

# Learning from our neighbours – a visit to the Schumpeter Academy

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When statements referring to the new regulation for Professional Certificate of Proficiency succeed each other rapidly in Switzerland it is worthwhile to look across the frontier to Austria. There the Schumpeter Academy in Vienna offers an interesting model which was presented at the International Conference of SIEC in July 2007.

As President of SIEC Switzerland I was able to gather first-hand information about this model when I visited the Schumpeter Academy in September. Slogans such as „Entrepreneurship Education“ or „Learning Culture aimed at talent reinforcement“ were explained to me in detail.

## Entrepreneurship Education

Johannes Lindner, a member of the Board at IFTE (Initiative for Teaching Entrepreneurship) and professor at the Schumpeter Academy, sees Entrepreneurship Education as a philosophy in education which fosters economic creativity, individual responsibility, decision making power and independence. It focusses on the invention and the development of entrepreneurial ideas up to the creation of a new concept and the feasibility of its implementation in practice. The learning process alternates between phases of instruction (the conveyance of knowledge) and of construction (the application of knowledge).

Josef Aff, Director of the Institute of Economic Pedagogy at the Economic University of Vienna, takes the view that Entrepreneurship Education should not limit itself to the transmission of a comprehensive body of scientific knowledge but also to the development of attitudes, concepts and values.

In its educational concept the Schumpeter Academy calls such entrepreneurial competences as independence, individual responsibility, propensity for innovation the „crucial virtues“ for later success in business, be it as independent entrepreneurs or as employees in an ever changing labour market.

## Talent Reinforcement

The student as a person such as she or he is stands in the centre of this concept. It is not aimed at geniuses or highly talented persons. According to Christine Werdenich, Director of the Schumpeter Academy, the concept is aimed at those 30% of the students whose talents are higher in one field or another. Anneliese Rotter, professor at the Schumpeter Academy, explains that „talent reinforcement means to reinforce the individual talents of the students and at the same time endeavours to impart ethical values such as solidarity and social responsibility while maintaining the basic goal of highest possible performance.“

When visiting classes at the Academy I got the impression that team-work together with individual coaching are not empty slogans but are pedagogical concepts which are shared by students and professors alike.

At this point I would like to thank the management of the Academy and its faculty for answering my many questions and for the interesting glimpses which I was permitted to gather from my visits to some of their classes.

### **The Educational Concept of the Schumpeter Academy**

According to information available from <http://www.schumpeter-hak.at/lehrer/bausteine.html> the educational concept of the Schumpeter Academy consists of the following nine elements:

1. Teaching Contracts based on the portfolios of the students
2. Coaching
3. Complementary individual work times
4. Extracurricular Team-work
5. Voluntary subjects
6. Excursions and On-the-job-training
7. Innovative methods of instruction
8. Team Meetings
9. Continuous Training of teachers

#### **1. Teaching Contracts based on students' portfolios**

The most important instrument documenting the learning process is a pair of portfolios. These are being maintained by the students clear across the five years of classes.

The purpose of Portfolio No. 1 is to serve as a basis for administration and communication between students and parents and faculty. It comprises monthly statements recording the classes attended by the students, general and individual teaching contracts as well as the yearly reports by their coaches on the development of the students. The general teaching contract lists the goals of the Schumpeter Academy and shows the rights and duties of the students. The individual teaching contract is being agreed upon every year between the coach and the student and lists the academic and personal goals of the student for the next year.

Portfolio No. 2 is a compilation of the work of the student during the five school years. It includes such documents as the yearly project papers, reports on excursions and on-the-job-training, interesting essays by the students a.s.o.

Thanks to these two portfolios the graduates of the Schumpeter Academy are fully documented as to their professional development and potential performance when applying for positions later on.

#### **2. Coaching**

An especially trained member of the faculty is in charge of four to five students and is constantly monitoring their learning and development process. Weekly coaching sessions serve to enhance the students' strengths by individual assignments and to cure their weaknesses. The coach is to act as advisor and when necessary as conflict mediator. At the same time, he will keep fellow members of the faculty informed about the development process of the students who are in his charge.

### **3. Complementary individual work times**

In addition to the regular classes the students will have five hours weekly in order to do individual projects, to do research of their own or to attend external courses. These times of individual work and their subjects must be recorded in the students' portfolio. Their purpose is to foster the students' individual responsibility for their learning process and also to improve their time management. The coach will act as advisor for these individual work times and will also exert overall control.

