NEW TEACHING TECHNIQUES IN 21ST CENTURY CLASSES

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Abstract

The main goal of education is to make use of ideas, theories, and concepts to create new things in order not to have people learn things mechanically and repeat the same things as the previous generations. Cognition is "the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses". It is an interactive process between the learner and the environment. Students learn better by putting the language in use and interacting with the environment rather than learning new words, concepts and theories mechanically. Learning is a complex process which comprises knowledge, judgment, reasoning, memory and of course analysis. People, especially children use schemas which are the basic building blocks of knowledge and enable us to form a mental representation of the world (the learning process is closely linked to the biological maturation of a person and the way he interacts with the world). (McLeod 2019). If we want to have students have a better future, we need to change their way of thinking since at an early age. Thus, teachers need to design modern school curriculum and also implement new contemporary techniques if they want to have better learning outcomes.

What are the 21st Century Schools?

This project, which is fully supported by the British Council and the UK government aims to equip students of the Western Balkans, aged 10-15 years old with the critical thinking and problem solving skills. Investing in their education means investing in their future and also in the progress of their countries as well. Students are also equipped with programming skills and they have the opportunity to practice them and other skills such as critical thinking skills and creativity through physical computing. In this way, the students will learn in smart, innovative classes and the learning process will be a fun activity.

How to Implement Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills in English Classes

Teachers that are involved in this programme are using a lot of techniques in order to enhance vocabulary by practicing critical thinking and problem thinking skills. Some of these techniques include drawing a mind map, a diagram used to organize ideas and to show relations among objects, phenomena or ideas. If students are dealing with the "Home" topic, this kind of map gives them the chance to recall, but also learn new words regarding this topic. They also have the chance to generate new ideas and express them freely regarding such familiar topics.
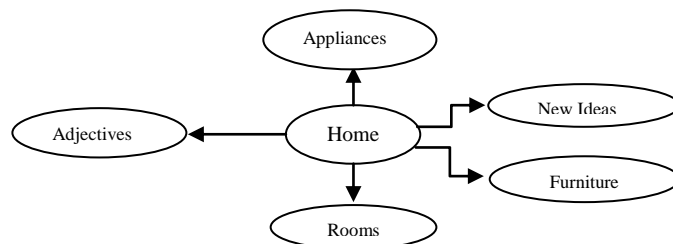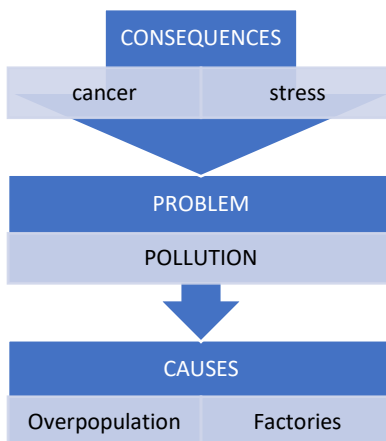

Figure 2. A Mind Map

This mind map gives students the chance to use their critical thinking and problem solving skills by expressing their ideas, for example about different kind of houses that do not waste too much energy or even smart houses where you can lift objects, turn off the lights, lock the doors … with a simple click on your computer or mobile phone. This kind of houses will offer the owners comfort and security and are also very convenient for them and also reduce the energy waste by making use of the natural light for heating and lighting and using echo – materials to create the building itself. This will also provide healthy living conditions for the house owners as well.

The problem tree technique – this technique enables students to understand things better by analyzing the factors that cause the problem / problems and their consequences. Students learn how to present problems by using the picture of a tree. The tree consists of 3 main parts: a) the roots, the trunk and the branches.The trunk is the problem and the roots and the branches are respectively its causes and consequences. Students should collaborate with each other and find the causes and effects of a certain problem. (Bright Hub PM, 2019)

Figure 3. A Problem Tree

How to use it in English language teaching? Teachers can ask students to use it in order to analyze things better. Students will have to deal with the problem by focusing on the causes and the consequences. They will follow a step by step process in order to analyze the problem properly by identifying it and the possible causes and consequences. Students may use flip chart papers to write their ideas and just stick them on the problem tree or they may use a diagram to present their ideas under the given categories.

