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Specific strategies for a more efficient individual study

Dana Jucan[a]*

[a]Babe□-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, 7 Sindicatelor, 400029, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Abstract

The present paper belongs to the field of university didactics, and it is directed mostly to professors delivering courses and seminars, but, at the same time, to students. The paper is structured into five logically organised sections, each section operationalizing and exemplifying the key syntagms on which the present study focuses. In what follows, we will analyse the traditional strategies of intellectual activity, or those that have already been acknowledged, and we will make reference to the modern ones that we recommend for the formation and development of the student's competence of individual study, for the development of his intellectual activity, and implicitly, for stimulating the achievement of good performance in school. In order to organise learning situations in which moments of individual study, but also debates, reflections, etc. predominate, we mention that the strategies of individual study and the techniques of intellectual activity are carefully selected by the professor.There is a category of students who can learn these strategies implicitly, another category of students who deduce them by reflecting upon their own cognitive style, but there are groups of students who do not acquire them, or who deduce counter-productive strategies. For these situations, interventions for the development of efficient strategies of intellectual activity (according to the student's personal learning style) are proven to be very useful. Even though the strategies of intellectual activity are mostly specific to the field of study, there is knowledge and relevant skills which can be transferable for the development of strategies of intellectual activity. Superior strategies of intellectual activity involve the elaboration, organisation and understanding or processing of the information. Such a strategy of intellectual activity is suggested to students in the present paper, in order to contribute to the efficient processing of information, to the quick assimilation of knowledge. We have built this strategy by starting from the competence of individual study that we wish to form and develop in students. By trying to form and develop this competence, we have identified the specific sub-competences, and, starting from these, we have imagined, in a critical, operational manner, a complex intellectual procedure, elaborated in the manner of a strategy of intellectual activity which we have called *Grid for the explanation of content* (GEC).

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Keywords: intellectual activity; individual study; students; techniques of intellectual activity.

1. The intellectual activity – introductive considerations

* Dana Jucan. Tel.: +4-074-496-9654 ; fax: +4-026-459-0559.
E-mail address: orian_dana@yahoo.com

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In the present paper we will first define the intellectual activity, the techniques of intellectual activity, and the style of intellectual activity. We believe it is important that we analyse some of the traditional techniques of intellectual activity that are used during courses and seminars, techniques which aim at a 'superficial' approach of the text. We will likewise pay a special attention to the modern techniques of intellectual activity, techniques which aim rather at the comprehension of the text.

The techniques of intellectual activity are considered to be the instruments which help us gather and process information belonging to various fields of knowledge. However, intellectual activity is based not only on the assimilation of this information, but also on its connection to information previously assimilated, and its transfer towards other fields. It consists of intellectual rearrangement and complex cognitive investments. Moreover, through type of intellectual activity we understand the specific, personal, particular manner in which an individual employs and develops methods and techniques of intellectual activity, improving his/her cognitive and meta-cognitive capacities.

2. Traditional techniques of intellectual activity

In what concerns the approach students have towards studying for courses and seminars, this refers to the superficial or the in-depth processing of the material. If the professor is able to contribute in encouraging an in-depth processing of the material (through the material and the style of teaching), it is, however, the student who must eventually assume a personal approach towards studying and learning, which will result in a deeper implication and a monitoring of progress. Stimulating an in-depth approach may also be realised through various learning activities to which the student is exposed. The educator stimulates the student so that, even from the area of content, the student should acquire both learning methods and knowledge belonging to the field of study. Encouraging the student to think of what has been taught might coincide with encouraging the student to think of methods for studying; thinking can be stimulated through the approach the student assumes regarding the newly-built knowledge, knowledge monitored within his/her own cognitive schema.

For the organisation of courses and seminars with students where moments of individual study, debates, reflections etc. should prevail, the professor carefully suggests strategies for individual study and techniques of intellectual activity. In the following pages we will analyse the already acknowledged strategies, while also making reference to the modern ones.

The traditional, efficient techniques of intellectual activity, often employed during courses and seminars, are: the scientific reading (efficient, quick, active), note-taking, annotations, reading the notes, the consultation of bibliography, the composition of a plan of ideas, summaries and abstracts, essays, research projects etc.

Scientific reading**,** efficient, quick, performed at courses and seminars, is distinguishable through the fact that it is: selective – insomuch as it is carried out by force of some predetermined objectives, to whom it circumscribes the whole process; systematic – insomuch as it draws on strategies, techniques, and specific procedures; formatively-creative – insomuch as the information assimilated during the reading is restructured into new, original forms; critically-evaluative – through the compulsion of interpreting, explaining, and confronting what is read with other points of view.

Scientific reading is carried out in two stages: superficial reading, and in-depth reading. Bernat (2003) discusses the existence of "quick reading" with its two implications: "pre-reading, and accelerated reading". During the process of pre-reading, there are three styles which can be used individually, combined, or integrated: scanning – through the identification of the title, of the table of contents, of the subtitle, of the index; the identification of key words – represents the determination of the most important words within the text; diagonal reading – represents the review of important parts of the material.

When preparing for school, the student must first read the text and the notes, but also other publications (handbooks, guidebooks, dictionaries, and anthologies). School preparation begins with the careful reading of the text, then ensuing the resort to complementary sources, with the following amendments: the student must understand the message of the author of the text, the problems raised in that book, he must identify with the characters, solve problematic situations, appreciate or criticise the aesthetic value of the message, identify the work's style, the described judgements, identify what constitutes the work's originality, compare the work to other creations belonging to that author, or to other works that he/she has read etc.