AN UNCONVENTIONAL WAY OF STIMULATING IMAGINATION

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Abstract: *The educational methods generally focus on the teaching of the so-called "hard"/technical skills that basically refer to the specialty knowledge proper. As for the soft skills of creativity and imagination, universities teach them, to a large extent, through the same "hard skills" or the so-called know-how implied either by the technical design or art production. It appears that none of them, actually, teaches students to activate and enhance their creative and imaginative abilities. The present paper suggests a possible way of teaching imagination through the environment of the foreign language class by resorting to e-learning techniques and also on the idea that the powers of creativity and imagination are actually inborn, natural qualities that can be awakened in the individual. The set of e-learning activities / tasks provided attempt at making students aware of and activate their creativity and imagination - an absolute "must" in their future profession as architects and artists.*

Keywords: *creativity, imagination, spiritual qualities, personal development, foreign language classes.*

Purpose of the paper

The skill of "imagination" belongs to the group of the so-called soft- skills that have entered the focus of educational strategies only recently. The conventional soft skills usually include the abilities of efficient professional communication, foreign language proficiency, proper attitude in relating with the team members, personal organization, time management, leadership a.s.o. This group has also been extended to include those abilities pertaining to personality development, namely those skills that are increasingly important in coping with the challenges of a permanently changing economic , political and technological climate. The competitiveness on the market and the design/produce/sell cycle with its accelerated rhythm have placed a heavy psychological stress both on employees and employers. Whereas hard skills are the background of the educational process in universities, they are still limited in helping students to deal with different situations like job-hunting, facing competitiveness or adapting to changes on the market. Thus, surprisingly enough, there is a considerable percentage of graduates with brilliant academic results who possess insufficient training in soft skills like self assertiveness, self control under stress etc. The conclusion is that hard skills ,basically including the specialty knowledge proper, applying information technology, numerical and data-handling skills, mathematical skills, capacity to solve information management problems, development of an information system, research skills etc. are simply not enough. Thus, the new work environment has forced a broadening of the abilities umbrella that has to ensure, among other things, taking quick decisions, managing critical situations, controlling one's emotions or keeping the inside balance.

The zone of soft–skills actually penetrates into the deepest layers of human personality up to the "softest" areas of self-esteem, self confidence, creativity, imagination, integrity and ethics. The series of soft skills naturally culminates with what Carl Gustav Jung called the Realization of Oneself, the Self Realization/Self Awareness

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or Individuation. The purpose of the present paper is, therefore to suggest a possible way to make students aware of their innate ability to be creative and imaginative and use this capacity not necessarily as artists but as complex personalities who can create and produce new ideas, concepts and systems in every domain of their life.

Imagination as a soft skill

The soft skills mentioned above, like self confidence, creativity, imagination, integrity etc. involve the deep zones of the human psyche and, hence, are the hardest to teach. They are practically un-teachable. The explanations is that, first of all, there is no acquisition model or training strategy that might be used by teachers because neither of them have been exposed either to this specific type of knowledge or to the involved teaching techniques designed to activate and develop the required skills. One might conclude that such soft skills are still beyond the conventional teaching range, a fact which is reflected in the difficulty of approaching the respective area. However, there is hope that, soon enough, educators will become more sensitive to this topic and re-evaluate it accordingly.The "softest" skills are extremely peculiar in that they are closest to the core of the human psyche which is the Self or the most active and alert Guide of Personality. The Self is known by psychologists to be the very source of psychic reality, the wholeness that gives individuals the ability to see themselves as part and parcel of the entire Universe/Creation. The innate power/skill of humans to develop and evolve essentially comes from the Self. It is due to the Self that individuals are "programmed" to reach self fulfillment and happiness and also to discover their inborn disposition to reach Individuation or Becoming of Personality.No one can neglect this profound zone of the psyche which functions like the roots in a plant. Dis-alliance with these inborn qualities takes one to rootlessness and dis-harmony. On the contrary, the activation or awakening of these values ultimately connects the individual with the treasure of creativity, inventiveness, imagination and joy of creation.

All ancient education systems used to place the "softest" skills in their central part that started with developing the fundamental spiritual values long before the teaching of the practical/ theoretical knowledge. In those days, students were taught the laws of universal harmony, morality and ideal behavior before embarking on the study of mathematics, astronomy, music, art or politics. These traditions have gone into oblivion and neglect and the result is visible in our hectic modern world where the impact of competition and artificial consumption has placed the individual under a serious psychological burden.

