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Teaching Shakespeare through Performance for the 21st Century

Георгі Няголов. Театральні постановки у вивченні Шекспіра у XXI столітті.

У статті узагальнено досвід автора, пов'язаний зі створенням та викладанням факультативного курсу «Шекспір крізь виставу» в Софійському університеті «Св. Климент Охридський». Ідея цього курсу була інспірована необхідністю прийняти та адекватно впровадити основні компетенції, рекомендовані Радою Європейського Союзу у 2006 році (затверджені у 2018 році) в галузі англістики в Болгарії. Курс має на меті ознайомити студентів із життям та творчістю Шекспіра в процесі розвитку базових компетенцій для навчання протягом усього життя. Його місією є сприяння переходу від навчання, структурованого навколо підручника і вчителя, до проектного навчання, яке винагороджує творчість та ініціативу і відповідає новим очікуванням, актуальним у XXI столітті. Цей перехід особливо актуальний у сучасних умовах, коли глобальні виклики випробовують на міцність гуманістичні цінності нашої цивілізації, що виявилась невідготовленою до негативних наслідків технологічного прогресу. У статті автор окреслює еволюцію загального дизайну цього курсу, а потім розмірковує про декілька компетенцій в контексті трьох історій, взятих із практики реалізації курсу. На думку автора, найціннішим надбанням цього позакласного проекту є те, що йому вдалося створити сприятливі умови для того, щоб студенти увійшли до «стану потоку» (термін Михайла Циксентміхалія), в якому вони були повністю занурені в процес постановки п'єси заради радості самовираження та співпраці, а не заради оцінки.

Ключові слова: Шекспір, вистава, основні компетенції для навчання протягом усього життя, факультативний курс, позакласний проект, проектне навчання, стан потоку

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No matter how we conceptualize these changes, whether we call them *democratization*, *globalization*, *automation*, or something else, it is hard to ignore that over the last decades, on a global scale, we have seen a freer movement of persons, products, factors of production and information, as well as the displacement of human workforce from more and more jobs, which can be now performed more efficiently by machines. Although these changes have come as a result of human progress and could lead to considerable improvements in everyone's quality of life, the effects we have observed so far seem predominantly negative. Surging waves of migration and global challenges are putting to the test the humanist attitudes and enlightenment values of developed societies. Globalized markets and automation are bringing to big corporations staggering profits, which are not used equitably to offset the harms of production on the environment and on society. The increasingly open access to information is undermining the institutions, which until now have guaranteed the truth, and is creating a favourable environment for unprecedented mass manipulation and disinformation.

It is important to understand that these negative effects are not a direct consequence of the changes themselves, but of the general unpreparedness for them, which is manifested in various forms – from passively allowing others to abuse the new opportunities, to actively trying to put a spoke in the wheel of progress by turning to isolationism, protectionism, national populism, anti-liberalism, etc. Therefore, since the 1990s international organisations, such as UNESCO, OECD, P21, the Council of Europe, the European Union, have striven to formulate a clear idea of what education is needed for everyone to function optimally, both as a worker and as a citizen, in this new global situation. The results of this effort are more and more detailed frameworks of learning objectives conceptualised as competences – syntheses of

knowledge, skills and attitudes (or values). These frameworks can be used by national governments and educational institutions when developing policies, management strategies, programmes, syllabi, etc.

Notwithstanding the structural and terminological differences between these frameworks, in essence they are very similar. As a European Union Member State, pooling capacity in common policy areas, participating in joint research and before long also in joint education initiatives, a reasonable choice for Bulgaria would be to adopt and implement adequately the framework of Key Competences recommended by the Council of the European Union in 2006 and restated in 2018. The framework proposes the following basic competences for lifelong learning: literacy competence, multilingual competence, mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, digital competence, personal, social and learning to learn competence, citizenship competence, entrepreneurship competence, cultural awareness and expression competence¹. Instruction in Bulgaria, however, both at school and university level, is inherently focused on memorization and reproduction of approved information, it is textbook and teacher centred, and as a rule rarely rewards creativity. As a result, most students become entrenched in the role of passive learners early on and disengage gradually from the education process. If they develop 21st-century skills, competences and attitudes, it is mainly as an extra-systemic, therefore random and unmeasured, by-product, or even as a counterculture to their experience of formal education.

Clearly, the transition from this situation to alignment with the new expectations of purpose, quality and relevance of the 21st century is not an easy task. Led by the understanding that sharing is caring, I report in this paper on

¹ Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, COM (2018) 24.

