E-LEARNING FOR RAISING STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF COMUNICATION

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Abstract: *The present paper is an attempt to bring about some changes in the general educational background of today where soft skills are still insufficiently dealt with compared to the considerably stronger attention given to the development of the so- called hard skills including the professional/technical abilities connected to the palpable facts, numbers and structure of physical reality. The focus of the research providing the teaching material suggested falls on raising students' awareness of the subtle significance and implication of communication as an extremely important act of the everyday life. The novelty of the e-learning activities here comes from selectively using some of the principles of the Hindu ancient science of language that considered communication to be a universal form of manifestation. This cultural dimension of the respective technology-enhanced learning environment has proved to have good chances of stimulating the learners' openness, interest and active participation in the new dimensions of communication that is a "must" for their future development and efficiency on the labor market. The images and the short texts displayed in the Power Point System appeal both to the active and passive knowledge of the students who will spontaneously "guess" the correct value or power of the communication act. The teacher will, therefore, find it easy enough to elicit from learners their assumptions, impressions and personal experiences that should be conducive to a complex image of the psychic implications involved in the respective awareness raising process. The teaching material consists in images and words/phrases selected from the ancient Hindu literature and legends that are "populated" with an impressive number of supernatural characters and events.*

Keywords*: communication, universal manifestation, students' awareness, Hindu symbols/archetypes*

INTRODUCTION

The e-learning based activities presented in this paper have been used in the General English course for the first year engineering students in the Politehnica University of Bucharest. The rationale consists in the attempt of increasing the student's awareness of the subtle attributes and values of communication by resorting to the philosophical and linguistic traditions of the Hindu ancient system.

It is true that the present day educational system has made important progress in developing the so called " soft- skills" in students, an important component of teaching that, until recently, has been predominantly directed towards the "hard skills" including the academic knowledge of the respective engineering field. Soft skills have attracted the attention of educators mainly as a consequence of a shift towards globalization, towards more rapid create- produce-sell cycles in industries and, consequently, towards an increased amount of stress affecting all individuals involved. The "discovery" of the soft skills and their integration within the existing teaching and training systems has come as an invaluable support for students and employees alike who gradually have become able to cope with various delicate problems. These pertain

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to the ability to perceive one's strong/weak points as well as master the emotional side, and to the power to enforce self-respect, tactfulness, sense of collectivity as well as the skill to deal with critical problems in a diplomatic efficient manner. Surprisingly enough, it has been found that job candidates (graduates of technical universities) with remarkable academic results do not always possess the soft skills required by employers. Such "cases" remain without explanation and the result is that most of the times firms and companies prefer hiring graduates with less outstanding university results but proving the possession of important soft skills like self-confidence, gaining the interlocutor's attention, imposing one's view point or transmitting an empathic message of trust, openness and collaboration. Such persons have the respective abilities as inborn values which does not imply it that the latter are un-teachable. The problem is that the teaching methods created so far are still insufficient and vague.

Secondly, how could such an enterprise be successful without the basic expertise of teachers who should possess the respective soft skills and also the confidence to develop them in students? This means that the teaching of soft skills should start not with the pupils and students but with the didactic stuff in the first place. Besides, the soft skills have an integrative nature that is difficult to define. Skills that pertain to the subtleties of communication act are still approximately defined and left to be solved by the teacher's own intuition and interest. The entire domain is still insufficiently investigated and offers plenty of ground for research and the play of creativity. The domain itself is well immersed in the psychological universe of the individual where clear cut borders are impossible to draw.

RATIONALE OF THE ACTIVITIES

The activities suggested below have been devised with the intention of awakening in students an intuition of the hidden attributes of genuine communication by resorting to the philosophical values of the famous Hindu epic of Mahabharata. The premise of our attempt is man's psychological tendency to mentally and emotionally accept the truth that comes via a story i.e. a logical and reasonable chain of supernatural facts and events. The happenings of Mahabharata, like all legends, do not observe the binary logic of the mind because they come from the deeper zones of the Collective Unconscious governed by archetypes. Archetypes are known to be highly illogical and dissociated from the laws of the ordinary brain. Nevertheless, the human psyche accepts legends and stories because it innately possesses the respective system of archetypes as ordering and governing principles. In one word humans are innately attracted to legends because the latter are printed in or inborn as fundamental, eternal principles.

