



EduMagic, a Creative Teaching Community

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Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to make an analysis, from a netnographic approach, of the online community EduMagic in Romania. This is a site offering teachers in Romania from all teaching levels courses, webinars and conferences based on teaching in a creative and motivational manner. They resort to this as if in response to the latest years' raising awareness about the way that the Romanian education system needs to be strongly adapted to the current needs and to the current society. Society changes and, with it, teaching and learning should also change, or, otherwise, the result would be that the students would enter an old, and unfamiliar world. Since the author of the present paper is also a member of this site and has finished several courses and taken part in conferences, she can use participatory observation from the netnographic approach to analyse this community. The teachers of the community show a very passionate attitude towards teaching, and they are determined to make the school environment one that promotes creativity, enjoyment, well-being, motivation, and efficiency in learning. They borrow presentation techniques from online social media influencers, and they rely in their lessons on platforms where they can set up visuals for the lesson, including animations, such as Canva, Mozabook, Genially, Wordwall. Mindfulness techniques and motivational techniques present in popular psychology are also used. Technology is regarded as an essential part of both students' and teachers' lives. Active participation of the students is considered a measure of the success of the lessons' creation. Notions of psychology, such as those relating to relationships between students, between teachers and students, as well as between parents and teachers are also considered essential to ensuring a harmonious learning environment in schools. Bullying and its prevention is also a treated topic. The EduMagic platform and community, through their activity, are willing to offer solutions to all that has gone wrong in the Romanian schools over the years.

Keywords: Active learning, teaching with technology, netnography, motivation

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning has been a topic of concern raised within Romanian culture members and teachers of all subjects and at all levels. The main issue was that students were no longer interested in school, and that teachers are supposed to raise the students' interest in the learning activities. Modern methods of teaching include, especially, active learning, which consists of students' active participation in class. Such active participation is art of motivation techniques, which are supposed to prompt learners' interest in participating in class. Additionally, teaching and learning activities are expected to be creative [1], [2], [3] in order to raise the students' interests and to make the activities significant for both teachers and students. What is significant is that such activities are supposed to make the learning experience worthwhile, and, most of all, entertaining. Students should not feel that the learning activities are not interesting. Teachers are supposed to make efforts to keep their students motivated in order to take part actively in the learning activities, to the point where they may feel genuinely interested and motivated to do schoolwork.

Motivating activities, asking for the students' active engagement, are supposed to spark natural curiosity in lessons and keep the students' interest active at all times.

We may notice, overall, how creativity is becoming, increasingly, one of our main values in today's society. We can expect to be creative in order to be considered for research and development activities, as well as for teaching activities. Capturing the students' attention and maintaining it throughout the lesson is considered crucial, in terms of allowing students to feel motivated to become creative themselves.

The topic regarding the situation in schools has been raised in mass-media for some time now. The main problem consisted of changes in society after the fall of Communism in Romania in 1989. Until then, nobody would publicly question the usefulness of the education system. Education was part of the values in society. Afterwards, a change in values and mentality happened. România opened to the



Western influence. Young people especially rebelled, willing to express themselves like the other members of their generation abroad. The influence of American culture brought a wave of wish for individualism [4], which meant freedom and self-expression, as well as the need for changes. Access to popular culture and entertainment changed the social mindset. Access to films, music from abroad, together with technological advancement, brought a wish for change at all levels, education included. The need for teaching and learning differently came from the need society became structured. Technology and entertainment could be incorporated in the learning experience. However, resistance to change and lack of material possibilities could delay such changes.

Ultimately, what mattered was for teachers to show interest and passion for their vocation. Choosing what we like to do as a job can be motivational and lead to good results and relationships between teachers and students.

Still, some adaptations were needed along the way. The change from collectivist to individualist society, from Communism to after Communism in Romania brought changes in understanding the relationships between teachers and students, together with changes in technological evolution. The teacher was no longer someone who knew it all, due to the wish for students to be equal with teachers, like in the American education system, which was perceived as encouraging to express personal opinions and creativity for students, allow them to gain practical abilities, become self-confident and learning in an emotionally supportive education system, as well as in a friendly atmosphere. It can be relaxing to work with teachers who are not showing authoritative behaviour, especially when students are teenagers. The teenagers' particular psychological changes make teaching in individualist societies' style more compatible. Teenagers are struggling to become independent, and their fast growing up during this time means developing abstract thinking and creativity, due to fast changes in their brain, together with critical thinking, the latter as part of their rebellious mindset, which is a path to their achieving autonomy.

