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CSR EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF ACTIVE PEDAGOGY. RESEARCH RESULTS

ABSTRACT

The presence in the public debate of the issues related to corporate social responsibility means that the increasing attention is drawn to how it is taught. This mainly concerns the methods used to explain the essence of the issue. Proper understanding of corporate social responsibility requires from the learners understanding not only of the mechanisms governing the market as is the case with other management concepts, but also a reference to own moral judgments and the ability to predict the consequences of actions. One way to get to the root of the problem and allow students to go through the process of learning in an innovative way is to use methods of active pedagogy and simulation through games that are in its framework.

The purpose of this article is to present the results of research on the perception of the business game as a method of supporting the teaching process of social responsibility. The research was carried out on a group of students of logistics among the participants of the authorial course on Corporate Social Responsibility in the Supply Chain.

Keywords: CSR, CSR education, teaching social responsibility, business game, active pedagogy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Issues related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) are now an important part of public debate. The discussion is subjected to such elements as responsibilities, the responsible entities or way of taking steps to promote and disseminate the abovementioned concept. All this caused that it became the subject of research and teaching at the university level. Social responsibility concept can be treated as subject that constantly changes. In 2001, the European Commission defined it as: „a concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment” (EU Green Paper 2001: 7) and in 2011

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as „the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” (*Communication from the Commission...* 2011: 7). The centre of gravity was therefore moved from relation management to management of the organization impacts on the society and environment. The concept of CSR should respond to the needs of the society and the environment by giving businesses the tools to implement specific changes, and it builds awareness of the purposes other than narrowly understood economic objectives. In addition, its evolution means that issues of social and environmental impacts started to be an important topic in areas where the discussion about CSR had not existed before, like in the supply chain management.

The interest of business circles in the implementation of CSR causes the need to prepare workers who, equipped with the appropriate competencies, will be able to take responsibility for coordinating social activities in enterprises. It is also important from the point of view of the development of the concept itself and its functioning in the society. The fact whether the issue of the social aspect of conducting the business will function at a management level depends on the perception of its importance. Therefore, a natural consequence seems to be to introduce the courses dealing with corporate social responsibility into teaching programs at universities (Sobczak et al. 2006). This issue is an argument for discussion for many researchers (MacVaugh, Norton 2012; Stubbs 2013; Savelyeva, McKenna 2011).

CSR learning is the key to continuous improvement in the acquisition of new skills and in the formation of responsible attitudes among students (Tseng et al. 2010). The challenges connected with education on corporate social responsibility apply to both the ability to include these issues into the teaching program as well as the development and implementation of innovative teaching methods (Moratis et al. 2006: 2012). The example how the topic of CSR tries to be incorporated into curricula was the Polish publication *Jak uczyć o społecznej odpowiedzialności i zrównoważonym rozwoju. Przewodnik dla nauczycieli* (Reichel (ed.) 2011). The response of the UN Global Compact to the identified needs is the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative that comprehensively deals with teaching responsibility in business schools.

An example, of a course, dedicated to this problem is *Corporate Social Responsibility in the Supply Chain*, an original program addressed to students of Logistics at the Faculty of Management at the University of Lodz. The proposal of this subject was a response to the growing needs of the external environment and an attempt to frame in a teaching program issues that seem to be urgent within the context of modern supply chains.

Previous professional experience of people conducting this subject showed that this course will be an additionally valued element of teaching program, if a customized method appears that will allow students not only to learn theory but above all it will provide a chance to experience different mechanisms related to socially responsible choices. This approach is shared by other researchers who

present the view that most of the teaching programs on CSR „require not just relevant content, but appropriate learning processes that contribute to the critical analysis and evaluation of business and its relation to society. The processes of teaching and learning in this subject minimise content dissemination, and encourage independent research, personal reflection, and extensive exploration and discussion both within and outside the classroom” (Stubbs, Schapper 2011: 263).

Hence the use of active pedagogy or pedagogy of active learning in the teaching process. Active pedagogy is an approach focusing learning objectives on student as opposed to the traditional approach in which the process is focused on the teacher. In practice, this means the active involvement of student and forming specific skills such as the ability to solve problems. The aim of this approach is also to prepare the student for active and competent participation in the society (Van De Bogart 2009). In the case of the mentioned subject, a method of simulation based on a business game was used.

The game „Homoresponsabilis in the globalized World” which was used for this purpose is the result of Leonardo da Vinci project (Transfer of Innovation 2011-1-PL1-LEO05-19895). The non-governmental organization Groupe One from Belgium was the creator of the original version of the game, and it developed the game in 2007. Training courses that use this game are very popular, for example, only in 2010 there were more than 500 people trained with it.

On average, 80% of people participating in the classes are satisfied with this form of teaching. The original version of the game permitted, through the above-mentioned project, to develop the Polish version of the game, which is used with success in conducting classes by trained lecturers from the Faculty of Management at the University of Lodz and other organizations and schools that participated in the project.