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my attempts to create an elective course on a traditional academic topic, Shakespeare's drama, aimed prevalently at engaging students and developing 21st-century competences. Project-based and performance-based pedagogies as well as the relative academic freedom instructors enjoy when teaching at the university level in Bulgaria are important ingredients in the mix. Below I will outline the evolution of the overall design and then offer my thoughts about several 21st-century competences in the context of three stories taken from the actual implementation of the course.

Overall design

The pilot version of the course was conceived as an extracurricular project in 2011. Students from all year groups were encouraged to audition and participate on a voluntary basis. We got together in the beginning of the summer semester and planned thirteen creative workshops around a single Shakespeare play – *Love's Labour's Lost*². First, students had a crash course in Shakespeare and his work by watching and discussing with me Michael Wood's documentary *In Search of Shakespeare* in an informal atmosphere over tea and biscuits. Then, each one went to the library, found authoritative sources, researched and presented to the group key aspects of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. Afterwards, students read carefully the text of the play on their own and then had five close reading sessions with me, one for each act, during which they were encouraged to take notes of everything about the play that they found curious or important. Next, they put to use all the knowledge they had gathered until then to devise a production concept for the play and in a subsequent session to adapt the text to this concept. Finally, there were creative rehearsal sessions during which

² Naturally, the choice of the first play was not accidental. As the overarching objective of the project was to rethink education, it was only logical that we would do the only Shakespeare play that explores the same topic.

students experimented with different roles, staging solutions, stage properties, costumes, visuals, music. By the end of the summer semester, we had a production concept, an adapted play text, and we knew how the roles will be distributed, so during the summer holidays students could take some time to learn their lines. We resumed our work in October with weekly rehearsals which led to a premiere just before the Christmas break. The performance was planned to coincide with the international conference in honour of Bulgaria's foremost Shakespeare scholar Prof. Dr. Alexander Shurbanov and became one of the highlights of the event. By the end of the project I presented the learning outcomes and argued that during its course students developed not only a sound understanding of Shakespeare and his work, which could be tested by the assessment methods traditionally used at our institution, but also transferrable skills, such as collaboration and entrepreneurial skills, leadership, problem solving, grit, critical and analytical thinking, literacy and language learning, digital, media and cultural literacy, creativity, which were much more problematic from the point of view of assessment³.

In 2012 I was invited to transform the extracurricular project described above into a course which would meet the administrative requirements for inclusion in the official curriculum of the B. A. programme in English and American Studies. A number of questions emerged. Could a theatre workshop award credits for studying English literature? What about students unable or unwilling to act on the stage? Could there be an elective course that would be open to students from all year groups? Would it be productive to make all students participate in the performance to obtain a grade?

³ Georgi Niagolov. *Labours Lost or Labours Won? Teaching Shakespeare through Performance at Sofia University* was published in *The Peregrinations of the Text: Reading, Translation, Rewriting (Essays in Honour of Alexander Shurbanov)*. Eds. E. Pancheva et al. Sofia: Sofia University Press, 2013.

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What would be the criteria for assessment? Is there any possibility to account for the transferrable skills? What if students didn't manage to realise the performance? Would this invalidate the learning outcomes of the course? Would formalizing the creative process kill the genuine student engagement and creativity the extracurricular project managed to generate?

After some consideration, I realised that the most valuable asset of the extracurricular project was that it managed to create the right conditions for the students to reach a state of flow, to adopt Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's term⁴, a state in which they were completely involved in doing something for its own sake. They accepted the challenge, gained ownership of the project, and joyfully indulged in the current of their individual and collective creativity, readily learning whatever was necessary to achieve their goal. If this feature of the project was lost in the process of alignment with the formal requirements and capabilities of university education, in my view, that would render meaningless the very existence of such a course.