Nowadays, education faces the challenge of a new climate that should make them aware of the limits of the existing teaching theories and strategies. Their efficiency might be enhanced by allowing access to the deeper zones of the psyche where the inborn qualities and skills reside.

Once awakened and also, developed, they have good chances of stimulating what specialists have called, the Spiritual Intelligence- IQ or the innermost key to naturally and spontaneously activating the entire complex of the human Personality.

A possible model for teaching "Imagination" in students

The model is based on some e-learning techniques, namely Power Point presentations, that could develop in students the awareness of their inborn qualities of imagination and creativity. The ideas have actually been trialed during the foreign language classes in the Politehnica University of Bucharest. The activities have been designed as a set of Power point slides that were used during the cycle of teaching

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creativity and imagination. As predominantly visual images, slides possess three main attributes: 1. they have the intrinsic potential of awakening certain psychological contents (emotions, feelings, states) in students.2.they have been selected in order to stimulate free group and class discussions on the respective topic. 3. each slide is focused on a single message that can be decoded according to the receptiveness of the students

Slides are usually extremely effective because they speak for themselves and thus need the support of a minimum text. This allows students to spontaneously label the message of each slide that is clear and suggestive. The entire teaching cycle makes use of these slides at each one of its stages (elicitation, free discussions, activity solving, practical applications, final project etc.) covering no more than four hours for the first year students in a technical university.

The rationale of these activities consists in enabling students to become aware of their spiritual values, creativity being one of them. They should also correlate them with their personal emotions, states and experiences and, at the same time, verbalize the respective contents in the respective foreign language (English in our case). Likewise, the stimulation of the two brain hemispheres involved in the emotional part of the psyche and the logical mind responsible for generating language respectively, will have good chances of bringing the two apparently distant zones into equilibrium. The main teaching stages are illustrated below:

Elicitation

The teacher initiates a general discussion on the topic of spirituality and spiritual values that are innate in each individual. The students have to come up with the idea that the individual is not only a strictly material manifestation but also a subtle "body" consisting in invisible energies and qualities. Each slide presented will clearly present such a quality that, in our case, is directly connected to the idea of creativity , imagination, self knowledge, self development etc. Each slides acts like a stimulus that triggers an inside reaction in the form of a state or an emotion. The images have been selected so as to suggest that personalities are more complex than the material, gross flesh and bone anatomy and more complicated than the simple binary logic of their mind.

The slides and their associated qualities are the following:

IMAGINATION- this quality is suggested by a girl sitting on a patch of ground floating up in the air. The atmosphere is beautiful and unreal. CREATIVITY- this quality is suggested by a girl painting the floor into the color of the ocean. The floor actually becomes the ocean. INSIDE KNOWLEDGE – the image presents a child reading under a fantastic tee, in the company of a little, white elephant. AESTHETIC

FEELING- the slide shows a magnificent rainbow over a landscape.

INTLLECTUAL PERCEPTION- the image represents a little child holding a huge book

The next set of slides is used by the teacher to elicit from students the possible causes of "catch" that can block the manifestation of creativity. Thus, one of them shows a man overwhelmed by a huge pile of files on his desk. Here, students will easily identify STRESS as a principal cause that may utterly kill imagination and creativity. Another slide will suggest ways of treating stress, like the one showing a baby blowing on a dandelion flower and spreading its flakes up into the air. Students may realize that this actually transmits the idea of living into the present moment and enjoying every

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second as it comes. The following slide shows a serene old man holding a cup of tea and looking out into the distance. The elicited answer will be that of the inside silence and peace that are responsible for the intact preservation of our power, balance and joy of living.

The next set of activities may invite students to engage in pair/group discussions where they describe the emotions or states suggested by the sides, explain their choices and present them orally to the class.

Likewise, they may write a few lines in English on the relevance of these qualities for their present and future development. They may also comment on the reasons for which some qualities appear to be more important than others. The post – teaching stage may consist in short diaries to be compiled as a homework, pair interviews prepared for the following class or projects where groups of students create their own slide display to illustrate a certain value.

In conclusion, the cycle suggested has good chances of giving students a glimpse of what creativity and imagination imply as subtle qualities of their personality. However, we believe that a more relevant effect is motivating them to more consciously introspect and integrate self- awareness within their already operative system of ideas and parameters.

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