### **4. Extracurricular Team-work**

In each school year the student will have to join extracurricular work teams. Their thematic range is very wide. It will include practical as well as general theoretic subjects.

In addition to the classical subjects of entrepreneurship such as e.g. the elaboration of a business plan the program will include subjects of a more general nature viz. introduction to scientific work, workshops in literature and music, the construction of websites and other matters of general interest. Students are making extensive use of these subjects and will some times do work more in these teams than absolutely required.

The duration of these work teams is dependent on their subject. Some teams work only during one afternoon, others take several days

Credit points are granted in accordance with the duration of the work team. In case of teams which last only a couple of hours,  $\frac{1}{2}$  point is accredited whereas work teams of longer duration are given 1 or more points. Every school year the student has to earn at least 2 points in extracurricular team-work. They will appear in the individual learning contract.

### **5. Voluntary Subjects**

These classes are optional. Their topics may range from sports to philosophy to foreign languages and will also include entrepreneurial subjects.

### **6. Excursions and On-the-job-training**

Excursions to and On-the-job-training at Austrian enterprises serve to give the students a deep and thorough understanding of economic development and enable them to combine their theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

On-the-job-training in a foreign country – away from the customary surroundings – shall deepen the students' understanding in theory and practice and at the same time enhance their competence in foreign languages and foster their personal development.

What the academy is currently offering in this respect is a stay of several weeks in a host family in Shresbury, the native town of Charles Darwin, and on-the-job-training at an English company. During these stays abroad the students will be separated from their fellow students so as to be compelled to find their own way in a foreign environment.

## **7. Innovative methods of instruction**

In order to reach the goals of „Entrepreneurship Education“ and „Talent Reinforcement“ it is indispensable for teachers to use innovative methods of instruction such as Workshop of Ideas, Team Teaching, Business Games, Case Studies, Role Plays, Computer Simulations, Elaboration of complex Business Plans, independent research (using books or Internet), lectures by experts, excursions and visits to companies. Right from the start the students are taught to make use of Notebooks, Internet and the academy's own extensive library.

## **8. Team Meetings**

Weekly meetings by the teaching teams of Schumpeter classes serve to foster the exchange of opinions in administrative as well as in pedagogical subjects. The teachers will define the content of curricular subjects while making arrangements for an interdisciplinary approach to certain subjects and exchanging their experience with innovative methods of instruction.

## **9. Continuous training of teachers**

Teachers of Schumpeter classes are regularly invited to special training sessions in order to reach the goals of the academy's educational concept. Tailored to the specific needs of the teachers, these training sessions are offered by the „Pädagogisches Institut des Bundes“ (Federal Pedagogical Institute) and by the „Institutionen der Begleitforschung“ (Institutes for Pedagogical Research).

## **The fostering of future entrepreneurs has to start already in basic instruction**

Business Education is an important factor in making a certain region attractive for economic activities and its importance is increasing in today's globalized competition. Students who are the future entrepreneurs – whether in an independent position or as employees – must be helped to develop an entrepreneurial way of thinking and acting as early as possible. Their creativity and individual independence must be strengthened, their social responsibility awakened, their talents furthered and their weaknesses helped.

Such a kind of business education which has to start already in basic instruction is based on the ideas of the Austrian economist Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1883-1950). In his famous paper entitled „A theory of economic development“ Schumpeter asks: „what is the reason why market economies show such a dynamic development?“ He answers himself: „the reason is to be found in the fostering of entrepreneurs“. Schumpeter also refers to „dynamis“.

If in Switzerland we see „Handlungskompetenz“ (professional proficiency) as a link from theory to practice, if we talk about reform of our Certificate of Professional Proficiency and of our basic economic instruction and if we consider the requirements postulated by our enterprises, then a look across our frontiers is definitely worthwhile. There is much that we can learn from our neighbours. The Schumpeter Academy is a case in point. The International Society for Business Education (ISBE) offers every year two platforms for exchange of ideas and experience, namely the „Dreiländertreffen“ (Meetings of SIEC/ISBE chapters in Germany, Austria and Switzerland) and the international conference which usually takes place in the last week of July.