The students' needs should always be considered in the teaching and learning activity. Once the educational system overall is adapted to social changes, it can work with the mindset of students.

Additionally, technology such as the Internet has made it possible to have information within our reach, which has led to less need in schools to acquire information and more to do practical work with it. Hence the need on practical skills and less theory, at all education levels.

The membership of Romania in the European Union has brought attention to the need to adapt to international education standards, mentioned in education policies. Values such as critical thinking, creativity, cooperation, competence based education are present there and the need to have these included in the Romanian education system are brought up constantly in mass media discussions.

2. Materials and Methods

The author of the present paper teaches English and French as foreign language seminars, as well as, based on the changing curricula and opportunities offered every academic year, courses of lectures in Culture and Civilization, Pragmatics, Syntax, Phonetics and Phonology, Academic Ethics and Integrity, The Status and Deontology of the Profession of Translator, The European Union and Its Institutions, and Project Management. She is a lecturer within the Department of Foreign Languages and Communication at The Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, Romania. Practices referred to as modern methods in the teaching of foreign languages are a must for the development and updating of the teaching curricula, which is checked by periodical controls of the teaching and learning activity. Teaching with technology [5], using audio-visual support for teaching and learning, interactive teaching and learning methods, which should ensure active participation and engagement on the part of the students are considered necessities, and aspects that need to be taken into account. This is what motivated the author of the present paper to consider joining EduMagic [6] site and teaching community, meant for teachers' training for efficient teaching and learning activities, adapted to the needs of today's society.

In what follows, the author of the present paper analyses the study of the EduMagic online teachers' community through her own, participant observation, based on the netnographic approach [7]. She has been enrolled in courses, podcasts, workshops and conferences, and has also participated in live events on Youtube, being able to interact herself and to notice the way the teachers online were prompted to interact with the two trainers and among themselves, as well as with the specialists invited, psychologists, pedagogy experts, as well as other teachers from Romania and abroad, while also including creators of websites with teaching resources and offering space for uploading and sharing teaching materials which were tested on and used for their own students and teaching class activities.



EduMagic can be considered an example of supporting modern teaching practices, adapted to the society and the entire world of today. It is more than just a site for offering online teacher training. It consists of a site with online materials, but also of interaction among members, and interaction with the managers and creators of this online community. The site also has a Facebook page where the team taking care of the community posts regularly, ensuring interaction with the members through memes adapted to teaching and learning, providing models of activities from teachers in Romania and abroad for different objects of study, together with students' activities and achievements, e.g. students' creative posters using visual techniques for present, briefly, the plot of a Romanian novel, using drawings and anime-style characters, or characters and scenes reminding of comic books. Therefore, the Facebook page is not only a newsletter, posting upcoming online live events. The Facebook page of EduMagic is also a place where interaction is encouraged through asking for feedback after online events. EduMagic also ensures communication through email, offering teaching class materials resources.

EduMagic is a true online community, adapted to the communication type through social media, and to the organization based on project management techniques. The online community aspect can be supported by noticing that it fits within the culture identity manifestation grid, including symbols, practices, rituals, traditions, values, and personalities [8]. To put everything briefly, creativity, motivation, entertainment, technology, sympathy, can be included among the values. As symbols, we can consider the slogan of making learning magic, meaning making it a very pleasant and entertaining experience, for both students and teachers. As practices, rituals and traditions we can include the periodical online events, such as conferences, and workshops organized based on topics of interest in the Romanian education system, together with the use of online resources allowing creativity, such as Mozaweb, Genially, Wordwall, Padlet, and Canva. Active participation practices can be enhanced through platforms such as Padlet, which allow for students to work together on projects. As personalities, we can include those teachers and other specialists in the field of psychology and pedagogy who have work of merit regarding creativity, increasing the motivation of students.