Admittedly, the state of flow depends on the constellation of many factors, some of which are difficult to control, however, the major ones can be identified and reproduced. First, the state of flow requires a substantial challenge. Enough students must be enthused by the idea of performing Shakespeare on the stage in front of an audience. As this cannot be expected of everyone, a course that raises such a challenge can only be elective. Second, the state of flow relies on genuine student engagement. This cannot be achieved without the right mix of freedom and responsibility. Students need to understand and accept the responsibility for the fate of the project. They should be free to commit or quit at any time. They should also be free to negotiate, decide and

⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper and Row, 1990.

modify as a group every aspect of their collaborative enterprise. They should be even free to fail, without any negative academic or social consequences. Their responsibility should come from everyone's sense of ownership of the project and his or her respect for the work of the others. From the point of view of educational design, this means that at least part of the whole course must remain entirely voluntary, unaffected by any aspiration to grades, credits or any other benefit. Third, the state of flow depends on the balanced, equally high levels of challenge and competence. A high level of challenge combined with a low level of competence results in anxiety. So, in order to avoid this, we need to dynamically support the increase of competence. This project consists of two discernible phases that require different sets of competences. There is a preparatory phase working toward the creation of a production concept and adapted play text, which requires better understanding of Shakespeare and his work, Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, the chosen play in terms of language, context, production and critical history. Depending on design, this can include a number of 21st-century competences – research competence, analytical thinking, language literacy (in a foreign language), critical, multimodal and digital literacies, cultural competence, communication and collaboration skills, creativity and innovation, etc. There is also a production phase which calls for organization, time management, entrepreneurial, leadership and social skills and competences, as well as specific theatrical skills, such as vocal, physical and acting skills, using lighting, video, sound technology, designing and crafting the stage set, costumes, properties, music and special effects, etc. The set of skills and competences pertaining to the first phase can be effectively supported at our languages department, while for those connected to the second one there is a need for collaboration with theatres, theatre schools and professionals.

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Based on these considerations, I proposed a thirty-academic-hour, one-semester elective course, open to B. A. students of all year groups. The big challenge of staging a Shakespeare play in the original language is posed in the very beginning, but it is accompanied by a clear explanation that the work toward this goal extends beyond the scope of the course, that there are two phases: preparation and production, that the course only covers the former, while the latter is entirely voluntary and extracurricular. The course consists of fifteen weekly workshops – five of them are dedicated to gaining contextual knowledge about Shakespeare, his times, his work, Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre; five are devoted to close reading of one Shakespeare play chosen by the students, its critical reception, production history; and five are set aside for creative laboratory work on the production concept, adaptation of the text, experimenting with roles and other staging solutions. Students are encouraged to collaborate in the classroom and also in the virtual learning environment of the university. Students' participation in the course is assessed on the basis of two assignments: an independent research assignment connected with the contextual and textual workshops, and a creative contribution assignment connected with the creative laboratories. The research assignment develops the capability to identify and use high-quality scholarly sources, textual but also in other media, extract relevant information, understand and communicate it, as well as to do first-hand analysis of the text of the selected play and share the finding with the others in the group. The creative contribution can take any form: original text, photograph, drawing, model, costume, music, video, choreography, live performance, so long as it is accompanied by a detailed explanation of how it has been informed by the contextual and textual workshops and how it contributes to the final collaborative outputs of the course – the production concept and the adapted play text. In the end of the course

students decide whether they would like to move forward with the production phase. Out of the eight runs of the course, so far, students have chosen to continue the project six times.

The voluntary production phase takes place during the following semester. At Sofia University we are lucky to have a small, but fully equipped, theatre hall. This is the most obvious rehearsal and performance space that we can use under a gentleman's agreement and in coordination with the student's theatre and university authorities. Depending on the nature of the production concept, we can identify our other needs. So far, we have collaborated on a voluntary basis with the Sofia University Theatre-Laboratory “@lma @lter”, the National Theatre, the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts, the British Embassy in Bulgaria, The British Council as well as professionals, in their individual capacity, working in various creative industries – theatre, choreography, video production, sound recording, illustration and design, media and marketing, advertising, etc. The role of the instructor in this phase is to support students and facilitate the collaborations, encounters, experimentation, rehearsals, etc. Rehearsals usually take place once a week, but towards the end of this phase the work of the students typically intensifies. Nevertheless, at any point in this process students may decide to not do the final performance. Out of the six times the project continued towards the production phase, so far, there have been four performances.

21st-century competences

One of the main problems of competence-based education is that competences are complex constructs of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which are dynamic, interconnected and stretch far beyond the limits of a single project, course, programme or institution. They depend on a large number of factors, from the personal life histories of students to cultural environment, collective narratives and

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belief systems. Therefore, it is easier to design a pedagogical situation that creates favourable conditions for developing competences, than to prove that it does. Reliable assessment of competences has been a hotly debated issue for some time now⁵. In my view, the complex nature of the problem requires a complex solution. If the development of competences is a systemic concern, then their assessment must also be a systemic endeavour. This endeavour would stretch over the lifespan of each learner integrating quantitative data and qualitative information in a structured form that would allow analysis. Ideally, through this analysis we can track the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as deduce the added pedagogical value of individual educational projects and modules. For now, however, we must make do with narrative testimonials. In the following part of this paper I will tell four stories that hardly exhaust the topic, but still provide more concrete illustration of how I think teaching Shakespeare through performance enables the development of 21st-century competences.

