Toolbox for Strengthening Soft Skills of Pupils

SOUL Skills Project

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union
Toolbox for Strengthening Soft Skills of Pupils 6-12 years old
TOOLBOX FOR STRENGTHENING
SOFT SKILLS

SOUL skills Toolbox aims to empower education professionals and parents in supporting soft skills training, evaluation and development of children 6-12 years old.

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Introduction

This Toolbox aims to support educators and parents in implementing activities that can be beneficial for pupils’ development of soft skills.

Readers of this toolbox will be able to:
• Learn how to use formal and non-formal activities in different learning contexts aiming to develop the soft skills of pupils 6-12 years old,
• Implement a step-by-step methodological approach that encourages pupils to develop their skills according to their strengths and weaknesses,
• Develop their own creative skills and understand how to accommodate educational activities targeting the development of soft skills.

This toolbox is suggesting new, innovative educational activities that are based in the holistic educational approach focusing on the overall development of pupils’ skills.

Lastly, the toolbox includes recommendations to policy and decision-makers on how to support education professionals, parents and youth experts to support the development of pupils’ soft skills in parallel with the needs of the 21st century.
SOUL Skills research showed some important results on the current realities of the participating countries regarding the formal and non-formal educational systems in relation to skills development.

This toolbox is built on the findings of the research implemented during the pandemic.

Specifically,

In **Bulgaria**: Innovative public schools implement soft skills training on a bottom-up process; no special national program for skills development but discussion on involving it in STEM training [1].

In **Greece**, during the last years there have been discussions about the improvement of soft skills within the formal educational context. In 2020, public primary schools were introduced at “skills workshops” focusing on life and soft skills development [2].

In **Italy**, the Guidelines on Pathways for Transversal Competences and guidance (PCTO) have strengthened the discussion of soft skills in Education.

In **Spain**, in 2022 the code of Infant and Primary Education focused on the Education by competences promoting the know-how on the topic beyond theoretical knowledge [3].

In **France**, socio-emotional skills are integrated into the national education programs since 2016 [4].

In **Iceland**, the curriculum is based upon six fundamental principles: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality, and creativity, topics mostly referring to the future and the ability of the pupils to be active in society.

Within **European countries**, non-formal education activities are developed outside of schools, mostly in private or municipal settings, and often focused on developing soft skills.

Bulgaria is starting to establish non-formal activities within schools, while in Greece, Italy, France, and Spain, non-formal activities are mainly based on private or municipal initiatives during after-school hours. Non-formal education is recognized in Iceland as important for developing a diverse set of skills beyond the specific skills of the activity, including communication, cooperation, problem-solving, creative thinking, and emotional management.

4. https://eduscol.education.fr/139/le-socle-commun-de-connaissances-de-competences-et-de-culture
The **impact of social isolation**, distance learning, and school closures due to the **COVID-19** pandemic has strongly affected the soft skills of children, as highlighted by various reports such as the SOUL Skills Project, (in addition to e.g. UNESCO [5], OECD [6], UNICEF[7], etc.).

The measures taken by governments in response to the pandemic have varied across countries, leading to different experiences for students and educators. In light of these challenges, our research has identified a pressing need to upskill education professionals in ICT technologies and enhance the adaptability skills of all involved in educational activities.

Based on these findings, we have developed a toolbox with innovative approaches developing soft skills of pupils that educators can integrate into their strategies and curriculum.

Soft skills are constantly being developed in various situations, and the activities provided by this toolbox primarily focus on non-formal and experiential learning methods that can be integrated into both in-school and out-of-school learning activities. Educators use non-formal activities to enhance their curriculum and capture their pupils’ attention. These activities are characterized by interactive participation, allowing pupils to learn from one another in a fun and engaging manner.

Conversely, teachers often require more time to prepare activities, which makes it challenging to implement them regularly. This toolkit offers a range of tools that foster soft skills while also being adaptable to different educational environments. The activities are presented **innovatively**, with options for varying **duration** (longer or shorter), **location** (indoors or outdoors, physical or online), and age appropriateness.

Our approach to education is centered around holistic education methodology, which goes beyond the traditional focus on core academic levels and sees pupils as whole individuals. In an integrated learning environment, educators practicing this approach work to meet pupils’ emotional, social, ethical, and academic needs. We prioritize creating positive school environments and offering whole-child supports that address both academic and non-academic needs. By adopting a holistic approach, we believe pupils can benefit in various ways, such as achieving academic success, improving their mental and emotional well-being, enhancing their problem-solving abilities, and reducing the impact of inequalities. Other methodologies and approaches that work under the same pillars are **Montessori theory**, **Multiple Intelligence**, **Cooperative pedagogy**, and **Waldorf**.
In education, innovation is crucial for creating a sustainable future, and three groundbreaking ideas for innovation have been identified: new to the entity, new to the market, and new to the world. These concepts have led to the recognition of four primary dimensions of innovation: product, process, position, and paradigm innovation (Bessant & Tidd, 2007). Today's “knowledge society” demands that education respond to emergencies and adapt to societal changes efficiently and effectively, utilizing all available resources. The COVID-19 crisis has emphasized the importance of innovation, technology, and the need for constant updates to educational strategies.

According to the OECD handbook on innovative learning environments, a learning environment is a holistic experience centered around a single pedagogical core, which includes more than just individual classes or programs. Innovative learning environments are educational spaces that prioritize creativity, collaboration, and student-centered learning. These environments go beyond traditional classroom settings and encourage hands-on, project-based learning. They often incorporate technology and flexible design elements that allow for easy customization and adaptation to meet the needs of individual students and learning styles. Innovative learning environments also emphasize the development of soft skills and prepare students for success in a rapidly changing world.

The OECD (figure 1) identifies four key elements and dynamics for innovation: learners, educators, content, and resources, which operate dynamically, connecting different pedagogical procedures and ways in which educators work to provide alternative forms of education.

![Figure 1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-oecd-handbook-for-innovative-learning-environments_9789264277727-en#page45)
Below are presented **tools** that have been designed in accordance with innovative educational methodologies and current updates in the sector.

These tools are developed to be used by both **educators** and **parents**, promoting collaboration between these important figures in a pupil’s life. In addition, these activities take into consideration the environment as the "third teacher," a concept introduced by Loris Malaguzzi, an Italian pedagogue. This means that the **learning environment** can provide opportunities for discoveries and experiences that enhance a pupil's skills, making it not only a tool for educators but also an independent source of learning. (Cagliari et al., 2016).

The **innovation** of the following tools lies in:

- Working in a cross-sectoral and transferable way between skills, cultural activities, and educational formats, which is the main principle of their development.
- Following a holistic approach in their design.
- Horizontally reaching all sets of skills and supporting their development.
- Targeting the larger involvement of non-formal educational methodologies in different learning environments as a means of suggesting new approaches to developing soft skills.
- Being versatile and easily adaptable to different contexts and purposes.
- Being suitable for use in both online and offline learning environments.
- Boosting collaboration between parents and educators to jointly and individually foster the development of pupils’ skills as a whole.
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AIM AND OBJECTIVES

**AIM:** To enhance & improve the communication skills of pupils 6-12 years old through verbal & non-verbal expression

**OBJECTIVES:**
- Enhance non-verbal expression through gestures, movements, etc
- Improve oral expression
- Develop emotional expression and enhance the desire to communicate with others

TARGET GROUPS

- 6-9 years old
- 10-12 years old

DURATION

The duration of the activity will depend on the number of pupils taking part in the activity (which implies the number of performances), the time taken to guess the scenario represented and the time spent afterwards discussing the performance.

The following times would be considered for each performance:
- **5 minutes of performance** (the performance can be stopped after this time if the scenario has not been guessed earlier).
- **10 minutes of discussion** about the performance.

In general, each performance could last about **15 minutes** or so, depending on the above-mentioned factors.

Educators should consider that prior to the activity it would be advisable to make a list of possible scenarios to perform (missing the bus, losing your wallet, being at a party, receiving a surprise, etc.).

CONTEXT

- School
- Extracurricular activities
- Outdoors
Communication is an essential skill for life in society. Within communication, not only oral expression is important, but also non-verbal communication through gestures, looks, movements, etc. Generally both occur together so for effective communication it is important to value and encourage both (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003).

For example, the expression of emotions through non-verbal communication plays an important role in defining people’s behavior, so knowing how to communicate and interpret these types of signals is fundamental when it comes to sharing a message (Tracy, Randles & Steckler, 2015).

This is also relevant within the educational community, where the integration of verbal and non-verbal expression is of great importance for students to develop appropriate communication skills. In this sense, the study carried out by Zeki (2009) shows that the use of non-verbal communication in the classroom (in this case by the teacher) promotes pupils' attention and motivation, helps them to understand others' state of mind, facilitates understanding, etc. Thus, the appropriate use of non-verbal communication implies the creation of a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere which increases pupils' self-confidence and participation.

REFERENCES

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Clock (to measure time in performances)
- Access to online devices if the activity will be carried out online
The role of the educator is relegated to guiding the activity, the performances and the mediation and orientation in the debate after the activity.

The students must be free to express themselves. The teacher must guide the communication so that it is simple, enjoyable and so that everyone can participate.

