own accord and out of interest and that the drawings were explained and given to me after the project.

3.   Results

In a range of ways this study has highlighted how mother tongue in correlation with drama techniques and especially puppetry and related tasks, which encourage learner engagement and creativity, can provide a powerful means of developing language skills as well as broader understandings related to

literacy and culture. Both observational data and interviews with students and parents gave strong support for the view that using mother tongue in a context and purpose are fundamental to building genuine communicative competence and to facilitating the internalisation of their mother tongue.

The analysis made it possible to distinguish and identify the significance of mother tongue with drama and puppets techniques as communicative potential and as a mediating tool, based on three result areas: as driving force, mediation and three-party relationships and communicative processes.

Drama's and puppets sentimental value as a subject manifests itself primarily in children's dialogues and ways of talking. Here, sentimental value does not only refer to the existence of emotions that children express, it also includes children's negotiations concerning the meaning of the puppet being 'for real' and what it then consists of.

"Three-party relationships" refers to the relationships that are developed in the communication between three parties – the teacher, the puppet and children –and is a way of participating, creating and developing common knowledge in social learning activities. The communication in mother tongue is based on a common object, the puppet and the puppet's actions in the contexts. The results show that experiences in the common dialogue in a three-party relationship often create situations that, for the teacher, involve unexpected communicative twists and changes in Greek. It also emerges that such situations result in and contain both opportunities and limitations as regards the teacher's actions. Here, opportunities refer to the creation of new insights and discoveries in the dialog with the children, while limitations refer to the uncertainty that arises when it comes to the puppet's credibility in relation to what is unpredictable in the dialog between the puppet and the children.

The results from the study point to the mother tongue and puppet's and drama techniques relational, linguistic and action-related potential due to the fact that the puppet is perceived and treated as a subject. The results also show that subjectivisation of the puppet takes place in close and immediate contact between puppet and child especially when the dialogue in mother tongue. This means that children's individual motives are related to the puppet or to the puppet's properties. How the puppet is experienced and perceived as a subject is expressed above all in children's dialogs and ways of talking to the puppet, their way of talking with others about the puppet and in the interaction with each other in the light of the puppet's participation in the pre-school.

When we use drama techniques or puppetry, the children's interaction reflects their cultural and social context. How the world functions is expressed in, among other things, children's dialogues where they, with the help of mother language, define their experiences and develop their horizon of understanding. The dialogue that emerged with drama techniques or with the puppets functioned as a discussion forum where the children who actively participated in relation to the puppet most often adopted a narrative and teaching approach.

It is evident from the research that there are many advantages associated with this approach to teaching and learning mother tongue through drama teqniques. The following were some of the advantages gleaned from the students' reflection sessions and our observation of the students during the entire process.

The participants developed confidence and were able to express themselves fluently. Through social interaction the students explored aspects of meaning together which enabled them to increase their understanding, not only of the particular content they were exploring, but also their individual interpretations. They learnt to offer, accept and modify ideas and to build upon the ideas presented by members of the group. They learnt how to empathize and as they became more motivated their self-esteem improved. They acquired better habits of speech and they increased their vocabulary in Greek as we could measure from the before and after the project interviews.

The project was positively received by all parents, who commented as follows: *"It has made learning more fun and interesting!"*,"It enabled the children to learn different areas of the Greek language in a fun way","*It has made learning more interesting and enabled understanding of the text with interaction"*, *"Children learn more when they play together, it promotes discussion, increases vocabulary"*, *"Helps promote the Greek language at home, speaking with your child"*.

Similar comments was made by the children:*"I can play now in the lesson, I like puppetry, and theatre", "It's fun and interesting", "I learn new words ... I speak Greek and I don't sit always on a chair ..","I learn about Greece", "I speak Greek at home with my parents and brothers and sisters."*

The comments were further supported by feedback offered informally during the implementation of the program. The project also had a positive impact on the attendance in mother tongue lessons not only in the Swedish Preschool Centre but also in the Greek evening school. They all attended the weekly sessions regularly and until the end of the academic year according to the official records of their teachers.

It thus emerged from this study that as the students became more confident their self-esteem improved dramatically, thereby leading to a concomitant improvement in their oral communication skills.

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It thus emerged from this study that as the students became more confident their self-esteem improved dramatically, thereby leading to a concomitant improvement in their oral communication skills. This research also points to the properties of the drama teqniques a versatile tool for communication and learning and defines mother tongue as children's communicative right in the context of pre-school.

4. Conclusions and Perspectives

The use of drama activities in mother tongue tuition can be used as an innovative method. With the emphasis on the use of the Communicative Approach in language teaching, drama provides a meaningful way of learning the language. However, it should not be used in isolation but should be used in an integrated approach for language teaching. It should be part and parcel of the communicative classroom methodology. In conclusion it is thus evident that drama-in-education can play a significant and meaningful role in the development of the students' oral communication skills whilst simultaneously developing their personality, self- expression, self awareness and self confidence..

Unfortunately, the way in which a language is acquired is often mechanistic and artificial, depending on a theory of teaching which ignores the emotional and non-verbal content of language. From my experience and research, I believe that the use of creative dramatics in a language classroom not only addresses the nonverbal aspects of language, but also provides a satisfactory linguistic base on which to build communicative competence.

 In addition Swedish policy teaches us that mother tongue education must be a priority in every modern country.

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