Literacy and multilingual competence

During the first instance of the course in 2011, after many students came and went from the project, we realised that only seven students (six girls and one boy) were willing to participate in the production phase of our adaptation of Love's Labour's Lost. At the same time, there were at least sixteen essential characters in the play. We had to sit down and rethink our production concept. At this point we were reminded of our close reading sessions. We remembered our discussions about the connection between Shakespeare's play and the Elizabethan love sonnet, more particularly the sonnets of Philip Sidney. How conventionally in the sonnets

⁵ See Patrick Griffin et al. *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills*. Springer, 2012.



the lady is idealised out of proportion. How in Sidney's poems the speaker follows this convention, but every now and then betrays himself and shows to the reader that he is much more fascinated with his own thoughts and feelings than with the distant perfection of the lady. How in the play Shakespeare sympathetically satirizes the infatuation of his contemporaries with the sonnet. Suddenly, we were struck by the idea that four of the girls could play both the four ladies and the four lords. The ladies would be recorded on video and projected on a big screen, while the lords would be played live on the stage. Each girl dressed up as a man on the stage would play on video the woman this same man falls in love with. To increase the cinematic experience, we borrowed elaborate theatrical dresses from the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts, we filmed the ladies close-up and applied a sepia filter in postproduction. Then the actors had to learn how to time their cues so as to create the illusion for the audience that they were actually talking with the figures on the screen.

So far, so good. But we still had too many characters and too few actors. Again, we remembered our conversations about Elizabethan drama. How the subplot typically provides

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a comic reflection of the twists and turns of the main plot, and how more serious characters have funnier counterparts in a parallel plotline. Then it would not be irrational to have the actors playing Navarre, Berowne, Longaville and Dumain to also play Armado, Moth, Holofernes, and Nathaniel. In order to distinguish between the two sets of characters, we created cartoon-face masks for the funny ones. Dull, Boyet and Mercade could easily be played by the same actor and there remained two actors to do Costard and Jaquenetta.

At face value, this is a story about problem solving, collaboration and creative thinking. Yet, what I would like to highlight here is the literacy and multilingual competence that underlies the creative thinking and the problem solving. Hardly anyone would disagree that literacy is the basis of all other learning. But what does literacy really mean today? It starts with the ability to identify and produce visual signals, connect them with sounds, and combine them into words, phrases and texts. Then goes on with the capability to understand complex texts necessary to function adequately in one's workplace and everyday life. And on with the capacity to intellectually navigate in the complex web of interpersonal, intercommunal, economic and political relations, as well as to defuse ideology and disinformation, weigh up social and cultural bias. And on, as today literacy is no longer limited to traditional texts, but extends to dealing with nonlinear, dynamic, interactive, multimodal texts conveyed via various media and the World Wide Web.

Collaborating to confront a practical problem of the production, we found ourselves in a state of flow in which everyone contributed ideas and also benefited from the ideas of the others. These ideas demonstrated unequivocally that everyone had read deeply and critically the play, in its original context and understands the context in which it was to be produced. The preparatory phase had done its work. Students had gained profound knowledge of Elizabethan

poetry and drama, cross-dressing on the stage, playing multiple roles, producing comic effects. They had identified and analysed the meaningful patterns and intricate complexities of the text. What is more, they had invigorating ideas about how to translate some of the features of English Renaissance culture and *Love's Labour's Lost* into the form of film and comics – expression modes that our contemporary multimodal culture understands better. Finally, they achieved all this – researching, communicating and creating in a foreign language they were studying.

Cultural awareness and expression competence



By 2012, in Bulgaria, it had become clear that the government, elected in 2009 with the promise to stem corruption and tackle economic inequality in the wake of the financial crisis, was not going to fulfill its promise. On the contrary, it was voraciously embezzling public and European funds, systematically betraying the public interest to favour shady capitalists. Inspired by protest movements all around the world and triggered by attempts of the government to

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grant to irresponsible developers control over protected natural areas, a rising number of Bulgarian citizens took to the streets. In January 2013 the government resigned, but as no political alternative received sufficient support, the new government was the old government, which continued with a series of highly controversial moves. The straw that broke the camel's back was the placement of a person, who was obviously part of the shady side of business and politics in Bulgaria, as the head of the State Agency for National Security. Mass protests ensued and continued on a daily basis during the whole summer of 2013. Nevertheless, the government would not resign. Protests escalated and in the end of October a group of politically sensitive students occupied the main building of Sofia University calling on everyone to “wake up” and take a stand.

