

Using Multi Media for Training in Soft Skills Training

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Importance of Soft Skills Training in a Number of Professional Colleges

The new millennium ushered in an accelerated pace of development in the realm of technology. The repercussions of the rapid changes are witnessed in the liberalization of trade and economy. Liberalisation in turn has led to privatisation and globalization and the subsequent rise of multinational companies -- the ripples of which are seen in the entry of the Multinational companies and outsourcing industry in India.

Liberalisation and privatisation have allowed the Government of India and its regulatory bodies such as AICTE and the University Grants Commission to permit a number of private colleges where technical and professional education is imparted. This has led to the importance of soft skills training in a number of professional colleges. Besides preparing them for placements, the faculty of English is also responsible of grooming students.

The original concept of education and the *Idea of a University* propounded by Cardinal Newman and others was different than what it happens to be in this age. In the contemporary world, education is closely interlinked with employment. Therefore, students require subjects such as value education and moral science from their school onwards.

Soft Skills and Personality Development Needed in Professional Colleges

At the professional colleges, where the emphasis is on imparting technical knowledge and skills, there is a need for a program in either soft skills or personality development. A soft skills course or a course in personality development cannot be taught in the traditional. In fact when there is emphasis on using ICT enabled methodologies in science and technology, a course that imparts training in personality development cannot ignore the usage of technology. The traditional lecture mode would make the teachers obsolete, the sessions boring, and also impractical in view of the time constraints.

Modes of Learning

The facilitator for any learning program should bear it in mind that human beings learn through a variety of modes. Foremost among them are: Auditory, Visual and Kinesthetic experience. A number of researches have demonstrated the effectiveness of audio-visual training aids in many kinds of learning. It has also been established that visual aids stimulate the cognitive process and reinforce the verbal message to a significant degree.

Function of English Language Teachers

The English language teachers who act as facilitators for not only language learning but also for the soft skills/ personality development programs need to bear in mind that creating and using effective support material has a threefold advantage: in sustaining the learner interest, aids in the learners' ability to retain and recall the information, and, apply it to their experience. However, while using the audio visual forms, caution should be taken to avoid possible distractions that will destroy the intended learning. Using simple aids that will act as supplements to the primary message is the best approach.

Facilitators can use either the training materials commercially available in the market, or use the multimedia to design/create their own modules/materials, or even adapt some as the situation/topic requires.

Teaching-Learning Process in Colleges of Technology – Five Stages

The integration of technology into personality development program marks a strategic development in the teaching-learning process. Rozalind G. Muir-Herzig in his paper *Technology and its impact in the classroom*, refers to David Dwyer's five stages of integrating technology into the classroom.

The first stage of entry, is characterized by teachers having doubts about technology as their classrooms begin to change.

The second stage the adoption of technology to support traditional methods.

The third stage is likely to show improvement in the levels of motivation and interest of the students.

A thorough integration of technology is seen in its fourth stage of adaptation in which students are more actively engaged in learning and their productivity levels increase.

The fifth and the final stage is the stage of invention which is pictured by teachers being prepared to develop all new learning environments utilizing technology as a flexible tool and where teachers view learning as an active, creative, and socially interactive process, and, knowledge is something students constructed rather than something that can be transferred (Herzig, 124-125).

A Lesson from Computer Introduction

The situation of using technology integrated personality development programs where soft skills are taught is analogous to the situation when computers were initially introduced in the schools in the West.

According to David Dwyer, the project, Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow™ (ACOT) was launched at a time when excitement about the potential of technology to enhance learning abounded. Many promised that technology in schools would some day be as common as paper and pencils, and many educators believed that technology would revolutionize America's ailing education system. Citing Baker, Herman et. Al.,report, Dwyer writes that:

Teachers successfully translated traditional text-based, lecture-recitation-seatwork instructional approaches to the new electronic medium, and for a time, whole-group instruction predominated in the classrooms. Student deportment and attendance improved across all sites, and student attitude toward self and learning showed progress. (Test scores indicated that, at the very least, students were doing as well as they might without all of the technology, and some were clearly performing better. (5)

Situation in Andhra Pradesh and Other States – Proliferation and Dilution

In the context of India and particularly the Sate of Andhra Pradesh, the proliferation of engineering colleges has led to its dilution of professional education (with a few exceptions). The language teachers are given the responsibility of being the trainers for the personality development sessions. It is their paramount responsibility to bring a drastic change in the demeanor of the students (through the personality development sessions).

Hence there is a shift in the focus of their teaching -- from teachers of language to being facilitators, now they are called upon to be effective trainers.

Further, they face the daunting task of vying for their interest, and motivating them to attend a non-credit course amidst their technical courses. In most instances the engineering colleges are generally located in the suburbs of the city, therefore, issues such as the location of the campus, the distance travelled by the students and transportation woes need to be factored in.

A Report from Personal Research and Experience

The following paragraphs enumerate the writer's experience in integrating technology for one such personality development program. The constitution of technology and multimedia is large and varied, similarly, the components of soft skills is equally varied. Therefore the paper attempts to discuss the integration of technology in relation to a few topics related to personality development.

