

THE BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE TEACHING APPROACH. STUDY CASE

Abrudan Denisa¹

Abstract

Since the European Union become more and more integrated the need for companies to have knowledge of HR practices in member countries increases.

Moreover, HR departments are increasingly confronted with an European workforce. Therefore universities who educate students in the field of HR need to address the topic of International or European HR.

Though theoretical insights are important, the innovative teaching of competences to work in a European environment might be even more essential.

The present paper presents as a case study the benefits of implementing innovative teaching approach which is focusing on experiential learning and self-reflection.

Keywords: entrepreneurial education, digital generation, lifelong learning, labour market

JEL Classification: A20, J23, L26

Introduction

The contemporary society is developing very fast. The global social and economic context, the new societal changes all categories of life, included education.

Those changes visualize new experiences, the acquisition of skills and abilities, which lead to more individuals who are "more educated, competent, adaptable individuals and who can work collaboratively" (Barr and Tagg, 1995)

To face those global challenges, just reforming the current educational systems is no longer sufficient, it is necessary now to transform them (Robinson, 2006). We are talking in this context about a new paradigm, a new educational re-thinking. Einstein once said: "The important problems which we are facing, can not be solved with the same level of thinking which was used for their creation."

Paradigm change from the *focus on teaching* to *focusing on learning* emphasizes the *quality of learning*.

Learning is a complex process, a dynamic one. It is complex because it takes place based on a lot of plans: cognitive, affective, volitional, characteristic, behavioral. Learning is dynamic because it involves the process of informational transformation into knowledge, by internalizing them, by passing from the external to the internal plan of *knowledge for others*, *knowledge for oneself*. Learning is the goal not only of what educators know but also of what they can do with what they know.

In the *central model of learning*, students are seen as co-producers of the learning system and not simply recipients, they have to take responsibility for the proper learning together with the other actors of communicational education.

The *learning paradigm* includes learning holistically. A higher education institution which adopts the *learning paradigm* is characterized through a constant search for new structures and methods which work well for the student learning and success and assumes that they will be permanently redefined and evolved over time, the whole being reconstituted from component parts. In the *learning paradigm*, the professor is creating learning on building collaborative and supportive subjects, while in the instructional model, the professor offers a simple instruction (transfer of knowledge) (Serbu, 2010).

Therefore, we are witnessing the transition from educational atomism to a holistic approach of education with curricular models increasingly focused on cognitive skills

¹ Assoc. Prof. Ph.D, West University of Timisoara, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, denisa.abrudan@e-uvvt.ro

development (OBE model - outcome-based education; CBE model - competency-based education; CTCM model – critical thinking curriculum model; TC model - thinking curriculum) (Schuyler, 1997)

Developing the personality of students, encouraging learning through cooperation and discovery, building collaborative networks between student, professor and other communityactors, stimulating intrinsical motivation, the *educational model focused on learning* is a *real model of education*.

1. Curriculum - realities and perspectives in romania

Is there a need for a curricular reform in Romania? Current research in the learning sciences, as well as the beneficiaries of the educational system, argue that the problem of changing the curricular paradigm is a difficult task. However, this change is needed because in Romania we have to deal with an overloaded curriculum and with low relevance for adult life and the labor market.

Theories of the personality show that there is no person without having qualities. As a result, the role of education is to identify the potential of the educated person, to stimulate the formation of the personality, to orientate the educated person towards those areas where they can obtain the performance, according to their talent (Lasnier, 2001).

The rethinking of teaching is an important part of the curricular reform. Including a variety of curricular documents –scholar programs, school textbooks, teaching materials, the curriculum coordinates the entire educational process. The curricular reform, a real change of educational paradigm, was one of the most controversial processes of change that took place in the Romanian education after December 1989.

Today, more and more, we discuss about a curriculum focused on skills and competences because this curriculum responds to the demands of the labor market by training capable, young people of adapting and integrating effectively into the workplace and into society.

According to the Report of the Curriculum Review Group of 2004, education of the 21st century is characterized by training and development young people in four capacities: study with successful, become confident individuals, become responsible citizens and contribute effectively to the well-being of the society (Raportul Grupului pentru Revizuirea Curriculumului către executivul scoțian 2004).

What exactly do these 4 capabilities mean?

Capacity 1: LEARN SUCCESSFULLY. This means enthusiasm and motivation for learning, determination to reach high standards of performance, receptivity to new ways of thinking being able to use technology to learn, to think creatively and to learn being both, independently and as part of a group.