At the same time, in my Shakespeare through Performance class, students chose to work on *As You Like It*. Their choice made perfect sense, as we were witnessing first-hand how environmental concerns triggered reactions against political pathologies. We were watching in the news how the people of Istanbul gathered to protect a park and how this little piece of nature became a symbol of their struggle against an authoritarian regime that usurped more and more power, encroaching upon the freedom of its citizens. We were rallying in the streets day in day out to protect a beach or a mountain, but in fact what we desperately wanted was to protect the idea that there were places unaffected by moral and social corruption, places we could escape to when we felt threatened, places where we could find strength to carry on. All these sentiments reverberated in every word of Shakespeare's text while we were studying closely the characters' journey out of the Court and into the Forest of Arden during the preparatory phase. When we moved on to the production phase the university building was occupied. Some of my students and their friends were among the

occupiers. Still, we continued our work. At this point I was pretty sure that if there were a performance, it would be a very political one, and that if I were to reflect upon it later, it would be from the perspective of citizenship competence.

To my surprise, as the political tension increased in the streets and other parts of the university, it spontaneously decreased in our rehearsal space. It was replaced by an overwhelming surge of creative energy. The boys and girls who outside bravely confronted the insolent political order, policemen in riot gear, smearing campaigns in controlled media, lack of support on part of their more compliant or confused peers, came to the theatre hall to joke, laugh, dress up, dance, play and sing. The roles of Rosalind and Celia were performed by boys who sported lavish dresses on the stage. Duke Frederick spoke Early Modern English with a hilarious fake Indian accent. Phoebe was tall and supercilious, while Silvius was short and neurotic. The love story of Touchstone and Audrey was converted into a comic strip. The most memorable feature of the production, however, was the soundtrack. Students were inspired by the fact that *As You Like It* includes songs without music to them. So, they went on and composed it.⁶

It took me some time to understand what was going on, but then it dawned upon me. In the theatre hall, during the rehearsals, students had created their own version of the Forest of Arden. It was a safe place where they could play and laugh. It was their own park, their own beach, their own mountain. Just like the pastoral forest in the play, it was not an actual place in nature – it was a work of art, a cultural construct. Can culture be a place? Yes, of course. In the same way that our body needs clean water, air and sunshine, our spirit needs a nourishing cultural environment. This

⁶ Everyone loved the soundtrack so much that after the performance the songs were recorded. They can be found on SoundCloud:
URL: <https://soundcloud.com/georgi-niagolov/sets/ayli-2013>.

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environment is not limited to public theatres, opera houses, concert and ballet halls, art galleries, or reading rooms in libraries. It is an environment people can and do create everywhere they go. Why is this important? If we accept Alain de Botton and John Armstrong's explanation⁷, culture and art help us remember what matters, they prevent us from losing hope, they allow us to overcome sorrow, show us our good qualities, assist us in understanding ourselves and overcoming our prejudices, re-sensitize us and save us from the habitual disregard of the good things we have around us. This was the big lesson my students learned from Shakespeare and I, in turn, learned from them.

Learning to learn competence



2014 was a Shakespeare year. The world celebrated the 450th anniversary of the Bard's birth. On the stage of the National Theatre in Sofia an ambitious production of *Hamlet* by one of the most respected Bulgarian theatre directors, Yavor Gardev, had been running for a year to both critical

⁷ Alain de Botton and John Armstrong. *Art as Therapy*. Phaidon Press, 2013.

and popular acclaim. On the occasion of the anniversary and under the influence of Gardev's production, the Culture Centre of Sofia University organized a festival dedicated to *Hamlet*, which included a number of events. One of them was envisaged as a performance of the students from my course, based on Shakespeare's great tragedy, on the stage of the National Theatre, together with Gardev and actors from his National-Theatre production. This was a really tall order, especially that in order to fit in the schedule of the National Theatre, we had less time than usual to rehearse. Nevertheless, the students seemed energized by the challenge. We had a very fruitful series of workshops during which we found a way to cut out several key fragments of the enormous original text and arrange them, interspersed with some hard rock and heavy metal music, into a concise, yet atmospheric, adaptation of Shakespeare's masterpiece. Students decided to wear their favourite black clothes and rock-band t-shirts as costumes. Gothic, black-and-white images were to be projected behind the stage.

