Integrating Soft Skills in Teaching with examples from teaching Languages for Middle School Students

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• To identify most important soft skills.
• To discuss when do we teach soft skills.
• To identify the meaning of integrating soft skills in teaching.
• To identify the challenges in integrating soft skills in teaching.
• To identify the levels of integration into academic courses.
• To highlight suggested procedures for integrating soft skills.
• To give examples about integrating soft skills in teaching.
• To give strategies of teaching soft skills.
• To provide suggested principles for assessing soft skills.
• To discuss strategies for assessing soft skills.
• Intra- and inter-personal (socio-emotional) skills.

• Essential for personal development, social participation and workplace success.

• Characterized as “skills” in order to emphasize the fact that they can be learned/developed.
Why Soft Skills are Important?

- Many students find challenges in dealing with the real world after graduation.
- These skills are key to finding jobs and being successful in the workplace.
- It makes the environment in the classroom more productive!
## Importance of different factors when seeking employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High</th>
<th>Enthusiasm for the position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal qualities/personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Soft skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential for advancement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good academic record</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relevant work experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Specialist subject knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal interests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Any other work experience</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Research by: the Careers Services and modern language departments of Dublin City University (DCU), Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), Transferable Skills Project, Ireland, 2009
Exercise

• Each group to give the top 5 skills to be integrated in the curriculum

• Time: 5 minutes
Top 10 skills in order of importance

- Oral communication
- Time management
- Team work
- Presentation skills
- Coping with multiple tasks
- Managing one's own learning
- Written communication
- Planning
- IT skills
- Decision making

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When do we teach soft skills?

- Soft skills are present in all disciplines, all the time.

- We need to teach them in every opportunity where the students are expected to “explain”, “analyze”, or “reflect”!
What does the integration of skills actually mean?

Approaches to skills development within the curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total embedding</th>
<th>Explicit integration</th>
<th>Parallel development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lose skills without trace</td>
<td>Visible skills</td>
<td>“Bolt on” development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills disappear in context</td>
<td>Skills in context</td>
<td>Limited contextualisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No explicit assessment</td>
<td>Explicit assessment</td>
<td>Separate assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low impact on curriculum</td>
<td>High impact on curriculum</td>
<td>Low curriculum impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery by lecturer</td>
<td>Delivery by lecturer</td>
<td>Delivery by teaching assistant / student services / elearning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesser understanding of relevance of studies</td>
<td>Understanding of relevance of studies</td>
<td>Lesser understanding of relevance of studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No extra time commitment from student</td>
<td>No extra time commitment from student</td>
<td>Extra time commitment from student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Curriculum and soft skills

Challenges

- Students attitude in the classroom.
- Students’ lack of awareness about the importance of exercises related to these skills.
- Some teachers believe that the students are not ready.
- Limited time to cover syllabus.
- Teachers lack strategic approach of integrating soft skills.
- Large number of students in the classroom, and inconvenient classroom setup.
Levels of integration into academic courses

- Adapting / designing skills materials for use in class while planning.
- Integrating existing skills materials into class work and activities.
- Writing the skills as part of the learning outcomes.
- Mentioning skills in class while taking the activities.

Not all skills need to be developed in all courses of disciplines – should be balanced across all years and disciplines.

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Benefits of explicit integration – to teachers

• Opportunity to reflect and improve our own teaching practices.

• Explore different pedagogic approaches in delivering subject material.

• Increases awareness of own skills.

• More engaged and confident students.
Benefits of explicit integration – to students

- Increase awareness about the soft skills that they are developing and the link with what they are studying.

- Greater confidence in utilizing developed skills and enhanced self-confidence.

- More focused approach to study.

- Link skills with career opportunities.
Suggested procedure for integrating soft skills

1. **Define Soft skills**
2. **Identify required skills.**
3. **Audit the courses you teach**
4. **Identify suitable materials or exercises**
5. **Consider level of development**
6. **Consider assessment of skills**
7. **identify skills "gaps" and opportunities**
Examples!

SOFT SKILLS PLAN/LANGUAGES

SOFT SKILLS PLAN/SPANISH
Factors which may facilitate successful integration of skills

- Maturity and openness of students.
- Provide information / guidelines on skill topic.
- Quite simple tasks with clear focus & structure.
- Have reasonable expectations.
- Give examples – students know what’s expected.
- Monitor students’ skill development.