Capacity 2: BE CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS. This capacity assumes self-respect, a feeling of emotional, mental and physical well-being, strong beliefs and values. In this way, young people become able to establish relationships with others, live a healthy and active life, develop and communicate their own beliefs and opinions about the world, evaluate risks and take decisions.

Capacity 3: BE RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS. This capacity is reflected through the desire to participate responsibly in the political, economical, social and cultural life.

Capacity 4: BRING EFFECTIVELY CONTRIBUTION TO THE WELL-BEING OF THE COMMUNITY. Characterized through adaptability and empathy, young people will be able to communicate in different ways, different situations, taking the initiative, thinking critically in new contexts.

When the potential, the competencies, the skills acquired through education will be valorized, when the demand of the labor market and the offer of the educational system will be compatible, the quick insertion of graduates in the field of the labor market will be a reality.

2. From knowledge acquisition to skill mastery. Illustrative cases

Learners are not interested in knowledge, they want new skills and competences to develop themselves and to reach their own goals. Reorienting education from knowledge acquisition to skill mastery makes education more relevant and increases learners' motivation. Mastery of both practical and cognitive skills is the new frontier that every individual should pursue in their communities of like minded people, and in formal educational settings.

The question that educators are asking themselves more and more in the context of the changes generated by globalization, digitalization is not at all simple: How can we have students nowadays, who are capable of sustainable learning, coming out of their comfort zone, pursuing a long-term task, processing double or triple requirements?

We are talking about a digital generation, the Z generation that needs stakes, a stable setting of learning missions, that needs immediate feedback (Petre, 2019)

Maybe we'll find the answer in knowing and understanding the profile of this generation.

Today, the transition from one level to another of learning is done through connection and active-participatory teaching strategies. In order to be able to form and develop the thinking of the generation Z student, it is preferable that the work tasks are organized in short, portions of 5-10 minutes, with immediate feedback, together with the scoring criteria elaborated previously.

1. Today's Generation Z needs challenges - at least one element of a new subject every day, an element that will attract their curiosity;

2. Generation Z is a network thinking type. It gets bored very quickly if there are no connections between information and especially if they have no chance to apply it in practice;

3. Generation Z is an emotional generation. Z gen needs strong experiences to retain information and needs permanent admiration of efforts, not results. The emotion is fundamental for keeping it in memory and working energy;

4. Generation Z needs less information, than working and thinking strategies;

5. Generation Z needs strong educational leaders – to empathize, inspire and motivate through the power of example;

6. Generation Z is a pro mindfulness generation;

7. Generation Z can be called the digital generation so technology must be integrated into learning;

8. Generation Z needs confidence and fair play from the mentors.

It is obvious that today, more than never, the creation and development of new educational models within individuals become responsible for taking actions, have more freedom of action, more information and wants to get involved into the community to identify solutions to the problems it faces, it becomes a natural requirement of the current educational system.

The experience of countries with the best performing education systems in the world Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Canada, Australia, UK, China, New Zealand, shows that it is needed to have a new set of capable values and principles to generate the well-being for the society.

More than that, these countries have invested heavily in education and research because they are aware that, in the long term, the financial support of the value-creating industries will lead to the development of their nation in the conditions of the evolution of the labor market and technologies. They understood that their competitiveness at international,

national and regional level can increase through educational decentralization, cooperation between educational institutions, research - business environment and administrative environment, new training and development programs.

- Finland – an example of best practice

Lifelong learning is the leading governing principle of the education system in Finland. The education in Finland aims for individuals to have a set of key skills and not necessarily more information.

Public authorities ensure equal opportunities for every citizen so that they can benefit from education after graduating mandatory school and develop as a person regardless of financial possibilities.

- *The JA-YE model*

In Finland, particular emphasis is placed on the development of vocational education in correlation with the labor market. Entrepreneurship is a real way of life for Finns. Vocational education is a first choice among young people after graduating from general school. The vocational institutions benefit from public fundings based on performance, developing important income-generating projects.

Professional education in the central of Finland develops a network of centers for learning about entrepreneurship. For example, the Junior Achievement – Young Enterprise (JA-YE) model is an entrepreneurial education program for young people that includes activities, type of *learning by doing*, which is held in class. This program benefits from a strong support from the business community. *Learning by doing* is the main idea for the entire JA-YE process. The young people acquire essential skills for life, participate in unique experiences with the opportunity to be part of a global educational and professional network.

- *University of Applied Sciences Laurea - P2P Method*

The principle that governs the method of teaching at the *Laurea University* follows the initiation and development of real business projects. The Laurea University prepares the students for the labor market by supporting young people in developing and implementing their own business ideas.

