



Know and Can Clubs

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Abstract

“Know and Can Clubs” were first introduced in 2007, in Sofia, with a view to providing non-formal learning activities for pupils and students (aged 7-18) through delivery of a series of extra-curricular self-development programmes centred on communication, creative thinking and intellectual stimulation.

Offered at three levels, and targeting children and young people in primary, secondary and further education, “Know and Can Clubs” provide:

- a place to meet other young people, to share ideas and communicate;*
- an opportunity to build and develop new or additional skills outside of traditional classroom settings;*
- a chance to discover new ways of thinking;*
- an interesting and useful means of spending leisure time;*
- continuing personal development and career profiling opportunities (including for recent graduates).*

“Know and Can Clubs” take pupils and students of various ages and through a series of game-playing, teamwork and creative thinking activities turns them into self-aware, self-confident and self-motivated individuals able to take responsibility for their own learning and career development decisions.

Delivered in cooperation with existing school networks, and involving school leaders and careers advisors alongside teaching and training staff, programmes embed more than 30 separate activities that can be delivered in Bulgarian and/or English (age-dependent). Intra-school and intra-class competitions are encouraged and provide a useful opportunity for students to demonstrate new skills.

“Know and Can Clubs” are based on the theory and methodology of Edward de Bono on lateral thinking which are closely related to insight, creativity and the generation of new ideas. In addition to creative thinking processes, “Know and Can Clubs” also target improved communication and social interaction with a view to improving and enhancing participation in education, training and society as a whole.

“Know and Can Clubs” provide an opportunity for motivated young people, to make better use of leisure time, through extra-curricular activity that centres on goal-setting, personal development and self-improvement.

1. Introduction

Established in 2007, Know and Can Association targets the provision of non-formal learning and educational development for young people in Sofia. Responding to an identified need among pupils and students, Know and Can Association developed a series of programmes commonly-referred to as “lessons for thinking”, or “Know and Can Clubs” in which the focus is on intellectual stimulation, creative thinking and active participation. Participating young people are encouraged to take a more active part in the learning process, building interest, taking responsibility for their education and making informed decisions on future study and careers paths. As an extra-curricular, elective-learning activity, experience has shown that participating pupils and students often contribute and take part more actively than they would during compulsory classes.

Currently, three levels of “Know and Can Clubs” exist involving primary school pupils (aged 7-10), secondary school students (aged 11-14) and high school students (aged 15-18) with participation encouraged from an early age, thus developing the required life and personal development skills that we often hear of as lacking among recent labour market entrants. Lower level programmes (primary and secondary) comprise a series of 30 learning activities, which increases to 34 learning activities for

high school students. Course delivery often takes place onsite, in school buildings, either before or after regular classes with intra-school and intra-class competition actively encouraged.

2. Rationale and main objectives of the programs

Early references to non-formal education, or NFE, can be traced back as far as the late 1960s although, to many, this appears to be nothing more than a re-branding especially when considering NFE as comprising “any organised educational activity taking place outside of established formal provision”. Even now, however, there are those that consider NFE as secondary to, or a poor imitator of, formal education provision, yet it is relatively easy to map non-formal provision against the broader requirements of an education system in terms of a need to: be available to general public (children, young people and adults); be relevant to the needs of learners; be relevant to the needs of society; and be efficient.

In fulfilling these requirements, it might be said that NFE has been authenticated, yet all education systems, irrespective of environment, strive for innovation and NFE is no exception. In terms of innovation, it has previously been said that^[1]:

1. NFE often emerges as a direct response to a pre-identified problem in a given society;
2. NFE is more goal- and purpose-oriented (rather than being certificate-oriented);
3. NFE attempts to tackle specific problems rather than presenting abstract subject matter;
4. NFE is flexible, learner-centred and participatory;
6. NFE is more practical than theoretical;
7. NFE has greater programme-level autonomy and is often less subject to external control;
8. NFE can be more economical, especially when making use of existing facilities;
9. NFE is a continuing and lifelong learning process

In Bulgaria, the last two decades have seen a series of systems-level changes and modifications introduced to the system of education, reflecting the developing democratic nature of Bulgaria at the start of the 21st century. Students and their parents were given freedom to choose where and what to study, money for education was reduced and extracurricular activities that had existed before became paid by parents. As a result most of the students become indifferent to personal development and self-perfection^[2].

Extra-curricular delivery is addressed by English-speaking authors Feldman and Matjasko^[3] who confirm a series of advantages tied to out-of-school activity and provide concrete evidence that student participation in such activity has positive effects on their longer-term personal development. Feldman and Matjasko specifically state that through participating in out-of-school activity, students develop a skills-set that would not normally be accessed in a traditional classroom environment (for example, responding to non-typical situations; communication with people of similar interests; developing a sense of common responsibility).

According to a recent article^[4], extra-curricular and out-of-school activities can:

- create a medium for faster socialisation among students;
- stimulate the development of consciousness and brain activity;
- lead to improved skills and abilities;
- facilitate communication among different actors and participants;
- encourage participants to befriend their peers in non-formal environments;
- invoke creative-thinking, a readiness for risk taking and improved decision-making capacity

2.1 Observations

Over the last five years, in our work with young people, we have observed the following negative tendencies:

- a more passive attitude in relation to out-of-school activity leading to less interests in any educational sphere;
- core ambitions that centre on gaining better results (marks) at school;
- less and less young people are interested in further developing their intellectual capacity.



2.2 Consequences

We feel that these tendencies could easily be translated into:

- a lack of ambition for personal development;
- not profound interests and smattering knowledge during teenage years
- a sense of indifference among young people in relation to the selection of future careers.