Creativity and motivation can be seen as the keywords and main values of the online community EduMagic. Learning and teaching should be fun and an emotionally supportive activity. Next to the teaching techniques, the relationships between teachers and students, as well as between teachers and parents, are considered. The atmosphere in the classroom should be one of well-being, which would encourage students to express their opinions, to collaborate with the teachers and with other colleagues, and gain the necessary skills.

EduMagic is a site where Romanian teachers can start by signing up for an account, and then benefit from the workshops and courses, as well as conferences, available online, for free or for a certain fee. The courses, workshops and conferences have taken place live, on platforms such as Zoom and YouTube live, offering the teachers who were interested the occasion to interact with the trainers. The main purpose of EduMagic is to offer training and support through discussion for teachers regarding offering solutions to the various issues they are confronting with. EduMagic is aimed at all teaching levels, as the one of the two trainers and owners of the business is teaching at university level. However, we notice a prevalence of workshops, courses, podcasts and conferences aimed especially for pre-university level. This is due to the result of the majority of the teachers interested and interacting within the community. Therefore, issues such as lack of material basics in schools, such as technology and didactic materials, teaching in poor communities, issues with special needs children who should be integrated among their colleagues and not sent to special needs schools disturbing the teaching and learning activity are also dealt with in the resources on EduMagic and discussed in the training events. Specialists in psychology and pedagogy are invited to help find solutions to such common problems in Romanian schools today. Bringing examples as how other teachers managed to calm down and to interact with children with special educational needs are brought up. Psychologists bring up particularities in the evolution of special educational needs children, the particular psychology of students of various ages in general, the way parents may react and the way teachers could discuss matters with them. Everything is focused on the capacity for sympathy and for placing ourselves in someone else's shoes.

Teachers who have solved the problems of lack of technology devices for learning and teaching, as well as other material basis, are brought to hold speeches and discuss solutions, as these are matters many teachers in Romania can be confronted with. Applying for European funds, for international collaborative projects, as well as asking for donations of books to create a reading corner equipped with fiction books so that they are able to start an extracurricular activity based on a book reading club are such examples. We can notice how social changes and political changes trigger certain practices in the education system. Reading fiction is popularized at the level of the European Union, as part of



promoting cultural activities and empathy. Having equal opportunities means access to material education bases and also to decreasing the digital divide in case of social groups and countries by ensuring access to technology.

Creative teachers are considered models to live up to and from which all teachers can learn. Such teachers are invited to present how they hold creative lessons to bring an example of creative class activities for one lesson in any subject, how they use online platforms teaching resources such as Mozabook and Canva. Some platforms allow students to work together and collaborate, which can make class activities interesting to them. They are used to interacting on social media and finding a familiar environment in class can make the experience of learning to become more and more attractive. The platforms with teaching resources contain, especially, animations, drawings, photographs and various visual and audio-visual materials, which are also part of the modern teaching techniques with respect to all objects of study in school.

Additionally, when it comes to relationships, between teachers and students, teachers and parents, and teachers with themselves, mindfulness [9] techniques related to meditation to relieve stress and to connect emotionally to the present moment and to the persons the teacher will relate to are also popularized within the EduMagic community, through podcasts, workshops, and conferences. Mindfulness techniques are popular within all professional settings, including corporate cultures, companies, schools, and also for personal use.

We can notice how EduMagic online community functions like a project, or like a company, having a mission and vision, and making us aware that their aim is to offer solutions for teachers regarding all issues they are confronted with, from students who are not motivated and interested, to problems in the relationships between teachers and students' parents, as well as with lack of teaching resources provided by the school.

We can also see how project management culture can be seen throughout the EduMagic community when it comes to collaborations at national and international level, together with the activities meant to stimulate students to cooperate and be creative.

When future teachers finish their training in faculty, where they sign up for courses for becoming teachers, they may feel that they do not have enough training for unpredictable situations in class. Additionally, some teachers may feel that they are not prepared to adapt to the changing social realities, as well as to using technology to such a large extent. In their case, EduMagic helps them to adapt to the changing realities of the education system, as well as to current requirements.

During the pandemic period, reliance on online resources reached its peak. EduMagic helped teachers adapt to the new reality and to help them keep students engaged in their learning experience. After the pandemic, the teachers realized they could not go back to the old system, and that they needed to continue using the online teaching materials and activities to keep students interested and motivated to participate actively in class.