1. The educator gathers the pupils so that they can see the space where the performances will take place.

2. The teacher presents the activity to the students and sets the turns for their participation. Prior to the students commencing their own performances, it is recommended that the teacher demonstrate a sample performance, by enacting a scenario and illustrating to the pupils how they should proceed.

3. The performances will begin. For this, the educator will choose the first pupil who will perform a scenario. The educator will whisper to the pupil the scenario in his/her ear, so that no one else can hear. Then the educator will ask the pupil to stand in front of his/her classmates to start the performance. The educator will also remind the rest of the participants in the activity, in this case the spectators of the performance, of the need to respect their turn to speak and their peers’. In this sense, the educator will remind them that during the presentation made by their peers, they can raise their hand at any time to guess what is being represented. To avoid conflicts, the educator will point to those who have raised their hands so that they can intervene and try to guess.

4. The performance will end: 1. when a spectator guesses the scenario or, 2. When 5 minutes have passed and the educator stops the performance and asks the performer to reveal what he/she was performing. When this happens, the discussion of the performance begins.

5. Discussion: The educator asks the student who acted out the scene about their reflection, asking how he/she felt, why he/she communicated the way he/she did (e.g. why he/she used some gestures and not others), etc. Then ask the spectators to express how they saw the presentation, what they would have done, how they would feel in this scenario, etc. The aim is to encourage communication between the pupils.

6. When the discussion is over, the educator chooses another pupil to perform and the activity starts again.
It is necessary to have a friendly and easy-to-use platform on which to develop the session. On this platform all participants (students and educators) must be able to intervene verbally and, above all, be able to see each other. Some easy-to-use platforms that you can use to organise the session are: GoogleMeet, Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc.

To tell what should represent each pupil his/her presentation, the educator can make use of the tools offered by the platforms (e.g. the chat)

The educator should moderate the session at all times. To do this, for example, he/she should remind learners of the need to keep the microphone closed while other learners are speaking (so as not to interrupt others), to raise their (virtual) hand before speaking, or to keep the camera on at all times...

For 8-12 year old pupils this activity can also be carried out easily online (carrying out this online activity with children aged 6-8 may be a bit difficult, as not all of them may have the necessary skills to use their devices on their own)... In order to do so, it is important to take into account the following aspects.

• It is necessary to have a friendly and easy-to-use platform on which to develop the session. On this platform all participants (students and educators) must be able to intervene verbally and, above all, be able to see each other. Some easy-to-use platforms that you can use to organise the session are: GoogleMeet, Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc.

• To tell what should represent each pupil his/her presentation, the educator can make use of the tools offered by the platforms (e.g. the chat)

Other considerations:
• As an alternative, the pupils themselves can come up with the scenarios that will later be used in the performances. In this way the children will also be involved in the creation of the activity.
• If the educator observes that the children find it difficult to start the activity (for example, because they are shy to present), the activity can be started with the pupils performing in pairs so that they do not have to do it alone.

Age Variations:
• Scenarios should be chosen according to the age of the pupils. Choose easy scenarios for the younger ones (6 to 9 years old) and more complicated ones for the older ones (10 to 12 years old).
• Reflection questions: The questions to be asked in the discussion can become more in-depth or "complicated" for older students.
EVALUATION CRITERIA

The evaluation of the activity by the educator includes the reflection of non-verbal communication (mostly through the performance) and verbal communication (mostly through the subsequent discussion with peers).

**Performance evaluation:** The educator should pay attention to the elements of non-verbal communication used by the pupil during his/her performance and the level of these elements.

Thus, the following can be used as indicators:

1. **Performance of gestures and their appropriateness.**

   The following are some criteria questions that can be used to evaluate this:
   a. Do the gestures the pupil makes relate to the proposed scenario?
   b. Does the pupil try to make these gestures in a way that can be understood by his/her peers?
   c. Does the pupil make an effort to make different gestures when his/her peers show that they do not understand the gestures made?

   d. **Movements:** The following are some criteria questions that can be used to evaluate this:
      d.1. Does the pupil move appropriately during the performance?
      d.2. Do the movements the pupil makes help to communicate what he/she is trying to perform?

2. **Comfort while communicating:**

   a. Does the pupil seem comfortable or uncomfortable in front of colleagues?
   b. Does the pupil get nervous when communicating?
   c. Does the pupil easily redirect communication when it does not seem to be effective?

**Evaluation of the discussion afterwards:** During this part of the evaluation the educator should focus mainly on the student’s oral expression and its level (for example: Is the pupil able to express emotions? Is communication with peers adequate? Does the pupil use correct intonation? Does the pupil use adequate vocabulary?)

These criteria questions can be further developed by the educator, adding other aspects relevant to communication considered important as part of the evaluation and for future improvement of the pupil's communication.
This activity can also be carried out by, instead of using scenarios (e.g. take the bus), through the direct performance of emotions (example. “perform happiness”).

In the following link you can find support material for this variation of the activity (emotion wheel): https://youthfirstinc.org/emotions-charades/

Variation of this activity is suggested by different authors, educators and teachers. The activity has been developed and designed by the Defoin team.

The idea of activity is inspired by:
https://positivepsychology.com/communication-activities-adults-students/

The innovation of the activity focuses on the promotion of non-verbal communication, an element of communication that is not usually highlighted as such (at least not as much as verbal or written communication), although it is one of the most important aspects of communicating.

On the other hand, the involvement of the children in all aspects of the practice, both in the performance and in guessing the performance, follows a path of active learning that puts the child at the center of the learning process, participating actively in the class and not passively, trying to find alternatives and solutions by themselves and not simply waiting for the educator to show them the way.
CUBES GAME!

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

**AIM:** To develop the analytical and critical thinking of pupils 6-12 years old through storytelling

**OBJECTIVES:**
- to enhance the ability of narrating stories,
- to be able to think in different context,
- to be able to act and think fast.

TARGET GROUPS

- 6-9 years old
- 10-12 years old

DURATION

The activity lasts between 30 minutes to 1 hour depending on the interest of the pupils.

There is a preparation phase in the activity which should be on different days
i) collecting words,
ii) creating the cube,
iii) painting the cube.

Depending on the variation or the repetitions the activity could last longer. Additionally, free story cubes are available online so the preparation steps could also be skipped.

CONTEXT

- school
- extracurricular activities
- outdoors
Analytical and Critical thinking is a highly important skill in the 21st century that empowers the ability of students to deal effectively with social, scientific, and practical problems (Shakirova, 2007). It is considered a core skill both in formal and non-formal educational frameworks. The significance of critical thinking for greater awareness and social justice has been emphasized for several decades now by critical pedagogy (Freire, 2009). One of the most popular definitions of critical thinking refers to "reasonable reflexive thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or not" (Ennis, 1991) while it requires both dispositions and cognitive skills and refers to thinking accurately, clearly, sufficiently and reasonably (Nosich, 2009). Other scholars, like Paul, Elder and Bartell argue that because of the complex framework of critical thinking, it’s not wise to try a single approach or definition of the term (Enciso, 2017). Everyone agrees though, that critical and analytical thinking in relation to the current challenges in education is to prepare high-qualified people who are able to meet the demands of everyday life, as well as adulthood and employment.

Active and participative exercises and methods support the development of analytical and critical thinking. Research shows that analytical and critical thinking is learned through practice and awareness, it is a capacity that can be encouraged and developed in an appropriate learning environment where children are able to express their own desires, impressions, feelings, needs and knowledge (Florea & Hurjui, 2015).

REFERENCES:

MATERIALS NEEDED

**Story cubes** or any other visual materials that may support the development of the **storytelling** activity (such as Dixit cards, story cubes etc.).
IMPLEMENTATION
STEP BY STEP

The presence of the educator will be based on the overall moderation and facilitation of the activity. It is important to consider the setting of the room, to be comfortable and spacious so the participants can sit in a circle and the cubes are reachable by everyone.

1. The presence of the educator will be based on the overall moderation and facilitation of the activity. It is important to consider the setting of the room, to be comfortable and spacious so the participants can sit in a circle and the cubes are reachable by everyone. The educator/facilitator gathers the pupils in a circle.

2. The educator/facilitator explains the rules of the activity to the pupils and clarifies that during the activity s/he be silent and the pupils will have to continue the activity for 15 minutes with no breaks (time may vary depending on the age groups and the flow of the conversation).

3. There are several different cubes in the middle of the circle. Students are asked to narrate a story altogether. The educator asks a volunteer to start and s/he becomes the narrator of one story depending on the image on the dice. Each pupil should say a phrase or a sentence. After s/he finishes, the next pupil continues the same story according to hers/his dice. The storytelling continues until the group decides to stop.

4. The educator is a quiet observer during the implementation of the activity. In case it is needed, he/she can also take notes to use them afterward during the reflection.

5. The story finishes when the group believes that they have nothing more to offer to the session.

6. The educator/facilitator introduces the participants to a reflection session where they discuss how the activity went, how they felt about their character and how they decided the characteristics of their personality.
Age Variations:
For younger pupils: This activity should be simplified in the case of younger pupils (6-9 years old). For example, the dice could include the letters of the alphabet, numbers, or any other topic relevant to the lesson and the cubes should be provided and colored to become more personalized to the participants.