The game allows interdisciplinary approach to the matter, incorporating in the course content such issues as: „entrepreneurship, responsibility of a manager, business ethics, social and environmental aspects of functioning of companies, the commercial relationships with producers in countries of the global South, product certification and many others. The game requires direct relations between the participants of the game and between the participants and a moderator of the game” (Reichel 2013) The game also pursues the objectives that in 1980 were stated by Hastings Centre for courses of ethics, i.e.:

1. Stimulating of the moral imagination of pupils/students.
2. Identification of ethical problems.
3. Inducing a sense of moral obligation, according to own values.
4. Developing analytical skills.
5. Approval of different positions and opinions (Moratis et al. 2006: 216).

The described business game simulates the real market conditions, showing that there is no one good answer in business. Thus, business education requires the

use of different patterns depending on the needs of individuals and particular situation. Additionally it should be focused on understanding rather than just the acquisition of knowledge (Moratis et al. 2006: 219). This simulation method through the game has been known for many years (Faria 1998; Gremmen, Potters 1997; Klassen, Willoughby 2003). In our case, it was used in an innovative way for specific classes. Whether it has fulfilled its task was examined during the survey research on a group of students who took part in the workshop session.

2. RESEARCH RESULTS

The aim of this study was to explore opinions about activating forms of classes on the example of business game *Homoresponsabilis*. The intention of the researchers was to investigate the reactions and emotions that accompanied students during the unconventional learning process and to determinate whether the proposed game is useful when achieving the educational goals. The research in a form of questionnaire was conducted among three groups of full-time students and one group of part-time study students at the Master Level in Logistics in the academic year 2014/2015 during one of the classes of Corporate Social Responsibility in the Supply Chain (an elective course available to choose from the academic year 2013/2014). Students optionally completed the questionnaire on 25 April 2015 (part-time students on the day of game) and 28 April 2015 (full-time students after the finished cycle of the game with each group that was implemented in previous weeks).

The study involved 90 people participating in the game 59 of whom were full-time and 31 part-time students. There were mostly men – 52. When it comes to their age most of the respondents were up to 29. Only three persons were older.

All participants of the classes were satisfied with taking part in the game, of which 11 people restrainedly. Among the 90 respondents, there was only one person dissatisfied with the participation in the game, but not for reasons related to the game itself but because of dates not matching with other classes. Only 10 people said that they had already taken part in similar classes during their studies: listing scenario classes and team works including the creation of the company and its strategy. However, with this type of game they had met for the first time. The overall picture of the classes in which students participated during their first and part of the second-degree studies is quite sad. Although most of them were exposed to solving case studies – 75 people, that are more than a half of the respondents, replied that classes „usually were another lectures instead of practical classes” (Table 1).

Table 1. What type of practical classes was usually held during your studies?

In.	What type of practical classes was usually held during your studies? (choose 3 most common)	The number of indications
1	Solving case studies	75
2	Usually another lectures instead of practical classes	51
3	Discussions about texts	47
4	Task solving	46

Source: own study.

Almost all respondents agreed that the way of conducting classes (using the game) can give them more than traditional lecture or practical classes – 76 people (some of them were not certain – 13 and only one disagreed). In the descriptive answers – although the remarks of students referred to a very wide range of issues – respondents focused mainly on the following differences in comparison to traditional practical classes:

- the use of knowledge in practice („The possibility to test the theoretical” and gain practical knowledge; „The possibility to learn practical rules of managing own business”) – a total of about 20 comments;
- the simulative character of the game („The possibility to feel as a part of the board of a large company during classes”) – another 16 comments;
- „The possibility of teamwork”, the integration and interaction – 16 comments;
- the easier assimilation of the knowledge through this form of classes – 11 comments.

The responses emphasized the relaxed atmosphere, fun character, engaging process and breaking the traditional monotony faced during other classes. However, the elements of self-education and development of the self-awareness were also important, e.g. one of the participants wrote, “The advantage will certainly be getting to know our true place in the group during the game. It is so engaging that at some point we forget that it is only fun and we start to fight for our business and then it comes out who we really are in the group”. In classes conducted with the use of the game students liked: the opportunity to interact with colleagues, engaging character of the game and the fact that it helped them to take a break from traditional classes (Table 2).

Table 2. What did you like the most during classes using the business game?

In.	What did you like the most during classes using the business game? (select up to 3)	The number of indications
1	Interaction with colleagues	48
2	Engaging process	46
3	Taking a break from traditional classes	46
4	Risk	38
5	Making money	37
6	Situations as during running own business	27
7	Roles played	13

Source: own study.

The most valuable elements of classes that gave satisfaction to the respondents were: solving problematic and unforeseen situations, possibility to make mistakes safely and drawing conclusions as well as the necessity to make choices (Table 3).

Table 3. In my opinion the most valuable in classes is/what gave me the most satisfaction is

In.	In my opinion the most valuable in classes is/what gave me the most satisfaction is (select up to 3)	The number of indications
1	Solving problematic and unforeseen situations	53
2	Possibility to make mistakes safely and drawing conclusions	49
3	The necessity to make choices	35
4	The opportunity to experience „the hard way” how the business works	29
5	Team-nature of the game	27
6	The possibility to use existing knowledge and skills	20
7	Belonging to the group and the desire to achieve a common goal	19
8	The possibility to test different roles	18
9	Learning, that good ideas can also come from other members of the team	9

Source: own study.