2.3 Objectives

Our own programme-level objectives centre on students learning to:

- accept themselves and others as they already are;
- learn to be tolerant;
- become aware of their role in life;
- be flexible, positive and adaptable when facing complicated life situations;
- be steady to the negative outer influences;
- work on personal development issues;
- develop intellectual potential.

2.4 Benefits

The expected benefits of our programmes are:

- improved interest in the process of thinking;
- greater ambition for success;
- broader spheres of interest among young people;
- enhanced creative-development skills.

3. Programme and Methodology

The purpose of thinking is to gather information and make the best possible use of it. The way the mind works is creating fixed-concept patterns. Traditional methods of thinking teach us how to refine such patterns yet we often make less than the best use of available information.

The “Know and Can Clubs” learning programmes are based on the theory and methodology of Edward de Bono on lateral thinking (side thinking). Lateral thinking is closely related to insight, creativity and humour and is concerned with the generation of new ideas. It is quite distinct from the more traditional approach, known as vertical or logical thinking. Lateral thinking is not a substitute for vertical thinking: both are required and are complimentary. Lateral thinking is generative. Vertical thinking is selective. Vertical thinking is concerned with providing or developing concept patterns. Lateral thinking is concerned with restructuring such patterns (insight) and provoking new ones (creativity). The emphasis in education has always been exclusively on vertical (logical) thinking which is by tradition the only proper use of information. But thinking is quite incomplete without lateral thinking as it makes a quite different use of information from logical (vertical) thinking.^[5]

The “Know and Can Clubs” learning programmes provide young people with the possibility to step “out of the box” of logical thinking and to develop imagination, fantasy and creativity. All exercises are optional, none compulsory, and there are no right or wrong answers. There are no textbooks, no marks or scores, and no tests. Participants are encouraged to join-in and to contribute as often as they like with students working both in groups and individually. The “Know and Can Clubs” learning programmes are different from traditional classes as students need to think beyond usual expectations (beyond adequate). In ordinary traditional thinking as soon as something is satisfactory, thinking can stop. And yet there may be many other arrangements or possibilities that go beyond the adequate. In this sense, once an adequate suggestion has been reached (often, the right answer), it is difficult to proceed with logical thinking yet with lateral thinking there remains plenty of room for continued thought.



3.1 I LEARN Programme for Primary School Pupils (aged 7-10)

Serving as excellent preparation for participation in secondary education, delivery of the primary-level programme centres on expanding pupils' interest in and awareness of themselves and the world around them, improving cognitive skill which in turn can influence self-motivation.

I LEARN programme operates mostly in a game-play environment in which pupils:

- pick up complex terms and objects from the world around them;
- develop capacity for fantasy and creative thinking;
- develop attention, coordination, patience and special vision and the so called "inner break";
- improve their skills for calm communication;
- develop social habits;
- develop verbal communication skill.

For pupils in the third and fourth grades (aged 9-10), some I LEARN activities are also undertaken in English, with activities centred on:

- activities for cognitive development (attention, memory, intellect);
- games that support the development of self-control, self-awareness, self-belief

I LEARN programme relies on:

- practical exercises for the development of perception, attention and memory;
- tasks that centre on the development of intellectual, self-oriented and creative skills, active learning;
- tasks that target the development of tolerance;
- games that facilitate communication and the formation of habits for self-control or personal behaviour.

Primary-level activities are predominantly performed through game-play which is sufficiently inclusive for use with pupils of different ages and intellectual capacities.

3.2 I AM Programme for Secondary School Students (aged 11-14)

Of particular importance for the secondary-level programme is the fact that it stimulates not only an interest in being successful but also in the very process of thinking and expanding the sphere of interest and creative abilities. I AM programme exists in two formats: humanitarian (predominantly verbal and literary tasks and activities) and mathematical (predominantly logical, mathematical and puzzle-based tasks and activities) and can be delivered in Bulgarian or English.

I AM programme aims to achieve:

- more complex development of attention, memory, speech and observation skills;
- the development of non-standard thinking (through solving logical problems and riddles)
- rational ways of thinking able to facilitate the traditional learning process;
- improved creative thinking and cognitive processes (through intellectual game-playing)
- Improved organisational ability.

3.3 I CAN Programme for High School Students (aged 15-18)

The third-level programme, for high school students, centres on personal development and self-determination much of which is also connected to an individual student's choice of study or career. Students can expect to leave the course more aware, more positive and more motivated in terms of the required next steps for professional development and self-improvement and will benefit from improved creativity and communication skills.

I CAN programme aims allow students to:

- determine a personal thinking style, also improving their awareness and tolerance of other people's thinking habits;
- become more effective in their use of personal intellectual resources;
- share experiences and mutual points of view with others.

I CAN programme includes activities connected to:

- personal development (self-awareness; self-confidence; self-regulation);



- communication;
- vocational guidance;
- case-solving and decision-making;
- creative thinking;
- time management.

4. Conclusion

“Know and Can Clubs” provide non-formal learning and personal development activity that centres on intellectual game-playing and lateral thinking and which provides participating young people (pupils and students) with an opportunity to build knowledge and develop social and communication skills achieving improved levels of self-confidence and self-belief alongside broader social skills for interacting with peers and others. As technology-use continuously increases so does the speed and the style of communication yet it is clear that more needs to be done to expand the original thought process, encouraging creative (lateral) thinking and developing individuals that are prepared to make use of this novel approach. Lateral thinking can bring about change through introducing new perspectives on creative thinking, making individuals responsible for their thoughts and decisions and improving personal and career development pathways. “Know and Can Clubs” provide a vehicle, outside of formal education, that enables this creative, participative, and self-developmental journey to begin.

References

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