Exercise– Design an assignment for your students in your subject

• **Time required:** 5 minutes

• **Groups of 2-4**

• Choose a skill which you would really like your students to develop. Design an assignment which explicitly incorporates the development of this skill as part of the course you are currently delivering. You are encouraged to be as creative as possible.
Organization Skills

These skills include:

– Manage assignments
– Information gathering
– Organize Ideas
– Time management
– Presentation of Work
– What else?
Strategies for Teaching Organization Skills

- Give students rubric
- Give student checklists, subtitles, graphic organizers, mind maps, etc.
- Teach student how to highlight important information, take meaningful notes.
- Logging learning goals, new ideas and skills, additional home study to prepare for next class.
- Allowing hand-written “cheat sheets” in exams.
- Be consistent in applying deadlines.
Communication Skills

These skills include:
- Written, verbal, and presentation skills
- Listening.
- Submit questions for clarification.
- Restating the information.
- Giving feedback.
- Documentation.
- Being assertive
- Manners and behaviour.
Strategies for Teaching Communication Skills

- Oral quizzes (listening and verbal)
- Presentations (verbal, written, diagrammatic)
- Role playing
- Adding documentation to existing programs
- Modeling use of formal language in classroom
- Summarizing what has been said.
- Debates
- Comparison of literature work, websites, etc.
- Peer assessment
- Modeling use of formal language in classroom for different audience.
- Preparing influential introductions.
Thinking Skills

These skills include:

- Apply past knowledge.
- Generate ideas.
- Inquire.
- Pose problems.
- Problem solving.
- Critical thinking.
- Creative thinking.
- Rational thinking.
- Significant use of memory.
- Decision making.
- Transfer and making connections.
Strategies for Teaching Thinking Skills

- Comparing solutions for a problem and providing new alternatives.
- Interpreting diagrams, graphs, statistical illustration, maps, etc.
- Generating questions that go beyond simple recall to higher order of thinking.
- Relating new understanding to other concepts.
- Give students sample problems with missing information.
- Variety of testing techniques.
Strategies for Teaching Thinking Skills

- Provide active modeling of thinking process.
- Give constructive feedback and follow up questions.
- Set challenging and specific short and long term instructional goals.
- Have students compare solutions and provide new alternatives.
- Link practice to real life situations.
- Provide tasks that are open-ended including several ways to solve problems.
Collaboration Skills

These skills include:

– Understand and work within the dynamics of a group.
– Flexible (Open to change).
– Accept others.
– Sharing information and expertise.
– Leadership.
– Conflict resolution.
– Face Challenges in groups.
– Patience.
– Help others.
Assign group tasks that allow each group member an equal contribution.

Explain the objectives of the group task and how it will be assessed.

Group test taking.

Opportunities for the group to evaluate their effectiveness.

Encourage groups to design action plans.

Election and Voting techniques.
Examples of strategies to integrate skills in teaching Languages

- Development of **organization** and **planning** skills by adapting writing assignments and reading materials to include exercises related to these skills.

- Development of basic **IT skills** by requiring e-mail submissions of homework, use of translation tools, designing presentations, communication with teachers via Moodle etc.
Examples of strategies to integrate skills in teaching Languages

• Development of **Planning skills** by asking students to create an Action Plan for every task—showing the steps that need to be taken and possible dates for completion of each step. Keep Activity log for every task with which to compare Action Plan.

• Development of **Presentation Skills** by asking students to present in class a report or assignment they have written. The student should develop more than one presentation targeting different audiences—different age, gender, etc.

• Development of **Time Management and Reflection Skills** by conducting a group exercise in class with specific goals/targets to be achieved, allow a period for reflection when the exercise has been completed. Upon completion, ask the group to address how well they managed their time and what they would do differently if they were to undertake the exercise again.
A literature review suggests that soft skills standards and assessments should (Binkler et al., 2010):

- Be aligned with the development of significant soft skills goals.
- Incorporate flexibility and unpredictability.
- Highly depend on performance.
- Provide added-value for teaching and learning.
- Demonstrate students’ thinking and make it visible.
Assessment Principles

- Be fair.
- Establish evidence of quality for new psychometrical approached of assessment.
- Valid for purpose.
- Generate information that can be a base for future action.
- Provide productive feedback.
- Build capacity for teachers and students.
- Be a part of a comprehensive and well-aligned system of assessments designed to support the improvement of learning.
Assessment Strategies

• Giving rubrics in advance in order for students to know how they will be graded.
• Detailed and clear instructions.
• Using of grading checklists that lists teacher’s grading criteria and the maximum points allocated to each criterion.
• Providing clear paths for getting to the next level.
• Having students describe their own development over time.
• Having students reflect on their own work and set targets.
References:


Thank You