During the game the biggest challenges, according to the opinions of the respondents were: the need to follow rapidly changing conditions during simulation, understanding the intentions of other teams and the need to make choices (Table 4).

Table 4. During the game, the biggest challenge for me was...

In.	During the game, the biggest challenge for me was... (select up to 3)	The number of indications
1	Changing conditions during simulation	51
2	Understanding the intentions of other teams/businesses	44
3	The need to make choices	27
4	Ensuring effective communication in the group and between groups	22
5	Teamwork and complexity of the interactions in our group	13
6	I did not agree with the decisions of others in our group	13
7	Breaking through with own opinion	11

Source: own study.

Playing the game in each group was extremely exciting and it was possible to observe a big number of various group processes and individual behaviours that could be the subject for further discussion at the end of the game and the subject for a separate discussion. Students asked about the emotions developed during the game enumerated the following feelings and situations.

Table 5. The most common emotions that accompanied the students during the participation in the business game (descriptive answers)

Try to name the emotions that accompanied you during the participation in the business game (descriptive answers)	The number of indications
Excitation, Exhilaration, Excitement, Stimulation, Fascination, Euphoria	24
Inquisitiveness, curiosity of upcoming changes, Intrigue, Interest	22
Uncertainty, Uncertainty about made decisions, Uncertainty about the rules in the game and the choices made, Uncertainty how the game will go on, Uncertainty of decision-making, Uncertainty of what will be the final result of the game, Unpredictability	18
Joy, Joy about the cooperation	15
Rivalry, Emotions connected with competition and the desire to win, Willingness to compete, the desire to rivalry and achieving the goal, the spirit of rivalry, the desire to win, the desire to win the game and be a better entrepreneur	11

Source: own study.

Among the less frequently mentioned emotions were: adrenalin, satisfaction, stress, commitment, fun, and surprise, a sense of risk, concentration, cooperation and self-control.

Two thirds of those who responded believe that participation in the classes with the business game taught them something – 61 people. 29 participants of the game are not so certain. However, nobody from the participants denied educational values of the game. Very interesting are the descriptive answers provided by the students, for example: „the classes highlighted the complexity of the problems encountered while doing business” and that „all decisions have to be thought through, especially in the context of the risk of the decisions”. A special place in the comments of participants was taken by a belief that the game teaches the cooperation and teamwork (19 people) and that it teaches „how to make quick decisions” and making „rapid assessment under changing conditions” (10 people). The game taught the participants „to deal with unforeseen situations” and also „drawing conclusions and bearing the consequences of decisions” and thus „better anticipation of the future consequences of the choice”.

Apart from aspects of the game, which contribute to education and strengthening their skills, as one participant put it: „through experience in the game I have a bigger view of the contents in lectures”. This is an important feature of the game, which demonstrates its good fitting into the teaching program.

Table 6. What have you learned during classes with the business game?
(most often repeated answers)

What have you learned during classes with the business game? (descriptive answers)	The number of indications
Teamwork, cooperation	19
How to make quick decisions	10
The fact that business is unpredictable	8
That every decision we will make carries consequences (not always positive) and how to draw conclusions	5
Negotiate. Communication (negotiations) with other team members	4
To risk	3
Getting to know suggestions, problems of the other side. Everyone has a different view of the given situation.	2
Analysis of gains and losses. Analysis of the changing environment.	2
Long-term thinking. In the process of running a business you have to take into account many factors, think „forward”	2
All decisions must be thought over, especially in the context of the risk of made decisions.	2

Source: own study.

As it results from the answers of respondents, they did not have the feeling that the game encourages them to act in a socially responsible way or forces ethical reflection despite the fact that during the game there were issues directly related to the topic of CSR and sustainability. This can be regarded as a big success of this form of classes (neutrality). In contrast to other forms, the knowledge about the responsibility was passed as a part of a greater whole – functioning of the company. Such an approach to the problem makes the people involved in the process learn a holistic view on the social responsibility, treating it as a basis and not as an addition for doing business.

Respondents agreed that an important part of the learning process with the use of business game is its practical nature. Experience of processes, their consequences and the risks of activities are a dose of practice needed in any profession. This means that the results of the process are the specific skills they have acquired or possessed, and they have been shown to them (e.g. the role played in the team). The game through its simulative character connects the education with professional practice. Prepares students to make decisions in real situations what is confirmed by the respondents themselves.

3. SUMMARY

The issue of social responsibility is so broad that it is hard to put a concept in a clear framework and provide the knowledge about it for several minutes during classes. In addition, the scope of the concept causes that the traditional teaching methods are not enough. They do not allow touching such important issues like individual values or the level of moral consciousness.

The given proposition to put CSR concept in the frame of simulation business game seems to be one of the possible solutions. It creates space for self-reflection while participating in group process and making joint decisions related to the market.

The answers given by the respondents confirm the need to be taught in non-conventional way. They also confirm that innovative forms of teaching better fit their expectations.

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