For older pupils: This activity can be used for conflict management or further discussions and debates among the pupils. Educators can use the cubes for guiding a discussion on conflicts or issues that have occurred in the classroom.

Through this activity, participants have the opportunity to open up for topics that interest them, express themselves and develop their analytical thinking during the activity.

For example, in case of a conflict inside the classroom the cubes can be used describing different characters and factors of the conflict, or different parts of the story.

Other alternatives:
The educator can decide a topic in advance and provide the plot to the students.
In a secondary level the teacher could also define different roles in the group and ask the students to act as their roles in combination with the cubes they have.

The activity can be customized for various classes, subjects, and learning experiences. For instance, the use of dice can be incorporated in the history class, where photos of significant individuals with details about specific events can be added to the dice.

Similarly, the dice can be employed in the geography class to aid in learning about animals, lakes, rivers, and other geographic features.

Moreover, the activity can be utilized in extracurricular activities outside of school to foster communication and collaboration among peers and teammates, such as in sports. It can also be used to develop artistic techniques, for instance, in an art class.

The activity can be also transmitted in an online learning context through any digital platform such as ZOOM, Skype, Webex, etc. In this case, the cubes can be done either using online free tools or digital dice can be used.
EVALUATION CRITERIA

The evaluation is based on the reflection that the educator facilitates. Simple reflective questions such as:

i. How did you feel during the activity?
ii. How easy was it to create arguments?
iii. Was it difficult or easy to continue a story that is not yours?

OTHER REFERENCES

Video for storytelling with cubes: [YouTube link]

how to create the cubes: [YouTube link]

SOURCES

Variation of this activity is suggested by different authors, educators and teachers. The activity has been developed and designed by ANCE team. Printable story cubes are available [here](#) by [My Special Learners](#).

INNOVATION

Innovation of the activity focuses on its implementation. This particular activity is designed in a format that can be adjusted and supports the actual development of students' soft skills who are in the center of the learning process and moderators of the activity. Pupils have a leading role in the activity forming and transforming it according to their motivations, inspirations and needs.
**AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

**AIM:** Develop and practice using emotional vocabulary

**OBJECTIVES:**
- Practicing the use of emotional vocabulary
- Improving interpersonal communication
- Improving oral and written expression, reading comprehension

**TARGET GROUPS**

- 6-9 years old
- 10-12 years old

**DURATION**

This can be a quick whip around with each person in the class 10 minutes; or the story activity should take about 30 minutes. It is best to make this part of your weekly practice so that your pupils develop their emotional vocabulary.

**CONTEXT**

- school
- extracurricular activities
- outdoors
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Affect labeling, also known as emotional labeling, has been shown to be a form of implicit emotional regulation (Torre, J. B., Lieberman, M. D. 2018). Unlike explicit emotional regulation techniques, affect labeling doesn’t feel like a regulatory process. Research (Memarian et al., 2017) has also shown that “neural responses during affect labeling predicted changes in psychological and physical well-being outcome measures for 3 months.”

What is particularly innovative and effective about this mood meter is that it helps students understand how the spectrum of energy and pleasantness ground their understanding of their expanding vocabulary and emotional expression in those two ideas.

REFERENCES:


MATERIALS NEEDED

https://www.thewell.world/files/resources/permission.pdf

*Dr. Marc Brackett’s moodmeter chart (colors and words)

You can access the materials here:

LINK
A fundamental aspect of emotional regulation is being able to accurately name what you are feeling.

Print out the mood meter chart, use it as a reference when coaching/teaching for all pupils. It is suggested that you prominently display the mood meter in the learning environment.

A great way to use this is by asking questions and having the pupils use the chart: How do you feel when you are learning something new? What is it like for you to play on a team? What do you feel when you are doing something for the first time? How do you feel when you walk into practice?

Think of a time where you had particularly noticeable emotions. Perhaps something you were really angry, sad or excited about. Tell the story in the shortest way possible using one of the words from the grid. “I was furious when they canceled the game."

Then, try it again, and see if you can find at least four more words to tell the story. “I was proud to be on the team. I was first shocked then furious when it was canceled. I was disappointed because I wouldn’t be able to play and I had worked so hard. It made it a little better when the coach called me to say she was hopeful we could play in a month. I felt grateful she called me.”

BONUS 1
Write your story down and color the emotions in your story to match the colors in the grid.

BONUS 2
Bonus: Practice feeling the emotions in your body, one at a time. Notice how pride feels vs. fury. How gratitude feels vs. hope.

*be creative with this emotional grid. Students can use the grid for their creative writing and character development, as they discuss stories and books they are reading, the music they are listening to, etc.
As the students become more adept at using the mood meter to identify their emotions, you can measure/observe how they begin to incorporate that vocabulary into their conversations and their writing independently, as well as when specifically talking about emotions (for themselves, others, stories, etc).

Dr. Marc Brackett permission to feel video
LINK
Why Labeling Your Emotions Matters
LINK

Education has a crucial role in supporting the development of soft skills in pupils, and emotional labeling is an innovative activity that can be incorporated to achieve this goal. This activity involves identifying and labeling emotions in oneself and others, which can help children develop empathy and communication skills. Emotional labeling can support the development of soft skills in pupils by promoting emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and self-regulation. By recognizing and labeling their emotions, children can learn to express themselves more effectively, manage their emotions in a positive way, and build healthier relationships with others.

By promoting emotional intelligence, empathy, communication, and self-regulation, emotional labeling activities can help pupils become more confident, happy, and healthy individuals, with valuable life skills that will serve them well throughout their lives.
AIM AND OBJECTIVES

**AIM:** To empower the children’s creativity in verbal and visual level, increase critical thinking and independence work.

**OBJECTIVES:**
- Enhance dialogue.
- Develop ideas, express thoughts, share stories.
- Enhance interaction with others.
- Exchanging points of view.

TARGET GROUPS

- 6-7 years old
- 8-10 years old
- 11-12 years old

DURATION

1 hour per week
Tip: in order to be effective, the experience should be carried out continuously and not left to a sporadic event.

CONTEXT

- school
- extracurricular activities
- outdoors
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The cognitive abilities and prior knowledge that a pupil uses to process information are influenced by their environment and social circle. As a result, the development of competence and problem-solving skills, which are essential for everyday life, are also affected by these factors.

In order to address the complex and unpredictable realities faced by pupils both inside and outside of school, effective training must be able to adapt quickly to the evolving needs of society. While pupils may possess some knowledge to deal with these challenges, they require tools that cannot be acquired through disciplinary teaching alone.

Transversal competences enhance subject knowledge and social/professional integration. Creative thinking, harmonizing intuition and logic, is a valuable transversal competence applicable across all domains. It involves problem-solving via rational reasoning, imagination, and originality, embracing risk and unconventional approaches.

These methodologies develop autonomy of judgment, awareness of one's abilities, and flexibility in finding solutions.

REFERENCES:


Creatività e TIC nella scuola dell’obbligo: un’inchiesta su opinioni e pratiche degli insegnanti – TD Tecnologie Didattiche – http://www.tdmagazine.itd.cnr.it/files/pdfarticles/PDF50/4_Ferrari.pdf

Usare le TIC per sviluppare la creatività a scuola: una sfida possibile? – http://www.academia.edu/4783260/
Usare_le_TIC_per_sviluppare_la_creatività_a_scuola_una_sfida_possibile

MATERIALS NEEDED

- A blackboard or a great sheet of paper
- Supports for letting children write and/or paint
- Printing of the images to use in the different laboratories
IMPLEMENTATION
STEP BY STEP

Here below a list of possible activities is proposed:

Write a simple line on a blackboard or big sheet of paper. Ask pupils to develop an idea based on the line (e.g., "Shopping" with clothes hanging on a line). Allow children to freely express their intuitions and ideas after an initial input.

Valid references for activities of this typology are the works of the writer Gianni Rodari and of the designer Bruno Munari.

EXAMPLE

1. SHOPPING

2. HOW MANY WAYS ARE THERE TO GREET? (NOT SPEAKING...)
   Can you describe them to us by writing a list of at least 10?

3. WHAT’S WITH THE WIND AND AN ANT?
   Two seemingly distant words are like sparks that can ignite in the great fire of the imagination... Blow and make up a story in 5 minutes!

4. THINK OF ALL THE RED THINGS YOU CAN THINK OF...
   Write down the ones you can think of in 2 minutes

5. WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A CHAIR?
   Time yourself for 3 minutes and write down all the ways you could use a chair for.
WHAT ELEMENTS DO YOU SEE IN THE SHADOWS?
THERE ARE AT LEAST FIVE...
Try a change of perspective and the possibilities multiply!

ALBERTO MUST CROSS A DENSE FOREST TO REACH HIS DESTINATION....

Unfortunately, along the path, he finds a torrent blocking his way... But he sees these two things on the ground and immediately thinks they might be useful! How would you use them if you were him?

ALTERNATIVES

Age Variations:
In the activities from n.2 to n.7 above the educators can also use other words, images, setting of the story/ies. Adjustments can also be made with reference to the ages of pupils (as suggested in the 'Target group' box above).

How to carry out this laboratory online:
It is quite easy to transfer this activity online, some example indications:
Using a platform that allows writing in a common space so that all users can see what the others are writing.
For exchanging views during the work, a synchronous forum or chat can be used.
The educator will act as moderator in raising the discussions and to organize the different interventions as well as to give instructions on the questions raised and the tasks.