Problem: Pollution

Causes: cars, factories which emit toxic waste overpopulation, not using the public transport…etc

Consequences: traffic jam, air pollution, lungs disease, heart problems, cancer, stress, a thinner ozone layer and therefore less animals and plants.

As the discussion goes on students may add a lot of new words under each category and this helps them come out with new ideas and focus on their objectives by trying to find possible solutions to the given problem.

A modern technique nowadays is the one known as: "**The colored hats technique**."

What is it about? Students are divided into groups.

The white hat group searches for information and clues related to the given topic.

The black hat group deals with judgement and to consider the disadvantages of an issue or problem.

The red hat group job involves feelings. They express their feelings towards a certain issue and explain why they feel like that

The green hat group focuses on creating new things and finding solutions to the problem or issue that is being discussed.

The blue hat group job focuses on the regulation of the thinking process. It's the group that makes sure that all the other groups do their jobs properly. It overviews the thinking process in each group and manages any possible conflicts among group members or among different groups in the class. (Debonothinkingsystems.com, 2019)

Example: Topic ADVERTISMENTS

YELLOW HAT GROUP - Which are the benefits of the advertisements?

BLACK HAT GROUP - Which are their drawbacks?

GREEN HAT GROUP - Which are your ideas to solve the black hat group problems

RED HAT GROUP - How do you feel about adverts? Do you, for example, find them pleasant or not?

WHITE HAT GROUP - How much money do you have to spend in order to advertise a product /shop / company?

Students will take different roles depending on the color of their hat. This kind of activity helps the learners to stay more focused and mindfully involved in the discussion. It also helps them to improve their speaking skills by discussing about real life problems. (Teachingenglish.org.uk 2019)

The Interrelation between Technology and Knowledge

Nowadays, technology plays a great role in our lives. Students, even little children of the age 7-10 can use the technology in order to practice what they have learned at school. For example in many school in England, they are using the microbit, a small device which can be linked to a computer to practice or to find solutions about different problems that they might need to solve. Students use the microbit by using a coding system which is learned at school. This project has been applied and it has been successfully used by schools all over Albania, like in Shkodra, Korça, Tirana and other cities as well. The schools were chosen randomly. Students were able to create many different things by using the microbit, teachers were amazed by the impact that it had on different students. They kept expressing ideas on how to use it and what kind of products they can create with it.

How to use the microbit in class?

Well, the microbit can be used when dealing with grammar like: prepositions of movement (across, up, down, etc) by using all the techniques mentioned before (mind map, 6 thinking hats & the problem tree) and the students can create a gadget of showing direction through light. It can also be used to make aware of the environment pollution by creating gadgets that show the average level of people in Albania and the litter that they produce each day, or gadgets that measure the levels of acoustic pollution in Tirana and other cities as well. It can also be used to promote the cultural heritage.

It can also be used with the 9 years old students when they deal with projects like (New YEAR'S Day, Mother's May, Children's Day… etc by creating a gadget that emits sounds (children can create the famous Jingle Bell song and send them to each other)after learning how to write a postcard.

How to use it in the English class?

Well, the microbit can be used when dealing with grammar like; prepositions of movement (across, up, down, etc) by using all the techniques mentioned before (mind map, 6 thinking hats & the problem tree) and the students can create a gadget of showing direction through light.

It can also be used with the 9 years old students when they deal with projects like (New YEAR'S Day, Mother's May, Children's Day… etc by creating a gadget that emits sounds (children can create the famous Jingle Bell song and send them to each other)after learning how to write a postcard.

Conclusions

In a report conducted by the IPSOS STRATEGIC MARKETING, a company that was part of the British Council's project "The 21st century schools of the Western Balkans", 80% of the teachers think that the microbit is very useful for the school curriculum, 93 % of them consider microbit as a very inspiring tool; even those students that weren't interested in the learning process got inspired and wanted to be involved in the class activities and 100% of the teachers think that it is a very useful tool for learning. (About 21st Century Schools | British Council", 2019)

The critical thinking and problem solving activities combined with programming skills enable the leaners to generate new ideas, get socialized and share ideas with each other and has also improved the way students and teachers communicate with each-other. Teachers report that the students have displayed new potentials and that this kind of teaching was very efficient for the learning process (Elementary School "Mborje", Korce | British Council", 2019)

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