The Peer-to-peer teaching method (P2P means "as from equal, to equal")

The Laurea University emphasizes peer-to-peer (P2P) teaching. This method has been applied since 2008 and has been adopted by other universities around the world - Harvard and MIT. The method consists in working groups of students for develop business projects, projects carried out in partnerships with organizations which are belonging to the public and private sectors.

The students have the opportunity to find out how projects are carried out in the real business world and the opportunity to apply the new knowledge acquired to courses by solving the problems which could imply to such a business project. Students receive from companies a real case by which they must offer practical solutions. Projects involve a number of tasks and responsibilities that includes working in a team. According with the P2P Method, the role of the professor is like an older colleague who has a lot of experience. In these terms, teamwork, taking responsibility, participating in projects that simulate real life problems, adaptability, creative thinking, authenticity become the new abilities of the 21st century learners.

- Education in Denmark, Best Practices

Study areas. The Danish school Orestad Gymnasium in Copenhagen is famous for its organization where there are no classes.

More specifically, those over 1,000 adolescents, between the ages of 16 and 19, the commonly learn in the so-called "study areas". For this, the school was fully digitalized, and the lessons were taught exclusively on tablets within applications. In a school like this, teacher act as a coach, promoting alternative methods of communication and engage students

into innovative projects. The main idea of this educational methods is to transform the learners into technology producers, not consumers (Garaiman, 2015).

- Education in USA, Best Practices

In the USA, trainers, mentors, educators are not talking about a problem, they talk in terms of a challenge. As a motivational method for engage students, they congratulate and encourage everyone, offering rewards. From a simple “Well done” to offering different diplomas like: "Diploma of good colleague", “Perseverance” etc, these gratifications has the scope to give the feeling that each individual is appreciated, is valuable for the community regardless of their age, their education. Interesting is that the American evaluation system not only gratifies the best in the its academic field, but also all those involved in the community life, thus being an inspirational model for others.

Providing young people a stimulating and innovative learning environment, the USA is recognized as a promoter of an entrepreneurial education model, model characterized by: support and development of collaborative projects between: universities, public institutions, business organizations; recruitment and attract of the main scientists-the principal creators of knowledge; development the entrepreneurial spirit, continuous increase of the degree of qualifications of human resources, commitment to achieving excellence.

- *Academic- Business Environment - Community Model*

Entrepreneurial education institutions in the USA are generally part of the private system and less of the public system, which explains the consistent funding of research and educational funding. In the US, the private funding sources allocated to higher education outweigh the public ones, which makes the US private university system extremely competitive, where private companies invested significant amounts in education and research (OECD, 2011).

There is a strong partnership between the academic and business environment. From the perspective of the labor market, the American educational system develops strong relationships between academics- business environment –community , vital partnership for create and develop the abilities and competences demanded for the labor market.

Educating the young generation about what it means to start and run a business, cultivating and developing entrepreneurial skills and competencies in the American education system, especially at the university level is the approach of one of the most advanced and performed educational systems from the world.

- *The Player, an innovative educational method*

The “Quest to Learn” school in New York uses innovative educational methods (Garaiman, 2015). Following a partnership with the “Institute of Play” and the city's department of education, the school teachers use the game in an intensive way, leading to the acquisition of the knowledge and motivation of the young people for increase the performances. The lessons always involve activities in which all students are trained, from storytelling exercises to creativity exercises. The program itself is structured as a game that involves a challenge offered by teachers at the beginning of the school year.

Thus, throughout the year and within the lessons, activities and projects, students accumulate knowledge to meet the final challenge and to win the game. Throughout the years of study, the games are adapted for the age of the students, being encouraged to find solutions for real problems of the community in which they live in.

This way, teachers and students are encouraged to create their own learning methods and continuously innovate.

- Education in Romania, Best Practices

If in the case of Finland, Norway or the USA we can speak about effective educational systems, in Romania, the education system is still oriented on collecting and transfer the

information and less on creative thinking style, entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurial education (Vlăsceanu et al, 2010)

The average academic-business-government partnership is still poorly functioning, as multinational companies are not been interested in cooperating within universities in R&D area. The positions of the two main actors: educators-business environment strongly contrasts when it comes to the problem of quality of the learners.

While most teachers has a strong positive image about the level of employability like a result of the Romanian educational system, when it comes to provide qualified graduates in the job market, employers are more cautious (Vlăsceanu et al, 2010)

The problems that the current education system in Romania is facing are related to inefficiency, irrelevance, inequity and poor quality (Miclea et al, 2007). In addition to these problems, there is also an external phenomenon with major consequences for the education: demographic evolution.