Gamification & use of new technologies
This activity could incorporate technology to make it more engaging and interactive. For example, children could use a digital platform that allows them to create a story using a range of media, such as text, images, and sounds. The platform could provide prompts and suggestions to help children get started and guide them through the story creation process.

Another possibility is to incorporate gamification elements to make the activity more fun and motivating. For example, children could earn points or rewards for their contributions to the story, or the group could work towards a shared goal or objective.
The students can be divided into groups to help each other create solutions and the teacher tells them that he/she will listen to see how many ideas they can generate before choosing the one they will use.

As the students work, the teacher takes anecdotal notes on their ability to generate ideas. If the teacher observes that some students still have difficulty coming up with more than one idea, he/she puts them into a subgroup and works with them on this.

At the end of the activity he/she asks the students to write in their learning logs responding to the following prompts for reflection:
1. Have I thought of many different ideas?
2. Did I think about the ‘solutions’ I gave from different points of view?

Analyzing results obtained, it is possible to observe how much the children get involved, even those with greater relational and linguistic difficulties. Even children who usually are not much participating in class activities appear to be very active and constructive.


Antonutti F. (2022) Sviluppare il pensiero creativo a scuola, Missione Insegnante, Gaia Edizioni Scuola.

This activity is groundbreaking in its approach to training children’s soft skills, particularly in the 6-9 age range. It emphasizes the value of expression and fosters creativity and independence through collaborative work. What sets this activity apart is its progressive structure, gradually building students’ skills. Additionally, the implementation of alternative methodologies incorporates cutting-edge technologies and gamification techniques to enhance children’s engagement and cultivate their interests.
AIM AND OBJECTIVES

**AIM:** To develop attention together with a complex of different skills such as communication, responsible decision making, self evaluation. The tool is built on the ATOLE program implemented in France.

**OBJECTIVES:**
- Enhance the attentional skills of pupils in the school environment and extracurricular activities.
- Target all students aged 6 to 18, regardless of whether they have attention deficit disorder or not.
- Believe that all students can benefit from acquiring superior regulation over their attention.
- Adhere to the guidelines of the ATOLE program.
- Formulate activities that can be adapted to diverse contexts and countries

TARGET GROUPS

- 6-7 years old
- 8-10 years old
- 11-12 years old

DURATION

Depending on the age of the students, the sessions will last from 20 to 40 min. A child's maximum concentration time increases with age: fifteen minutes at age three to four, twenty minutes at age five, thirty minutes at age seven, forty minutes at age ten.

CONTEXT

- school
- extracurricular activities
- outdoors
The ATOLE program is based on the theoretical background of cognitive psychology and attentional control. Attentional control refers to the ability to focus and sustain attention on relevant information, while ignoring distractions or irrelevant information. It is an essential cognitive function that underlies learning, memory, and decision-making.

According to the ATOLE program, attentional control can be enhanced through cognitive training exercises that are designed to improve specific attentional processes such as selective attention, sustained attention, and attentional switching. These exercises involve the use of computer-based tasks and activities that require the student to focus their attention on relevant stimuli while ignoring distracting information.

The ATOLE program also incorporates elements of mindfulness, which is an approach to attentional control that involves non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Mindfulness-based training has been shown to improve attentional control and academic performance in students.

The attention learning program is conducted through workshops, consisting of three main components designed to teach students the skill of "paying attention to attention." The program will involve the following practical approaches:

Introducing students to the biological mechanisms of attention to stimulate their interest in the subject.
Training students to identify and manage situations of attentional conflict, by developing a "sense of attentional balance."

The tools needed to set up the program are available on Website ATOLE and on the Website Canope.
IMPLEMENTATION
STEP BY STEP

ATOLE is a program for discovering and learning about attention in a school environment. This activity is designed following ATOLE’s principles and reformed. The program is done in 10 steps:

1. **Discover attention and its role**
   Students learn about the importance and usefulness of attention, which will be discussed throughout the year. They understand that attention is a cognitive process that helps them focus on objects, activities, or people.

2. **Attention balance**
   Pupils discover the similarity between the control of their attention and the sense of balance, through the metaphor of the beam. They understand that distractions act as forces that unbalance their attention. They learn to assess the level of attention they need to perform an activity based on two codes (the dimensions of the beam, the three “A’s: (Light attention, Medium attention, Intense attention)”).

3. **The brain and neurons**
   Pupils learn about the brain and neurons. They acquire the necessary knowledge concerning the operation of biological mechanisms which are at the origin of the various forms of distraction.

4. **Neurons and distraction**
   The pupils learn to identify, among their distractions, those which are due to unsuitable habits or to the action of their "magnet neurons" (reward circuit of the brain, see sequence 3). They understand the origin, in their brain, of these distractions and know how to react to them (by curbing their impulsiveness and by actually deciding how to act).

5. **Neurons and concentration**
   Pupils learn that in order to be able to pay attention, they must have a clear intention, a precise goal and to be focused on it. They learn to determine whether they are acting with a clear intention or not, or with several conflicting intentions. They are able to explain with examples why a clear and unique intention facilitates concentration and reduces feelings of mental fatigue and stress.

6. **Maximi and Minimoi**
   Pupils use two characters, Maximoi and Minimoi, to learn to switch between planning and executing tasks. This helps them break down tasks into smaller missions and minimize attention conflicts when they lack clear intentions or have conflicting ones.
React to external distractions
The pupils understand the similarity between the movements of their Gaze and those of a bee (Our gaze moves like a bee that flies towards everything suddenly seems to us important: everything that dresses our attention). They note that these movements can be spontaneous or on the contrary controlled voluntarily, and that in the first case, they are carried out according to the action of the great forces of distraction of the brain (neurons-magnets and habits). They learn to describe from the movements of their bee/Look, their Attention and their Posture the moments when they let themselves be distracted by external elements. They can then use these signs to restabilize themselves on their beam like a tightrope walker on a tightrope.

Responding to Internal Distractions
Pupils discover the different forms that internal distractions can take (verbalized thoughts – “little voice” - mental images, sudden urges to move on to something better “PAM”). They discover and use a technique – the Pensoscope – which makes them understand that they can feel these distractions without them necessarily capturing their attention and causing them to drop out of the activity in progress (“fall off the beam”). They discover two ways to react to their internal distractions (the so-called "labeling" technique and the observation of their body’s reactions to distracting thoughts), to complete the REMINDER tool, which provides five points of observation and reaction to external and internal distractions.

Concentrate on body activities
The pupils discover and use a “method for concentrating well” when they have to carry out an action involving the body: the attentional programs, or “PIM”. They learn to identify situations that require the use of a PIM and train to build PIMs that meet the intrinsic needs of each of them.

PIMs for intellectual activities
Pupils understand, use and create PIMs to focus on intellectual activities: Perception can be a “mental object” (eg small voice, mental image) and Acting can be a cognitive process (eg. : form a mental image from a heard word). They learn to use a PIM directory of this type on a regular basis for their school activities.

Note:
PAM stands for Proposition d’Action iMmédiate or Move on to Something Better (« Passer à Autre chose de Mieux » en français).
PIM for Perception, Intention, Mode of Action: three components that define the way to concentrate on the task that we are about to perform when it requires concentration).
ALTERNATIVES

The use of digital technologies in the activities can incorporate game-based learning into the ATOLE program. By using game mechanics and interactive elements, the program could be made more engaging and motivating for students, leading to better learning outcomes. For example, students could be rewarded for completing exercises or achieving specific attentional control targets.

The ATOLE program could be designed to incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies. By teaching students to recognize and regulate their emotions, the program could help students to manage stress and distractions, leading to improved attentional control. SEL strategies could also help students to develop positive relationships with peers and teachers, promoting a supportive learning environment.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Students better understand how their brain works and the forces that challenge their attention on a daily basis; they become able to react better to distractors, especially in class.

SOURCES


INNOVATION

This activity is designed according to the ATOLE program in France which is used to support the development of mathematical/ science skills together with the development of soft skills such as attention, creativity and comprehension. We have chosen to develop steps 1-5 with children ages 6-9 and are continuing with steps 6-10 with children ages 10-12. Additionally the innovative suggestion of this activity is the cross-sectoral approach and the incorporation of digital technologies on the implementation of the activities.
BOTANICAL GAME
“DISCOVER THE PLANT”

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

AIM: to introduce pupils to the fascinating world of plants and to help them develop an understanding for the natural world. The activity encourages children to observe and interact with plants, which can help them develop their scientific inquiry skills and their ability to think critically.

OBJECTIVES:
- Increase pupils’ awareness and appreciation for plants and the natural world, while encouraging environmental stewardship and conservation.
- Encourage pupils to explore and observe the physical characteristics and diversity of plants.
- Promote pupils’ scientific inquiry and discovery through hands-on exploration and experimentation.
- Develop both soft and cognitive skills of pupils connected with curiosity, imagination, comprehension and communication.
- Promote social and emotional learning of pupils by providing opportunities for collaboration, communication, and problem-solving.