After the pleasant, creative climate of the preparatory phase, the rehearsals always come as a bit of a workout. Pronunciation of Early Modern English, articulation of sounds, the iambic pentameter, blank verse, intonation, stress, loudness, breathing, memorization of lines, stage movement, choreography – these are just some of the difficulties students run into during this part of the project. At this point they need substantial support and encouragement on part of the instructor in order to hand on. Unfortunately, after only a couple of rehearsals my six-year-old son suffered a severe case of salmonellosis and had to be taken to emergency care, where his state remained critical for days before he took a slow course to recovery. My boy needed me by his side, and I could not spare time to work with my students. They knew I was out of the game and did not know when I was coming back. They also knew that there was less than a month to the

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show. I feared the project was derailed irreparably. Then I started receiving the video messages. My students had decided not to give up. They organized, scheduled their meetings, and were rehearsing on their own, sending me short videos so I could keep track of their work. A couple of weeks later we were together again, and they rocked on the stage of the National Theatre.

Hardly anyone would disagree with the idea that one of the paramount objectives of formal education is to develop the learning to learn competence of all students and so equip them for lifelong learning. On the technical side, this competence has to do with understanding one's learning needs, formulating goals, selecting resources, adopting learning strategies, being aware of the learning outcomes. Yet, there is one crucial ingredient – motivation. Students need to learn to do this on their own, at their own initiative. Admittedly, this type of motivation is a complex phenomenon. It depends on a host of factors some of which go well beyond the scope of formal education, such as one's degree of natural curiosity, socio-economic status, belief and value systems, personal life philosophy, social and cultural environment, support from the family. Sometimes these factors align serendipitously and as a result we have a small percentage of natural-born self-directed learners. The question faced by educators, however, is whether they can do something to increase this percentage.

This is a difficult question in an education culture, like that in Bulgaria, where formal learning remains teacher-directed from beginning to end. Generally, students are disciplined to jump through hoops, demonstrate compliance, memorize content, try to get good grades and pass examinations, but hardly ever are they trusted to make any important decisions in the process. This usually goes on at the university level. Setting self-directed learning as an objective of education means a paradigm shift in how we think about

teaching and learning.⁸ First, we need to see teacher-directed learning as a tool, but not as an end. The end should be self-directed learning. Second, we need to understand that teacher-directed learning, if misused, can end up disabling self-directed learning. Third, we need to figure out how to use teacher-directed learning in order to stimulate natural curiosity and creativity, teach students how to think for themselves, work at their own pace, set their own goals, choose their learning strategies, assess their achievements. Eventually, we need to carefully hand over control and responsibility to them and, if everything has been done right up to this point, even if they fail in a project or two, they will still learn in the longer run.

Final remarks

In this paper I have tried to describe an approach to teaching both Shakespeare and 21st-century competences at the same time. The most useful feature of this approach, in my view, is the project that brings together a traditional academic course and an independent extracurricular enterprise. Thus, the academic rigour, thoroughness and critical analysis characteristic of formal learning enables a real-life venture, while the complete freedom of the real-life venture creates a situation of informal learning in which students can take an excursion from the teacher-directed environment, assume responsibility for the project, and develop a number of valuable competences in the process. The lack of any formal credit for the extracurricular part, both for students and teachers, is a necessary sacrifice in order to guarantee the complete freedom of the venture, including the freedom to fail. At the same time, they should also be free to seek any justified moral or material recompense for their work on any available free market.

⁸ See Maurice Gibbons. *The Self-Directed Learning Handbook*. Jossey-Bass, 2008.

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As for the 21st-century competences, I have limited the scope of this paper to only three stories which, in my estimation, demonstrate important effects of the approach. In fact, the experience generated from these eight runs of the course is so rich that I feel I can tell many more stories associable to every competence of the European framework, except maybe the mathematical one. On the other hand, in all honesty, I can think of no way of proving that the wholistic and largely intuitive impressions I share reflect objective truth. I know that they coincide with the feedback given by the students and other observers, but I have no idea what measurements to make in order to generate reliable data for evidence-based learning analytics. I am also not sure how such measurements would affect the overall dynamic of the project. Nevertheless, I believe that this does not diminish the value of the described approach, but rather presents a practical challenge to be resolved in the future.