Motivational Videos and Songs

Challenging and motivating videos and PPTs

Increasing their levels of motivation to attend the sessions is always a big challenge. A number of motivational videos are available on the website which are free to download. *The True Story of a Carpenter, Who moved My Cheese, Priorities of life* etc. which can be used for various topics. One of the most challenging video is on an astonishing person is Nicholas James Vujicic (VOY-chic) born in 1982. He is a Serbian Australian evangelist and motivational speaker born with tetra-Amelia syndrome, a rare disorder characterized by the absence of all four limbs.

He is limbless, missing both arms at shoulder level, as well as legs. On his legs he is toeless except for two toes on one foot. He is bullied and attempted suicide and finally overcomes depression to embrace his disability and moves on to start his organization "Life without Limbs".

The writer allowed the students to watch an amazing and highly challenging video of Nick where he masters the daily tasks of life. He writes using the two toes on his left foot with a special grip that slid onto his big toe. He uses a computer and types using the "heel and

toe" method. He throws tennis balls, plays drum pedals, get a glass of water, combs his hair, brushes his teeth, answers the phone, shave and even swim.

After the session the students are asked to give their responses and resolutions. While some students were visibly moved and almost all were challenged by Nick's life, one student appeared to be totally apathetic towards the videos. Later, upon inquiry, it was revealed that the student had some family problems and the opportunity was taken to give further counseling.

Inspirational Songs

Students often require to be inspired to dream. As APJ Abdul Kalam says: you have to dream before your dreams come true.

An exposure to erstwhile pop albums such as ABBA the numbers was provided. The students were allowed to listen to numbers such as Eagle and I Have a Dream on their computers through LAN. The mellifluous songs of the old favorites offered a stark contrast to the contemporary film songs that the current generation is exposed to. After the listening session, they were asked to spend time about their dreams for their future. It was then followed by a power point presentation on goal setting, time management, prioritizing and values followed by task sheets for self analysis.

Popular numbers like Waka Waka and others songs from the movies also may be used.

Computers and Awareness of One's Personality

After lectures on the theories and types of personality, the students are made to go through the assessments tests that are available on line as well as in the Globarena software, particularly the Aptitude Lab client. The students are also exposed to videos on Body Language both from the internet and also K-Van software that is followed by a test for interpreting body language. The students get to read their scores and also assess their own body language. While the students give the presentations, feedback and tips are given on improving their body language, etc.

Movies and Soft Skills

The monotony of interacting with the computers is broken by allowing the students to discuss their favorite movies/books and the lessons from them. A power point presentation on *The Three Idiots* is followed by a session of watching *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*. The entire class participated in the lessons on the importance of interpersonal skills. The session is followed by forming students into groups and allowing them to discuss various aspects of soft skills such as leadership in *Eega*, team spirit in *Chuck De India*, *Taare Zameen Par* etc.

Kinesthetic Experience

While the four stages that Dwyer refers to provide scope for auditory and visual learning, the final stage can involve a project in which students form into groups and create/produce a small video/documentary on various topics that interest them. This will form their kinesthetic experience.

The experiential learning process of the project will require the students to practice, learn and assess their own team spirit, leadership skills. It would require them to manage time, people and resources, and calls forth their negotiation skills. They would also learn how to resolve conflicts.

Though the final stage is time consuming and challenging in the backdrop of the time constraints, it would be the consummation of the personality development course and also provide the students with a sense of challenge. The successful accomplishment of the task will satisfy them and also empower them with confidence. The experiential learning becomes a training in itself for both the trainer and the students.

Conclusion

Ever since industrialization, there has been an emphasis on the need for training for various needs and in all spheres. Research has proven the importance of training for development. Training the personnel of a firm for development of the organization is different from training students in soft skills and personality development. One common factor, however, is that training consists largely of “well organized opportunities for participants to acquire understanding and competencies they realize they need”(Lynton,7).

However, it is a known fact the demands in tests and examinations create an assessment. The shortage of time collaborative work or planning, or even professional

development in ICT poses a number of problems. Therefore there should be focus on training the teachers.

In the contemporary scenario of professional education, most of the institutes realize the need for training the students. But, sadly, they do not send the trainer to be trained in these areas. They often enlist the faculty from the department of English to be the trainers. Most managements do not relieve their staff for refresher courses or other training programs for a number of reasons. The trainers may not be bringing in “ an adequate standard of competence in the field for training” in training methodologies (Lynton,201). This implies that the teacher-turned-trainer stumbles his/her way through the various stages of planning, designing, and implementation of the training sessions.

In India, awareness about the pre-service and in-service training is limited, and possibilities of attending them are equally sparse. While most institutions would like to impart soft skills training to their students, they ignore the importance of training the trainer. Lynton and Pareek emphasize on the importance of improving the professional competence of trainers through many day-to-day activities and by learning from each other’s session (280).

There is a dire need for not only training the students in soft skills but also enabling the trainees to be professionally trained. This will ensure the effectiveness and success of any training programs. The management as well as the trainers and trainees would benefit if the organization send the trainers for training which is imperative for teachers in their mid-career, whose services are required to handle such courses in soft skills/personality development.

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