

## **Entrepreneurial Learning in Tartu Art School using TOY (team learning as an entrepreneur) method for VET.**

### **Context**

In 2015, Pärnu Vocational Education Centre was invited to the Leonardo da Vinci project TOY.VET final seminar in Tartu Art School. Tartu Art School is a small school that was created 65 years ago. They have approx. 220 students. Tartu Art school is the only vocational school in Estonia purely for design studies. They have 4 main study programs: Graphic Designer, Digital 3D designer, Display and Decoration Designer, and Illustrator.

During the final seminar we found out that they use really interesting TOY methods in their learning process that contain teampreneurship, team learning, coaching and learning entrepreneurship by doing.

Their project aim was to transfer Finland innovative business study model TOY (Työssäoppiminen Yrittäjänä), which is specifically tailored for the vocational education level. The project's main activities were the adaptation of the model to Tartu Art School, curriculum design, training of coaches, mentoring, model testing within one year. The project focused on the creative industries sector, but the model is also applicable to other areas and educational levels.

### **How TOY method was created?**

In 1993 Mr Johannes Partanen founded the TeamAcademy (Tiimiakatemia) at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. TeamAcademy is built up by using all the great modern ideas about learning, entrepreneurship, team work, leadership, organisational and personal development. It was at that time a revolutionary form of training that combines the worlds of business and education. Tiimiakatemia students run their own cooperative businesses and learn with real money and real customers. This means that during their studies students of Tiimiakatemia work in the cooperatives from day one. Each team creates a company and they start to look for customers who have needs they can fulfill. The aim besides of just learning is to collect money for a round-the-world trip which starts just after their graduation as a prize for hard work. So they learn entrepreneurship by doing, from their own and fellow students' mistakes, as they meet every week in a circle with their group mates from other teams and with their team coach. They talk, discuss, reflect and share. The team coach will help them to keep on track but is not teaching in the usual sense of the word. In these study years all teams have to learn how to function in order to earn profit and with this purpose in mind will go through all the levels of team building. They create a rather complicated curriculum which has range of gaming and competitive elements for making it all FUN.

TeamAcademy teach students at university level where the students can afford to fully commit themselves to this specific study or work. Tiimiakatemia produces 100% entrepreneurs. But on VET level or for students of others subjects in higher education it is more complicated. Therefore some people from the Ikaalinen College of Crafts and Design started to think how this Tiimiakatemia method could be transferred to the VET level. And so the TOY model was born. The TOY is the abbreviation of the Finnish words

“team learning as an entrepreneur” or in its older version “Entrepreneurial on-the-job learning”.

### **What are the key elements of the TOY model?**

These are: learning by doing, working and learning in teams, the teacher is substituted by a team coach, a direct connection between the customer and learner, creating and selling a product, sharing experiences in the dialogue circles. The TOY model is flexible, so every school can adjust it to their own needs and possibilities.

### **How will studying in the TOY model be?**

Key elements of the model are teamlearning, learning by doing, regular team learning sessions with a team coach, continuous self-reflection. TOY model is very flexible, you can create your own system, each team coach and each new group will affect the work done in a team.

For example at Tartu Art School: in the first session students are asked to form teams. Most times they draw lots. But sometimes they discuss initial business ideas and then divide themselves into teams according their interests. With one group, the coaches divided students according to their characteristics and skill profiles, because it seemed reasonable. So they usually have 3-5 teams in one study group altogether consisting of 15 learners. After the team forming they start to brainstorm business ideas and make a task plan. For the minimum 7 week TOY course, the goal is to sell a new product or service for at least to one customer. Furthermore, their cost of revenue should be positive. By completing this task the teams will have covered all the main topics of entrepreneurship. Also they have to create their personal learning contract for conscious learning, team contract for learning teamwork skills and for avoiding a total failure in team work. They also have to collect reading points for understanding how reading relevant literature can help one with real life tasks, give new ideas and change one's world.

And within 7 weeks or so two team coaches will gather the group for a weekly meeting for minimum 3 hours per session to discuss what they have learned, what are the current issues and how they decide to solve these. The idea is that the coaches may talk not more than fifty percent of time. Here a general rule is that less is better. This is for creating the atmosphere where learners start to understand little by little that the responsibility of their learning process is their responsibility. True learning happens not when the teacher or the coach is talking but through their own actions. By team coaching such elements will emerge: self reflection, giving feedback, dialogue and discussion, and sharing experiences.