TARGET GROUPS

- 6-9 years old
- 10-12 years old

DURATION

1-2 hours, it can be done at various times throughout the academic year using variations (seasons, routes, plants, methods).

CONTEXT

- school
- extracurricular activities
- outdoors
Botanical activities have been increasingly recognized as effective learning activities for children in recent years. These activities not only promote children's curiosity and interest in nature but also contribute to their cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development. Botanical activities that are designed in a learning context and methodology can have special benefits for pupils. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, children's learning and development are influenced by their social and cultural environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

Specifically, gardens provide pupils with a conducive setting for immersive learning on plants and their significance as messengers of ecological science and plant conservation to the visitors of the garden.

In the context of botanical activities, pupils learn through interaction with their peers, adults, and natural materials. For example, when pupils work together to plant and care for a garden, they engage in social interaction and learn from each other's experiences and perspectives. Through these interactions, they develop their communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

A considerable amount of research suggests that when pupils visit informal settings, such as science museums, botanical gardens, etc. their understanding of and interest in science can be greatly enhanced.

Environmental Education and Botanical activities have a strong connection with STEM. Environmental education is strongly linked to STEM, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Botanical activities are an excellent way to engage pupils in STEM fields because they involve a wide range of STEM principles and concepts. One STEM activity that connects with botanical activities is designing and building a hydroponic garden, which teaches children about plant growth and engineering principles while also developing important life skills such as responsibility and patience.

**REFERENCES**


MATERIALS NEEDED

- Map with the botanical route
- List with description of plants
- Camera
- Notebooks and pencils
- Prizes – plant journals

Online – alternatives: visual (botanical photos, sketches, short YouTube video links) and text materials prepared in advance by the educator.

IMPLEMENTATION

STEP BY STEP

1. Introduction
   Based on the school grade and level of biology and nature knowledge, the educators prepare in advance and provide the pupils with a list of types of plants/flowers (about 4-8) with short description, a botanical route and form two teams. Each team consists of 4 to 6 pupils. The game rules and timing are announced as the two teams compete in: 1) finding as many plants from the list as possible and 2) how accurate and good the plants were visualized.

2. Observation
   Pupils are taken outside (to a nearby park, botanical garden or eco trail) and are asked in collaboration with their team members to follow the route and find as many of the plants in the list as possible. Encourage them to look more closely and in detail for the unique features of the plants, such as interesting leaves, bright colors, or unusual shapes. With precaution encourage them to use their senses: smell, touch, sight in order to safely explore the plant.

3. Visualize (Sketching and Photographing)
   Next, ask the pupils to visualize their explorations: some can sketch the plant in their notebook, paying attention to details such as the shape and texture of the leaves, the color of the flowers, and the overall size and shape of the plant. Other members of the team can take pictures of the plants zooming in detail and catching various angles.

4. Discussion and Prize
   Once the pupils have finished observing and sketching a maximum number of plants from their lists, the teams are back together for a discussion and prize. Ask each pupil to share their experience in discovering the plant, what they found challenging and interesting about the plant and what they have learned. The team that found most of the plants and visualized them in the best accurate way is awarded a prize - a plant journal to encourage the team members to continue exploring.

5. Expand
   Expand the activity further by encouraging the pupils to research more about the plants they have just discovered, or by repeating the activity with different plants or in different environments. They can focus on their origins, roots, growing, but also learn more about their use (herbs, as food for animals, birds, as building material, etc.) and the products they are part of. Also, it could be motivating to use applications for identifying local flora on walks and trails.
ALTERNATIVES

Perform the activity online and for age range 6 - 9:
The educator prepares the list of plants/flowers with more visual materials (botanical photos, sketches, short YouTube video links) with less text for the pupils to explore online and then discuss with them what they have learnt and found interesting, what caught their attention (shape, colour, origin, etc.). Pupils are encouraged to create their online plant journal. Includes steps 1-4.

Perform the activity online and for age range 10 - 12:
The educator prepares the list of plants/flowers with balanced visual and text materials for the pupils to explore online, including step 5 and then discuss with them what they have learnt and found interesting, what caught their attention. Pupils are encouraged to create their online nature/plant journals. Includes steps 1-5.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The main evaluation is based on the number of identified and properly visualized plants/flowers and the team who managed best to implement the tasks is awarded.

1: Pre-Activity Evaluation

It’s important to inform the pupils in advance of the activity (or series of activities) that will follow. Try to understand the level of knowledge and engagement of the pupils with nature.

a. Ask pupils to rate their knowledge of plants and botanical terms on a scale of 1-5 (1 being very low and 5 being very high).

b. Ask pupils to state their expectations from the activity.

2: During-Activity Evaluation

a. Observe the pupils during the activity and note their level of engagement, participation, and enthusiasm.

b. Ask open-ended questions to gauge their understanding of the botanical terms and concepts covered in the activity. Try to encourage pupils to answer the questions on spot, with specific answers related to what they see, touch, smell in nature.

c. Note any difficulties or challenges faced by the pupils during the activity and within the team.

3: Post-Activity Evaluation

a. Ask pupils to reflect on their knowledge of plants and botanical terms again on a scale of 1-5.

b. Ask them to provide feedback on the activity, including what they liked, what they did not like, and any suggestions for improvement.

c. Conduct a short quiz to assess their understanding of the concepts covered in the activity.
This activity is innovative in that it enhances traditional and outdoors botanical observation techniques and activities with modern and up to date ones (visuals, videos, applications) to create a multi-sensory learning experience for the pupils.

By allowing pupils to experience their own observations, the activity encourages curiosity and exploration, and by incorporating sketching, discussion and competition, it promotes creativity, collaboration and teamwork. Additionally, by suggesting the expanding of the activity through research or journaling it can be adapted to suit a wider range of ages, experimentation with technologies and learning levels.
AIM AND OBJECTIVES

AIM: To use an electronic board and movement to teach math to pupils between 6-12 years old.

OBJECTIVES:
- Enhancing the mathematical and learning capabilities of an individual, using the newly discovered embodied cognition method;
- Having a positive influence on analytical and critical thinking;
- Developing skills for understanding mathematics and mathematically oriented text;
- By developing working memory, we give children the opportunity to build their own strategies that increase creativity.

TARGET GROUPS

- 5-6 years old
- 7-8 years old
- 9-10 years old

DURATION

Activities lasting at least 3 months or longer, can be periodically incorporated into teaching new mathematical algorithms.

CONTEXT

- school
- extracurricular activities
- outdoors
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This method employs color-coded visualization to represent quantities and concepts, and includes sound for better assimilation and understanding of math algorithms. Based on embodied cognition theory, the approach seeks to encourage repetition through movement, thereby promoting a strong foundation for academic and real-world success in children. Empirical evidence suggests that embodied cognition, which emphasizes the role of bodily states and modality systems in shaping cognitive processes, has a significant impact on mental development (Foglia & Wilson, 2013). Physical activity has been shown to enhance executive function skills, such as attention and working memory, which are important for academic success, and can also improve academic achievement by affecting brain regions associated with learning and memory (Best, 2010). Developing mathematical skills can positively influence analytical and critical thinking skills and contribute to general cognitive abilities, as well as improve academic performance in a variety of subjects (Beck et al., 2016). Learning math skills with multiple modalities can provide children with more opportunities to increase their creativity.

REFERENCES:


MATERIALS NEEDED

Textbook, writing materials, notebooks,
4 - 6 pcs electronic board programmed to the textbook,
Personal card for collect motivation points,
LEGO or origami paper.
IMPLEMENTATION

STEP BY STEP

Warm-up activity is to help the child transition into a focused and attentive state of mind for studying. Keep the activities simple and fun.

**Getting to know the plot of the lesson.** During the course of a lesson and learning level, an overarching storyline unfolds which captures the attention of students and enhances the appeal of the lesson. Understanding the main plot of a lesson is key to engaging students and making the learning experience more enjoyable. A well-designed lesson plan typically incorporates a clear storyline or story arc that guides the learning process and brings together various concepts and activities. By presenting the lesson within a captivating plot or storyline, students are more likely to remain interested and motivated throughout the learning process.

Introducing new educational material using a technology-based and multi-modal approach. This innovative teaching method utilizes an electronic board that is programmed with the textbook material to help students better comprehend complex concepts. Examples are provided on the board, and students follow the task-solving algorithm step-by-step, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the material. Additionally, the inclusion of more modalities in learning, such as clapping hands according to the volume of the number, caters to different learning styles and preferences, which can make the material more engaging and accessible. Overall, this approach shows great potential to enhance the learning experience for students and increase their level of engagement with the material.

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**Example:**

The electronic board is programmed according to the contents of the Manual (in a process of development). The examples below show the two versions of use – the image drawn on paper and the image on the electronic board. Both are positioned on the floor so pupils can step (jump) on them.

![Image of examples on paper and electronic board]

**Example:**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{summand} & \quad \text{summand} & \quad \text{sum} \\
\begin{array}{c}
\text{feet} \\
\end{array} & + & \begin{array}{c}
\text{feet} \\
\end{array} \\
23 & + & 34 = 57
\end{align*}
\]
In the electronic board:
On the electronic board, an example is written that preserves the colors - the units are in pink, and the tens are in blue:

![Image of electronic board](image1)

Then only the units are written and the pupils step on them in the sequence of addition and writing:

![Image of electronic board](image2)

To establish a numerical correlation while stepping, pupils clap their hands to represent the value of the units. For example, three units correspond to three claps of hands, while four units correspond to four claps of hands. Therefore, seven units correspond to seven claps of hands. Next comes the writing of the tens only and the pupils step on them in the sequence of addition and writing:

![Image of electronic board](image3)

In this stage also they can clap their hands to relate the value of the tens.

