



THE CASE: "Youth Sleep Habits"

Context (where, who, how)

At Tallinn University, second-year youth work students were involved in the Winnovator project through a study course called "Project Work in Youth Work." The course aimed to equip students with the skills needed for project execution in a youth worker's daily tasks, including securing funding for youth projects and supporting young people through project work. Given that young adults are an underrepresented group in youth work, the course specifically targeted this age group, with the aim of preparing youth work students for professional practice in empowering young adults.

A Problem-Based Learning pedagogical approach was adopted, where learning was primarily self-directed through cooperation in teams, guided by a jointly formulated problem question: "How can we engage young adults in an e-learning environment through project work?" This question was explored through a collaborative, real-life learning task where students engaged with the target group to support and empower young adults through project work. This process involved identifying the needs of young people in the local social context and, in collaboration with the young women involved, designing a concrete project proposal in the form of a concrete application.

Activity description (what, how, why)

The project team was formed by involving young people interested in project writing. Each student reached out to a young person within their network with whom they had positive experiences with and trusted, resulting in a six-member team.

During the initial meetings, mutual agreements were established and respected throughout the process, enhancing the youth's sense of responsibility. Meetings were characterized by a positive team spirit, open communication, and an environment where young participants felt comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns. In the project planning phase, youth were encouraged to think independently about the project's theme, objectives, vision, and budget planning. Youth work students acted as mentors, providing support and asking guiding questions to help develop ideas further, especially when mental blocks were encountered.

Communication was mainly through Facebook Messenger, with meetings held via video calls, allowing face to face connections, quick information sharing, and idea discussions. However, the absence of a fixed schedule affected consistency, leading to last-minute task completion. A clear plan with deadlines would have made the process more organized and effective. Additionally, better preparation by students before each meeting could have streamlined the writing process.

Although roles were initially assigned, they evolved based on members' interests and strengths. Youth were given tasks equally, such as researching funding sources or comparing catering quotes in budgeting. During the project application writing phase, while tasks were assigned to the youth, students ended up managing most of the writing, content creation, and activity planning. Reflecting on this, they felt more youth involvement would have made the project better reflect their own perspectives. The initial goal was to introduce the young people to project writing without pressuring them to take too much responsibilities. Online resources were shared with young adults to encourage independent exploration, but in hindsight, assigning more concrete tasks and directly discussing the youth's willingness to take on complex responsibilities would have been beneficial.

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The project idea emerged from a brainstorming session, guided by questions like, "Is this idea feasible?" and "Would other young people be interested?" The focus of the project was on improving high school graduates' sleep habits through practical workshops and follow-up activities to enhance mental health by addressing the link between sleep quality and well-being.

The main outcomes of cooperation included skill development in project planning, writing, and teamwork for both the students and the young participants. Despite being time-consuming and challenging, the process was a rewarding learning experience as team successfully navigated unexpected challenges and gained valuable insights into project writing.

Conclusion

This type of collaborative learning was a first-time experience for everyone involved, and participants appreciated the insights gained. Key lessons for the future included the importance of a clear timeline, structured planning, and proactive involvement of all participants from the outset. More intentional role assignment, active youth involvement, and consistent communication were highlighted as essential learning outcomes.

For future cooperation, it's crucial to understand each participant's availability and willingness to take on responsibilities, creating an environment that fosters active participation. Structured preparation and clear guidelines can significantly enhance the project-writing process, making it more manageable and inclusive of everyone's ideas.

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