We can notice the enthusiasm of those presenting the resources, creative teaching techniques, as well as mindfulness and psychology-related techniques to be applied in the classroom. We can see how, during their presentations, the public speaking techniques and skills remind of those of online social media influencers, due to the enthusiasm for the topic of presentation being dealt with. The enthusiasm of the presenters can be considered relatable for the teachers watching the videos and the live sessions, and also motivating. Combining social media behaviour and teaching activities may seem incompatible at first sight, yet they can be considered all right to be combined once they become a significant means of communication for our society. Students enjoy this communication style, and so do young teachers, and the older generation should acknowledge as a fact that the current communication trends through social media can have their impact and benefits on allowing students to relate to enthusiastic behaviour related to topics of discussion during class and to expressing and sharing their interest and enthusiasm for certain topics of discussion. Students can find it relatable to speak critically about certain issues once they are provided with the analogy familiar to them of reviews for books, beauty products, or gadgets being done on social media. Perhaps they have participated in such reviews themselves, and then they can consider that the experience is very familiar to them.

EduMagic, therefore, seeks to provide training and creative teaching ideas and resources, in order to motivate both teachers and students.

3. Results

The specific situation in Romania shows the need of the education system at all teaching levels to adapt to the changing ideological and social context, in that students should focus less of acquiring



knowledge and memorizing theoretical notions, and more on gaining practical skills. Collaborating with colleagues on group projects, expressing their opinions and being creative with the tasks they are supposed to solve can be considered part of their adapting to the needs of today's society. Both teachers and students need to consider the current situation in society, as well as the situation at world level, controlled by supranational organizations such as the European Union and their education policies. EduMagic seeks to provide solutions and techniques adapted to the current world we live in. The mindsets of both teachers and students can be relatable to those of other teachers and students from their own, personal experience. This online community can offer support for creative activities and for solutions for current problems.

The fact that others have been going through similar issues can help, emotionally, and provide encouragement and emotional support for teachers.

The teaching profession, regardless of subject taught, as well as level, can be considered as a subculture. Professional subcultures can be considered a reality we are dealing with, due to the need to discuss common concerns and to offer mutual support through difficult times. We always feel the need to connect to the others and to feel understood, and the community EduMagic offers such support. Making teaching and learning interesting and creative can help provide opportunities for enjoying work in class. After all, seeing the teacher is enthusiastic about the subject they are teaching can offer students a true role model and also increase their own motivation.

With so many opportunities for entertainment nowadays, we can find the reality of the classroom and education system overall as disappointing, boring, and commonplace. However, new interest can be sparked in the learning and teaching experience, by adding all other practices in society and applying them to the teaching experience, including offering the analogy of an experience of discovery, storytelling, and mindfulness techniques to improve the relationships, which are very important in the teaching and learning experience.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

What can motivate us, both teachers and students, nowadays to improve the education system and to participate in the teaching and learning experience? What we know about today's world and the practices on social media can offer us useful analogies for critical thinking, public speaking and presentations, as well as for expressing our personal opinions regarding various issues and topics. Students may feel motivated and comfortable to express their creativity in class once they are offered analogies with what they are familiar with, including online social media activities such as reviews for books, gadgets, beauty products, or any other products, including films and games. Memes and quotes circulating on social media can also be used in class projects, as in the case of the students' relating, emotionally, to the experience of characters in compulsory reading activities for literature. Compulsory school curricula activities and reading lists may not sound very attractive to students yet, once they are given activities they may participate in through which they can sympathize with the characters, and presenting the plot in a manner similar to book reviews on social media, they can begin to find those activities attractive.

We do not need to draw clear limits between entertaining activities and compulsory, school related activities. It is, in fact, not at all beneficial to do so with respect to students' motivation. It can be, on the contrary, much more beneficial to present a certain framework with which students are familiar when relating to various issues. Social media practices, entertainment and other enjoyable activities should not be separated from school work. This should provide increasing motivation for students to be actively engaged in the learning activities and also to actually enjoy them.

EduMagic offers such examples of enjoying the teaching and learning experiences, to the point where they are entertaining and relaxing in a similar way to free time activities and hobbies. These types of activities can serve to motivate students to participate in school-related activities.

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