To enhance the reinforcement of the learning mode, the electronic board's settings have been modified to display the answers only after the pupils have attempted to answer the task correctly. This approach of displaying answers on the board can effectively reinforce learning by promoting active engagement and participation among pupils. They are encouraged to think critically and problem-solve independently before receiving feedback. Moreover, this technique can help foster confidence and self-esteem among pupils as they are given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes without any fear of criticism or judgment. As a result, it can create a positive learning experience and motivate pupils to take risks and explore new ideas. In conclusion, combining technology, multi-modal methods, and active learning techniques can offer an innovative and engaging approach to teaching that can benefit learners of all ages and learning styles.
ALTERNATIVES

During the next class, pupils will engage in a 20-minute modeling session using either LEGO or origami. The LEGO modeling session will provide pupils with the opportunity to choose between following a set pattern or theme or working freely with the bricks. By following step-by-step instructions, pupils can learn about the principles of construction and engineering, while also developing their fine motor skills through the manipulation of the small bricks. Alternatively, working freely with LEGO bricks allows children to explore their imaginations and experiment with different shapes and structures, fostering creativity and problem-solving skills.

Origami, another engaging activity, can aid in the development of children's fine motor skills, spatial awareness, and concentration.

At the end of each class, using motivation cards to mark personal progress can significantly motivate and drive students to achieve their full potential. Motivation cards can be a powerful tool for promoting personal progress and motivation in children's classes. Making the use of these cards fun and celebrating success can help to encourage children and increase their self-esteem.

Digital Variation:
This activity is formed in order to be implemented as a physical activity. Though variations of this methodology can be designed in case the educator wants to implement the activity online.
Overall, ongoing assessment in mathematics can be a valuable tool for teachers to support student learning and development. By providing students with regular feedback and opportunities to demonstrate their understanding, teachers can help students to develop their mathematical skills and knowledge over time.

Here are several evaluation questions for the educators that could be addressed directly to the students in the end of the activity during the feedback session:

- How did the children engage with the math activity? Did they seem interested and motivated?
- Were the pupils able to follow the instructions and understand the concepts being taught?
- Did the children show an understanding of basic math concepts such as counting, addition, subtraction, multiplication or division?
- How well were the children able to apply the math skills they learned to solve problems or complete tasks?
- Did the activity challenge the children appropriately based on their math skills and abilities?

The method is an innovative approach to teaching mathematics, which incorporates movement and multiple modalities to enhance the learning experience. The use of an electronic board (or paper drawing), color-coding, and sound engage children in a multi-sensory way, making the learning experience more enjoyable and memorable.

Bodily sensations and movements play a crucial role in the learning process. By incorporating movement into the mathematical algorithm, children are actively engaging their bodies and minds simultaneously, which could lead to a deeper understanding and long-term retention of the concepts.

It is also worth noting that this method caters to different learning styles, including kinesthetic and visual learners, as well as those who benefit from auditory cues. By using multiple modalities, the method is more likely to reach a diverse range of learners and accommodate their individual learning preferences.

The method was developed by eng. Nadia Kirilova, who is also the founder of Matema LTD.
AIM AND OBJECTIVES

AIM: Support children in developing their own strategies for learning information and presenting it.

OBJECTIVES:
- Develop study time allocation skills
- Familiarize with techniques for extracting important information, and develop analytical and critical thinking skills
- Encourage self-assessment and recognition of emotional states before/during presentations and tests
- Cultivate presentation skills and communication abilities
- Foster conditions for the development of creativity and stimulate the application of various learning strategies.

TARGET GROUPS

☑️ 10 - 12 years

DURATION

Minimum 3 months, classes held once per week (in a group of up to 6-8), pupils must apply what they have learned at school.

CONTEXT

☑️ school
☑️ extracurricular activities
☑️ indoors
The method is based on studies’ results about mechanisms of learning and memorizing, and selected pedagogical practices.

- **Skills for allocating learning time**
  - **Prioritization**: Helping pupils understand the importance of prioritizing their tasks and responsibilities.
  - **Time management**: Teaching pupils to manage their time effectively by setting realistic goals and schedules.
  - **Focus**: Helping pupils develop the ability to focus and avoid distractions.
  - **Flexibility**: Encouraging pupils to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to learning, and not to be afraid to try new things.
  - **Communication**: Helping pupils communicate their needs and goals to others, including teachers and parents.
  - **Initiative**: Fostering independence and encouraging pupils to take initiative in their own learning.

By developing these skills, pupils will be able to allocate their learning time more effectively, leading to better academic outcomes and increased confidence.

- **Skills for memorizing and learning the lesson**
  - **Double coding**: Encouraging pupils to use both visual and verbal methods to learn and remember information.
  - **Mind mapping**: Using mind mapping techniques to help pupils visualize and organize information in a way that makes sense to them.
  - **Visualization**: Encouraging pupils to visualize and associate new information with images and graphics.
  - **Active recall**: Encouraging pupils to actively recall information by testing themselves and practicing recalling information.
  - **Association**: Teaching pupils to associate new information with what they already know and understand.

By implementing these techniques, pupils will be able to memorize and learn lessons more effectively, leading to better academic outcomes and increased confidence.

- **Presentation skills**
  - **Confidence**: Encouraging pupils to be confident and speak clearly when presenting.
  - **Rehearsal**: Encouraging pupils to rehearse their presentations multiple times to build their confidence and refine their delivery.

By developing these skills, pupils will be able to deliver more effective and engaging presentations, helping them to communicate their ideas and knowledge effectively.

**REFERENCES**

MATERIALS NEEDED

☑ Textbook from school
☑ Sketchbook
☑ Pencils

IMPLEMENTATION

STEP BY STEP

1 Teachers pay attention to the conditions in which the pupil is learning:
   - What are the conditions – using a desk and sitting on a chair, as well as maintaining a correct posture
   - Usually pupils are guided to study in an environment of soft classical music.

Warm-up activity

To help the pupil’s transition into a focused and attentive state of mind for studying. Keep the activities simple and fun.

2 Reading and learning with mind mapping techniques

Mind mapping is a powerful learning technique that can help absorb and retain information more effectively. It involves creating a visual representation of the key ideas and concepts from study material. Pupils start by identifying the main topic or theme of the lesson. Next, pupils create a central node on a mind map and write the topic or theme at the center. Then, they create branches or subtopics that relate to the main theme. They can also use colors, symbols, and images to help organize and remember the information.

Example & Template

(5th grade, Lesson number 14, subject “History and Civilizations” p. 52-53, Authors: Teodor Lekov at al, publishing house “Prosveta”)

Using real lessons from the textbooks from school with study material where the lessons rotate by subject - language and literature, mathematics, history, physics, geography, etc.

Test simulation is done with a real lesson where pupils learn to recognize the origins of their anxiety and localize its causes. Then, the educator provides them with an appropriate method to try to reduce the anxiety before a test or exam.

Pupils are directed to use the resource in the textbook to highlight and bring out the important points of the lesson - bold font, different color and other tricks of the textbook design. The teacher guides them to use these resources to make their mind map and notes about the structure and material.

3 Pupils present the lesson using their notes and mind maps to the rest of the group.

They are informed in advance of the time they have to present. With only 3 minutes, pupils focus on the most important points from their notes and mind maps. The goal is to keep their presentation clear and concise and avoid getting bogged down in unnecessary details. By using visual aids they are aware of emphasizing key concepts and aim to make their presentation more engaging and interesting. They are encouraged to speak clearly and confidently, engaging their audience.
Memory training follows different types of exercises that can vary

The teacher introduces the pupils to the relevant memorization techniques. The goal is to familiarize the pupils with various techniques for memorizing information - for example, memorizing dates and names.

Memory training is a crucial part of learning, as it helps pupils to retain information more effectively and perform better in exams. Here are some techniques for memorization that can be introduced to the pupils:

**Visualization:** Encourage pupils to create mental images of the information they want to remember. For example, they might create a mental image of a historical figure they are studying about, or imagine a scene that represents a concept they are learning.

Use patterns or associations to help them remember the information. For example, pupils might use a rhyme or acronym to remember a list of items, or create a story that links together different pieces of information.

**Chunking:** Breaking down information into smaller chunks can make it easier to remember. For example, pupils might group together dates or numbers in sets of three or four, which can be easier to remember than a long string of digits.

**Contextualization:** Linking information to a specific context or setting can help to make it more memorable. For example, pupils might associate a historical event with a particular time period or location, which can help to anchor the information in their memory.

**Example**

Instructions: “Look at the room plan for 10 seconds and memorize it.”

“Now draw it again.”

**Training of memory with origami**

*(have concrete instruction – first, pupils look at step by step demonstration; second, pupils repeat and finally – they make)*

The teacher chooses a simple origami design that can be completed in a few steps that is easy to follow and remember.

