



THE CASE: “Baby clothes flea market”

Context (where, who, how)

In Tallinn University the 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 for project involvement within a youth worker's daily tasks, including sourcing funding for youth projects and aiding young people in project execution. Due to young adults being an underrepresented group in youth work, the course specifically focused on this age group, aiming to support the readiness of youth work students for professional practice to empower young adults. Course used a Problem-Based Learning approach, centered around the question: "How to engage young adults in an e-learning environment through project work?". The specific tasks assigned to students aligned with collaborative learning in the realm of professional youth work, applying fundamental project management principles in preparing youth projects (targeting young adults) and crafting a project proposal meeting sponsor criteria. This was achieved by completing at least one Winnovators challenge module as a team.

The strategy chosen to engage young women in vulnerable life situations in Estonia involved collaboration with local youth and community workers. Given that a considerable number of students already work in rural youth centers, they were encouraged to reach out to potential participants in the local community to identify suitable candidates for the project. Contact with the young adults was initiated by a student who had previously briefly interacted with them. Among the three young women approached, two expressed their willingness to participate in the group. The team comprised four students and two young women, both of whom were stay-at-home mothers. The primary aim of the collaboration was to offer students an opportunity to acquire project writing and management skills by collaborating with young women to create a shared project proposal.

Activity description (what, how, why)

The efficient group formation was aided by getting to know each other, sharing interests, and clarifying project goals and roles in the group, emphasizing transparency and honesty from the beginning. Creating a Messenger group ensured ongoing communication, while a Drive folder facilitated uploading project materials, summaries, and analyses, enhancing collaboration and group unity. Weekly meetings were prearranged for a month ahead, offering flexibility for any required adjustments.

Collectively chosen Winnovators challenge related to reducing the Ecological Footprint. Young mothers were assisted in navigating the digital environment and handling tasks in English. The involved women were directed to take specific tasks related to project proposal planning, where students provided necessary support and feedback as needed. The team attained strong synergy, driven by active participation, encouraged knowledge exchange and ongoing inclusive communication, supported by an enjoyable and sociable atmosphere. Step by step approach used in the study course helped in comprehending project writing and management activities, smoothing the shift from confusion to clarity. Juggling multiple commitments made time management challenging, yet follow-up assignments from teacher and reminders prior to weekly meetings ensured individual contributions. The urgency of deadlines served as motivation to promptly complete assignments. The final task in the challenge involved crafting a project idea that aimed to meet the needs of the participating young women: reducing the ecological footprint and financial strain on young families regarding children's clothing consumption. The idea was further developed with sustainability in mind, engaging local partners for support. Together, a project proposal titled "Baby Clothes Flea Market"

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was crafted, centering on a community-engaging café-style day for parents to connect and exchange baby clothes, while also receiving valuable parenting information from specialists. The event involves local youth through the youth center, managing the café setup and childcare/play area.

As learning outcomes, students highlighted the know-how in project writing: conducting needs analyses, goal setting, fundraising, action plan and resource planning, along with project management aspects like risk analysis, team building, and maintaining smooth cooperation. Through the project writing process, collaboration skills and entrepreneurial courage were cultivated. Additionally, the value of established connections — the network formed and the experience gained from successful collaboration with unfamiliar individuals — was underscored. A direct comment from one of the young mothers on the final meeting was: "It's a shame that we no longer gather weekly to be part of something exciting."

Conclusion

Several insights and learning points emerge from this case, offering recommendations for fostering collective capacity building:

- Tailoring HEI courses to address underrepresented topics or groups, like young adults within youth work, can better prepare future professionals, as it ensures inclusivity and readiness for engaging with diverse groups and innovative topics.
- Problem-Based Learning, as a method to address real-life issues and encourage active participation through collaborative learning fosters development of practical know-how bridging the gap between theoretical learning and real-world application.
- A structured, step-by-step learning approach incorporating feedback sessions, emphasizing time management through scheduled meetings, and including teacher follow-ups is instrumental in comprehending complex activities, managing multiple commitments, and sustaining motivation throughout the process.
- Utilizing established connections can optimize project involvement and enhance participant engagement. Fostering synergy and collective learning can be achieved through team-building efforts, encouraging active participation, knowledge exchange, and cultivating an enjoyable and sociable atmosphere. Effective communication and rapport can be facilitated by employing digital tools such as social media groups and shared folders, amplifying resource sharing, collaboration and fostering group unity and coherence.

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