We have chosen the epic of Mahabharata because the legend is centered round the character of Krishna, a king and a god. Krishna, as the outstanding character of Mahabharata, was a symbol of perfect communication and perfect inter-relationships. Each and every one of his physical, psychological and behavioral attributes is directly connected to the fundamental values of efficient communication and ideal behavior. The Hindu ancient philosophy and linguistics considered communication to be a universal form of manifestation and even the source of the material Universe. And, since the act of language/communication was essentially a flow of subtle vibrations/energy, the origin of the entire physical world was Holy Word - generator of the infinity of forms. The role of Krishna in this cosmic drama was that of initiator and controller of Language as a fundamental act of creation.

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Our teaching experience has shown that our student's awareness of the qualities of communication has good chances of being raised and developed by resorting to the e-learning based techniques. The latter has proved to be the optimal choice for stimulating interested in the topic and ultimately making the foreign language class a pleasant and relaxing experience. In our case, the E-learning technique resorts to a range of visual images of Krishna, were each of them is rich in hints at the defining features of the ideal communication act .

We have resorted to the visual impact of Krishna's images because of the power to connect the unconscious story of archetypes to the logical mind. The pictures presented can be the ancient miniatures ant paintings available on the Internet. The psychological mechanism involved spontaneously allows students to reach the correct intuition and automatically detect the link between the image content (the archetype) and the verbal representation of the logical mind.

PRESENTATION OF THE SLIDES

Visual Detail Present in the Pictures	**Value of Communication Suggested**
Beauty of the Krishna	Language should be beautiful
Rich Ornaments of Krishna	Language should be elaborated, refined
Krishna playing the flute	Language should be soft, pleasant to the ear
Krishna performs an artistic act(dancing and playing His flute)	Communication is performance, hence
Krishna's attitude suggests that life is a play	detachment is important for success Communication and life in general are a play to be witnessed and enjoyed

The first slide represents Krishna according to the traditional Hindu illustrations and paintings. The character is richly decorated with ornaments and jewels fit for a handsome and powerful king. His presence suggests perfection and equilibrium. The slide selected for opening a class – round discussion shows him playing the flute, an important detail that can be used to elicit from students some of the qualities of ideal communication. Since Krishna embodies genuine flawless communication, every detail in this picture symbolizes a certain value.

Not all the above connections will be easy to decode but with the teacher's helping remarks, students will be able to create an abstract representation of communication according to their inborn archetypal pattern. Krishna is here that archetype full of significance, paradoxical, intriguing and well beyond the limitations of the ordinary mind.

The activities that can be devised also imply an introspective part that may be presented in the form of a short questionnaire where students have to analyze their communication style and see whether they are gentle, kind, dominating, aggressive etc. They also may be asked to compile a recipe for "How must you communicate?" that should include items like: Talk decently with tender and beautiful mannerism, talk in a very sweet manner which excludes bending your body, nodding or sounding artificially.

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One should be decent in language and behavior, talk with humility and not go on jabbering at the time or talk excessively. Language and body style should be like Krishna's delicate flute music which is the perfect flow of sounds arranged in the best sequence according to the laws of harmony. In one word communication should be music and good music never uses these harmonic, harsh sounds that irritate the ear. In the same way, the language of good communicators never resorts to hurting remarks, criticism and judgment. The latter are replaced by constructive remarks, encouragement, motivation and a strategy of building up rapport and mutual support. The language should be directed towards the others, showing interest and concern in what the others need. The flute music suggests yet another detail – to be elicited from students: what was the effect of Krishna's flute music upon the surrounding atmosphere? This would naturally become absolutely quiet, without any ripple of trouble or any idea of disturbance. But, unfortunately, in modern times, it is the other way round: the music seems to break one's nerves, it excites hearing beyond limit and eventually the brain becomes numbed. Likewise, people's talking is more like barking at high-pitched tones, which ultimately causes neurosis and exhaustion. Communication also involves discretion i.e. the capacity to distinguish between true and false. First and foremost is that one should avoid artificiality, speak the truth and stay away from lies.

CONCLUSIONS

We consider that it would be useful for students to eventually understand that communication is closely connected to spirituality and the development of personality. The question that they should ask as far as spirituality is concerned is: "Am I ready for this type of progress?" Spirituality means the ability of a person to perceive himself/ herself as completely detached from all the life acts, totally at peace, completely confident in oneself and a master of wisdom, discretion and compassion. Students should understand that communication is not just an automatic act but the manifestation of one's efficient creativity and integration within collectivity. Hopefully, students should eventually refine their communication abilities in order to be free from confusion, aggressiveness and conflict.

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