Teacher demonstrates the steps: Shows pupils how to make the origami design step by step. They make sure to explain each step clearly and slowly and allow time for the pupils to observe and ask questions. During the demonstration, pupils can make the sequenced movements in space, but without a sheet of origami paper.

Then the pupils repeat the steps again, but this time they make the origami design themselves. If they need a reminder, the teacher shows them the origami diagram.

By incorporating origami into the memory training exercises, the teacher can help the pupils to develop their memory skills, while engaging them in a fun and creative activity.

**Note personal progress in the motivational map**

At the end of each class, using motivation cards to mark personal progress can significantly motivate and drive the pupils to achieve their full potential. Motivation cards can be a powerful tool for promoting personal progress and pupils’ motivation in classes. Making the use of these cards fun and celebrating success can help to encourage pupils and increase their self-esteem.
Innovative in the course is the comprehensive learning designed to provide learners with a comprehensive set of skills and competencies critical to academic success and personal well-being.

The innovation in the method is the application of different strategies and distribution of time for learning and test of the pupils that reminds them to build habits of conscious and purposeful learning. They are offered an environment where they can prepare to present and express an opinion. They learn to recognize and understand their emotions and states before a test or presentation, are able to discuss them.

These competencies include:

- **Skills for allocating study time**: This refers to learning how to manage and prioritize one's time effectively, ensuring that there is enough time for studying and other academic tasks.

- **Conditions for meaningful learning** with reading comprehension and analysis: This involves understanding how to create an optimal learning environment that facilitates deep learning and comprehension. It also includes developing skills for analyzing and interpreting complex texts.

- **Techniques for extracting the important information and learning**, developing analytical and critical thinking: This pertains to learning strategies that promote effective learning and retention of information. It also involves developing critical thinking skills that enable learners to analyze and evaluate information.

- **Self-assessment and recognition of one's emotional states** before/during presentations and tests: This involves developing emotional intelligence and learning how to manage one's emotions to perform well during presentations and tests.

- **Developing presentation skills and communication**: This involves developing effective communication skills, including public speaking and presentation skills.

- **Conditions for the development of creativity** with stimulation to apply different learning strategies: This involves promoting creativity and innovation in learning by encouraging learners to apply different learning strategies and techniques.
WHAT TO PAY ATTENTION TO DURING AND AFTER THE CLASS

Apply: Pupils should apply the skills from the learning strategies course in their lessons in their formal school learning.

The time: Completion time is monitored throughout the lesson and pupils are given feedback on the time allotted:
- TIME ALLOCATION FOR HOMEWORK
- TIME ALLOCATION FOR TESTS
- MODE - REST

DIGITAL VARIATION

- Training can also be held online. For this purpose, the pupils must have prepared their materials in advance and the teacher must make visual contact with them through one of the online conferencing platforms.
- The teacher has previously set the topic and additional learning materials.
- It is preferable for the pupils to have read the material at least once beforehand.
- Have space and materials for drawing and creating infographics.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

To be effective, learning is applied in self-preparation for school.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Control with presentation and teacher’s feedback.

Increasing academic success and increasing self-esteem is a guarantee of absorption.

SOURCE AND AUTHOR

http://matema.biz/strategii-za-uchene-учене/

The method was developed by eng. Nadia Kirilova. For contact: nadakirilova@gmail.com
Cultural activities for SOUL Skills Project are considered those taking place in after-school centers, sports, arts and other extracurricular activities which support soft skills development. In this chapter, we will explore the most commonly attended extracurricular activities which take place in the participating countries. This step will support the matrix between soft skills, the suggested activities in the previous unit and the cultural activities. Our overall aim for this unit is to present different activities which can foster the development of soft skills and how these activities can be implemented in different contexts. These activities are focusing on Arts, environmental and social activities, technology, and sports.
Cultural Activities that supports the development of soft skills - Country Context

*Cultural activities* are a reflection of the diverse and unique *traditions* of each country. These activities include music, dance, theater, literature, and art, among others. Participating in cultural activities helps individuals develop a range of soft skills that are essential for personal growth and success.

*Local cultural activities* and *traditions* create an ideal setting for fostering personal growth within the local community, as they are familiar, relatable, and evoke positive emotions among community members. These activities are often nurtured within families and reinforced by educators in both school and extracurricular settings.

Such cultural practices offer a blend of traditional knowledge and *contemporary skills development*, as they effectively integrate local cultural knowledge with the latest scientific findings. Additionally, these practices are conveyed through methods that are readily recognizable and accessible to the community, thereby fostering an emotional and conscious connection to their cultural heritage.

Overall, cultural activities contribute to the development of various soft skills that are necessary for personal and professional success. For instance, *learning a new language* through cultural activities *improves communication skills* and fosters intercultural competence. Participating in theater or dance activities can improve public speaking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. Art activities promote *creativity, critical thinking*, and *self-expression*. Cultural activities also provide an opportunity for individuals to develop *empathy, understanding*, and *respect* for different perspectives and ways of life.
Country: Bulgaria

Folklore dances/ choreography training
Traditionally the network of chitalishta organize training courses for kids to learn different folklore dances.

In some places there courses are organized together with extracurricular activities. Typically, the training sessions were conducted in groups over a period of one semester, which usually spanned two to three months. It is common for parents to enroll their kids in these classes to learn the intricacies of folk dances.

Skills that are developed during training: group/team communication, concentration, emotional regulation, analytical and critical thinking, comprehension, creativity.

Specific skills development:

Analytical and critical thinking – application of mathematical knowledge in learning the sequence and tempo of the dances, awareness about the own contribution to the group/ensemble dance performance, gathering information and performing individual tasks related with improvement of the student’s own dance performance.

Comprehension – understanding the description of the specific notions, historical information and customs and dances from different ethnographic regions.

Creativity – to distinguish different types of music from various ethnographical regions, to create/design stage decors, costumes and other stage accessories.

Communication – working in coordination and synchronizing with the other students for the dance performance; often is necessary to communicate with children from other ethnic groups; in international events to communicate with other country participants.

Emotional-Behavioral - ability to express emotional experience, relates and connects own emotions for artistic expression.
Country: Bulgaria
Region of Lom and Vidin cities- region in Northern Bulgaria, near the Danube river Parashki-

Art of eggs painting

The name “parashki” means that the egg’s painting is by using an old traditional technology which is known and is popular only in these two regions. To educate children about the history and application of this method, special courses are conducted every year before Easter. These courses teach children how to paint eggs using the traditional method, provide insight into the tradition’s cultural significance, and its relevance in modern times. Each child is required to present their design and tell its story. Following the course, a public exhibition of parashki is held on Easter, and a jury selects the best designs.

Skills that are developed during training: creativity, imagination, team working, concentration,
Specific skills development:

Creativity and imagination: children are free to elaborate their own design; they are stimulated to create something different and new, non-standard and unique design.

Comprehension: understand and learn to do the old technology of painting, understand and incorporate the new information about old technology into already existing knowledge.

Teamwork and ethical behavior: children work individually or in group of 2-3 ones under the instruction of an educator (local well known in the region artist), during implementing the old technology children share materials, collaborate and help each other; there is a competition to create unique design and at the same time there is a collaboration in realizing it.

Communication: working in a group children communicate among them and with the educator, learn to listen to the opinion of others, but they are free to make their own decision, learn to express themselves orally (Story telling), art design, movements during work and during final public presentations, etc.
"Clean Monday" is a Greek religious tradition that involves group activities centered around flying kites. This practice, which symbolizes the soul’s ascent to Heaven and God, dates back to ancient times when people believed that the height of their kite's flight could increase the likelihood of their prayers being answered. In addition to its cultural significance, kite flying is also a valuable tool for developing soft skills.

Specific skills development: problem-solving, creativity, communication, teamwork, comprehension

Problem solving & decision making: making kites requires creativity and problem-solving skills to design and assemble a functional kite. It also requires attention to detail and precision to ensure that the kite is symmetrical and well-balanced.

Creativity: constructing kites involves using different tools and materials, such as bamboo sticks, paper, and string, which can help develop manual dexterity and hand-eye coordination. By designing and attempting to fly their kites, kids, families and friends of all ages can connect with nature, learn about natural phenomena such as wind.

Communication and teamwork: making and flying kites for Clean Monday is often a group activity within family members or friends, which can foster communication, leadership, teamwork, and social skills as participants collaborate and share ideas.
Fallas of Valencia in Spain

The Fallas (or Falles in valencian) is a typical celebration of the city of Valencia, although it is also celebrated in other municipalities of the Comunidad Valenciana. Officially they begin with the act of the "Crida" on the last sunday of February and continue for a large part of the month of March. During this days the streets of Valencia become a huge festival of urban art to celebrate the arrival of spring. The main attraction of this festivity are the fallas, figures of several meters tall that the masters make in order to be exhibited to the public in different parts of the city and then burned on the day of the Cremá. Individually, each figure that makes up the falla is called a "Ninot". Fallas tend to have a satirical nature referring to current issues. During these days several important events are celebrated such as: the Crida, the Mascletà (every day of the festivities at 14:00), the Cavalcada del Ninot, the Plantà of the Fallas, The Nit del Foc (Night of Fire), the Cavalcada del Foc and the Cremà of the Fallas.