Within the framework of the reconstruction of the educational system in Romania, specialists recommend restructuring measures connected with entrepreneurial approaches starting even at the primary education level (Vlăsceanu, 2010;Miclea, 2007).

Reconsidering the role of the school in the community, stimulating continuous learning, a new educational management style –can be the first measures for the restructuring the Romanian educational system.

If we talk about modernization of H.E. and Research, Romanian specialists propose differentiated and flexible financing of universities and research institutes, reorganization of the research system, create new resources by implemented a strong entrepreneurial culture

- *BCT, a successful project of innovative education*

If we really want a strong change, it is crucial to make a commitment of all the responsible forces within the dual: academic institutions - business environment.

The international project in Human Resources Management “BRINGING CULTURES TOGETHER” Romania – The Netherlands is an innovative approach regarding the university education, an international project that offers the students from The Faculty of Economics and Business Administration within The West University of Timisoara an excellent intercultural and business experience.

Started in 2003 in partnership with Christelijke Hogeschool University of Ede from The Netherlands, the program of "BRINGING CULTURES TOGETHER" is a successful one (Abrudan, 2016)

The international program "BRINGING CULTURES TOGETHER" presents a holistic approach because it involves a process of transforming information into knowledge through a different way of learning compared to the known one in Romania. Within this project with an applied research part, students discover that learning is not just what an educable knows, but also what an educable can do with what he knows.

If at the beginning of the project, only the Dutch students have had included this HRM project in their curriculum with ECTS credits and the involvement of the Romanian students was voluntary, during the last 2 years, BCT project was included in the Romanian curriculum of the master’s program of Human Resource Management as an optional discipline. It is an important step in the curriculum of Romanian partner because in these terms, the Romanian participants also receive ECTS credits, which is another motivational reason for implicate in the next editions.

This HRM international project is an attractive program because connect academic and corporate world which means a lot of benefits for the students, universities and companies involved. For over 15 years, this partnership with mixed teams of Romanian and Dutch students, carry out comparative research and analysis on human resources topics, such as: New Generation of Leaders, Team engagement- modern methods of motivation and

involvement of teams, Development and Careers, Talent Management, Coaching- Mentoring, Compensation and Benefits, Labor Law for European Migrants, Appraisal Systems etc. benefiting from the expertise of human resources specialists from multinational companies in Romania and The Netherlands: Continental Automotive Timisoara Romania, Accenture Managed Services SRL, Atos IT Solutions, Bosch Service Solutions, TRW, Profi Rom Food SRL, Lideea, ADR, DUOGROUP, BRD-SG – from Romania and NEDTRAIN, Permar, Delinuts, Plantion – from The Netherlands.

From the arguments that stood behind the involvement in project of these firms from Romania and The Netherlands, we can mention: the positioning as a company interested in the education and development of future Human Resources specialists, access to innovative ideas, generated by a cross-cultural environment, by solving real situations in Human Resources domain, access to a database with cross-cultural work experienced young people.

Promoting principles such as cooperation, critical thinking, creativity, communication and finding solutions to real HR problems faced by companies, the project shows its attractiveness and usefulness based on the high number of participants (over 600 participants) within the last 15 years, which shows that students want to have numerous challenges to discover what it means to, and especially, how to achieve performance in the field of international business.

This project can be seen as a model of best practice in education, because promote innovative teaching and creative learning.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, for different reasons, creativity and innovation are not current among the educational practices in Romania. There are by far too few examples in the Romanian education where creativity and innovation are encouraged. Rethinking education is mandatory needed. A transition to a culture of lifelong learning and entrepreneurial education. If we do not rethink the education, if we not rebuild the educational system, if we do not invest in research and innovation –the future colaps.

It is a fact that an authentic and high qualitative education system does not exist without investing significant amounts, sources which are mostly private.

The American H.E. system is one of the best example to mention, but in Europe, a possible mark for higher education may be considered in the UK. Universities such as Oxford and Cambridge are included in all international rankings.

These countries are joined by the Nordic countries as - Finland, Norway, Denmark but also Canada and New Zealand - which recognize that education contributes significantly to the economic growth and increase the productivity.

Creating efficient financing schemes in correlation with the diversification of financing sources, rethinking education programs continuously adapted to the labour market can represent represents some possible solutions to increase the quality of education in Romania.

It is a fact : the reconstruction of educational system in Romania must be radical. This requires commitment, active involvement, accountability and rationality.

It is possible to have performance in education in Romania?

The answer is given by the best educational system in the world: Finland. The model of Finland explains what construct the performance in education: family, school and a culture of respect for the values.

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