During the festive period, it is common in the schools of Valencia and the Comunidad Valenciana to create ninots in the schools and to make a School Falla with all the ninots made by the pupils. Unlike the Ninots of the main Fallas exhibited around the city, these are made with materials that are accessible to children. In some schools, the cremà of these school Fallas is also carried out.

**Specific skills development:** creativity, imagination, communication, teamwork.

**Creativity:** Ninot construction promotes creativity by encouraging each child to create something unique that expresses their perspective, fostering creativity in the classroom.

**Imagination:** Using various materials, such as cardboard and paper, to create the ninots encourages children to be imaginative and innovative, allowing them to express their point of view on the chosen theme.

**Communication:** Building the ninots involves communication with classmates and educators since they will become part of the school falla. Talking about emotions, ideas, and work while creating the falla is encouraged to share viewpoints and create a participative structure.

**Teamwork:** The success of the school falla depends on all pupils making the figures. On the day of the cremà, both teachers and pupils work together to make the day as enjoyable as possible.
Country: France

Making "bredele" (Christmas cupcakes).

"Bredele" or "Bredala" are small cakes, traditionally made in Alsace for the Christmas season. They are prepared from the end of November and are eaten right up to Christmas Day. The recipes have been passed from generation to generation!

Specific skills development: comprehension, attention, communication, teamwork, and creativity.

Communication and teamwork: traditionally, these cupcakes are made in families, which requires communication and teamwork; the recipes are often passed down from generation to generation, again developing communication.

Comprehension and attention: there are many different recipes of "bredala", each as varied as the next. It is therefore important to understand the recipes and to pay attention to each step of the process.

Creativity: The shape and ingredients of bredala are very variable; everyone can have fun creating new shapes. After baking, cupcakes are often decorated by children who can let their imagination run wild.
Country: Iceland

Outdoor Swimming

Swimming outdoors in Iceland’s geothermal hot waters is a staple activity throughout the country. All pupils learn to swim during school hours throughout their compulsory school experience (ages 6-16). All neighborhoods and small communities have pools for the public to use. In many municipalities the entrance fee for children is either free or very low. It is typical to see families with young children enjoying the hot water on weekends and children playing in the larger warm pool which are often equipped with water slides and other games/toys.

**Specific Skills Development:** Communication, critical and analytical thinking, behavioral self regulation and responsible decision making

Playing and swimming at the pool falls into the category of free play for children in a water environment. They generally walk on their own to the pools, get a key for the locker, get ready and shower and then play as long as they wish in the pools. As they navigate the pools independently they are developing and practicing many soft skills.

**Communication:** They are practicing their communication skills with the adult workers at the pool. With each other as they play and navigate what and how they will play they are expressing their desires, negotiating with their friends and then engaging in the play.

**Critical and Analytical Thinking:** The pool environment is one, like many, that requires a certain level of care and attention to safety. As the children play and swim they are always calculating the level of risk, depth of water, energy level of play, distances to one another and more. All of this requires the gathering of data from multiple sources (eyes, ears, body) and then making decisions based on that data.

**Behavioral Self-Regulation:** As in all free play, children are managing their emotions and regulating their needs and desires as they negotiate both the decided upon rules of the game and their interactions with each other.

**Responsible Decision Making:** While playing in water and often navigating slippery surfaces the children are practicing making responsible decisions as they determine how and when to play on certain equipment and who is in their immediate surrounding area (older and younger children, adults of all ages).
General cultural activity

“Child-Friendly Museum”
Exhibitions, cultural activities, and museums can be stimulating and educational for children, even if they are not specifically designed for them. Museums should strive to create a friendly and interactive environment for young visitors, stimulating their curiosity and nurturing their desire for knowledge. Children have the ability to appreciate all kinds of art, from abstract paintings to sculptures. The museum experience should be interactive, allowing children to explore and discover on their own rather than relying on guided tours and boring explanations. Parents should inquire about the exhibition and plan fun and engaging activities, such as asking children to find specific elements in paintings, preparing nursery rhymes or fairy tales, or letting children draw something before the visit to compare with the exhibition. Finally, there should be a harmony of purpose and networking between formal and informal learning.

Skills that are developed: creativity, comprehension, analytical and critical thinking, communication, emotional regulation.

Creativity: activities that are suggested to be done in the family before going to the museum are useful to stimulate creativity in children. The experience within the museum is particularly suitable for stimulating children’s creativity.

Comprehension: understand the objects they have in front, some notions, the environment, the use of spaces; what can be defined as ‘art’, particularities, variegated characteristics, etc. all instruments to help them understand more deeply all what they will meet in their future and daily life.

Analytical and critical thinking: Arts education fosters personal perspective, critical thinking, responsible behavior, and independent thought. Interactive museums provide a multi-sensory learning environment to encourage curiosity, creativity, and divergent thinking through hands-on exploration and experimentation with artistic techniques and materials.

Communication: this experience helps to explore, embrace, narrate, and share during the ‘exploration’ children communicate their impressions and emotions to parents, friends, peers.

Emotional regulation: desire, emotions, imagination are the first means through which children can express their inner world, made up of as yet unknown emotions, which in art find expression and gratification, so let accustom children to life by training their eyes to wonder and amazement: a simple visit to the museum, an art exhibition, a botanical park, are all important experiences that help and support the healthy and harmonious growth.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS
The discourse on presenting activities that promote the development of soft skills in students is not a coincidence. It is a result of bottom-up processes that are prompted by the perceived necessity of improving the competencies of pupils, and the educators’ desire to change the teaching methodologies. Simultaneously, this is also a top-down process as soft skills are the foundation for the development of competencies in the labor force, which is a priority in the educational policies of European countries.

Educational policy should reflect the importance of developing transferable skills across the entire day of the pupil. There must be a strong effort to renew teacher training and provide meaningful, embedded and ongoing professional development to all educators. It is especially important for research on the development of transferable skills during after-school activities to be conducted and widely communicated to all so that it is made clear how these skills are being developed by the coaches, music, dance and art teachers, etc.

The key is that the skills’ development goes in parallel with academic knowledge acquisition. Today, the various existing pedagogical methodologies give more freedom to educators/teachers to use great variations of tools focused both on achieving academic knowledge and on development of transferable skills.

Thus, inclusion of soft skills’ training in the education system allows for its systematic development, not as it is currently implemented – mostly in out of school activities, detached, partially and on the personal initiative of individual educators.

Soft skills development is open space for inventing various training tools, allowing those tools to be upgraded, so as to be attractive and interesting to pupils and at the same time – to facilitate the teaching process.
More specifically, our suggestion for policy recommendations for the development of soft skills are:

- Develop a unified and holistic strategy for the children’s soft skills which will be piloted, tested and evaluated in the different age groups and promote practical learning through games, recreational and interactive activities.
- Include non-formal educational activities in the main curricula of the schools and afterschool activities taking into account alternative and more student-focused methodologies such as Multiple Intelligence, cooperative pedagogy and STEM. Studies have shown that interactive activities support the learning process and the development of useful skills.
- Provision of high quality training to teachers regarding knowledge and skills to teach the pupils’ acquisition of new academic knowledge and in parallel the formation of transferable skills, including cooperation with Universities and Research entities.
- Train educators in diverse learning pedagogies that focus on participatory and collaborative learning methods, and ways to support the development of soft skills in the educational context. Educators should promote social development by encouraging the building of interpersonal relationships.
- Promote and motivate parents’ active engagement in the personalized pupils’ education through an innovative framework by introducing them to the available tools for skills development they can use.
- Include parents of pupils in non-formal educational activities in the main curricula of the schools and afterschool activities. It will create collaboration between educators and parents and will give information to pupils about links between learning and real life.
- Promote ICT training for educators: this is necessary for educators to be able to use new technologies to create and develop new methods of education. In addition, this will prevent the collapse of education experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in case a similar situation occurs again.
- Promote greater communication between the three main actors in children's education: teachers (in schools), out-of-school educators and parents: in order to have a global vision of the child’s development in all types of environments (school, leisure activities with peers and at home).
Conclusions

This toolbox is a result of the joint efforts of SOUL Skills Project partners. The main goal of this document is to present alternative methodologies for the development of soft skills for children 6-12 years old in different educational environments. It is conceived in a way that could be used by educators with no or limited experience in non-formal educational settings willing to guide children in the process of developing their basic soft skills.

The toolbox presents a number of activities with important variations in the implementation formats that can enhance the participation of students in online/offline environments as well as indoor/outdoor activities. All tools are developed according to the current literature and consider up-to-date methods and techniques.

For the development of the tool, a number of educators from all partner countries have actively participated and collaborated with each organization’s experts in order to create unified approaches which incorporate the educational needs of students, educators and parents. Moreover, a list of policy recommendations is suggested, aiming to support the development of an inclusive education which targets the advancement of soft skills according to the individual characteristics of pupils.

All in all, this toolbox is a proposal of a comprehensive learning model designed in an interdisciplinary way underlining the importance of soft skills growth in all ages and educational frameworks. The adaptability of the suggested activities shows how educators can enrich them and readjust them in order to accommodate the expected outcomes.


UNESCO map of school closures (https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse) and UIS, March 2022 (http://data.uis.unesco.org)

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