### **Who is the teamcoach?**

This is a person who is adequately trained, it can be a teacher, but does not have to be. S/he must be able to coach the work of the team and notice each team member's personal development. S/he must, in particular to support learning, not by teaching but by listening and coaching.

As usual, a TOY period lasts only for 7 weeks, the TOY model provides also a structured plan for covering all important aspects of entrepreneurship. This is a great help for the coaches who can then choose the main theme for the session and also have some ready to use materials about all the topics. In our school, some coaches use these in every session and others only when needed, because learners themselves bring in new themes and issues to the sessions.

### **Piloting TOY- model in Tartu Art School**

In Tartu Art College the pilot of the TOY-model started in spring 2014. In autumn, the school offered students the opportunity to choose between on-the-job learning period or the entrepreneurial practice in TOY-model. The methodology of TOY-model will also be used in other courses, especially with practical students' projects.

During the TOY.VET project 4 pilot groups tested the TOY model. And the results were impressive. Before the project started art school had a traditional economy course for all students – a lecture about writing a business plan. To pass the final test learners had to produce a business plan about their fictional company. And actually no-one really thought that there is something wrong with this course, because they educate designers and not businessmen. But at the same time one could sense dissatisfaction: one could hear talks in the teachers room, that students lack motivation, initiative, sense of responsibility and entrepreneurial attitude.

After Tartu Art school visited Tiimiakatemia and other VET schools in Finland who already used the TOY, they understood that by using the model of team learning entrepreneurship students will acquire knowledge and experiences which are not only about business and skills of making lots of easy money. This is for making profit with their professional skills and entrepreneurial attitude, no matter as an employee or an employer. And this was an extremely important conclusion for school and teachers.

The first question they asked from each of the student was: **what are you good at?** Student have to know in which areas they need to grow and how to sell themselves. This kind of self reflective question was a totally new approach – instead of the lecture about microeconomics or marketing the learners had to look into themselves, talk and brainstorm business ideas. In the end, from this first TOY group a new design company was born and they are now in the incubation at Tartu Art School school.

The next group that was tested the TOY model was a special group of people from a project titled *Creatively Back to Work*. The group consisted of young unemployed people and people who have been at home for an extended period with their children. In May last year they had reached the situation when they didn't know what to do with this group, they were in the deadlock, not communicating with each other and also motivation to learn had disappeared.

School director took a rather brave decision to use TOY. Anyway they didnt have nothing to lose. Immediately the situation changed because they were surprised. And even if they continued to produce different challenges, **they started to work and learn in earnest**. There was a real result of their work and they were working as a team (Picture: Cat house prototype they created).



With this group they continued to use the TOY model, so another period of product design and work with the customers took place later and they produced a board game prototype for History Museum of Tartu University.

The main benefits of the TOY model for this special group were: the rise of self confidence, learning in real life situations, leadership skills, customer processes and working in team.

The other two groups of the TOY pilot testing were created in the usual way and first they had to form teams. At this stage school coaches had more knowledge and experience and the groups were not so specific or "special". Altogether there were 7 teams who achieved a solid result in the end. A few examples: a paper folding book about the old town of Tallinn (the book was sold in bookshops all over Estonia); a souvenir mug for Tartu Art School, anniversary book for another school, promotion video for Tartu Paper Museum etc. Couple of business ideas born in the TOY process are now in the pre-incubation at Tartu Centre for Creative Industries.

Nowadays, when the project TOY.VET is finished the trained coaches of Tartu Art School use the TOY model and its components with all student groups. They meet weekly and discuss issues which have emerged and seek together solutions. It is a constant learning for school team too because each group is different and coaches are different.

At the moment Tartu Art School have now a one-year study group of continuing education at the 5th level for designers who already have professional skills. This study program was planned initially to take place in a traditional way for updating skills. But then the school discovered TOY model what is not only about learning entrepreneurship, it is simply an innovative way of learning in general. So now there are no teachers with this group but only team coaches and it is about learners motivation to learn, share, talk and listen, learn from each other and work together with a common goal. They have to define themselves what they want to learn. The group started 2015 September and will soon reach to the end of the first project period. There have 3 teams and they had to find themselves their project tasks. Lot of the TOY topics we considered to leave out at the beginning as this program is not entrepreneurship centered, but they still cover themes like: branding, marketing, self management, client processes and so on.

### Some of the difficulties in implementing the TOY model:

1. The change on the first level has to happen in your mind. For the teachers it is a great change not to be a teacher anymore, but a team coach. This means you cannot talk so much anymore - you have to make the learners talk. There will be lots of silence at the beginning. Obviously, this is not easy.  
You also have to motivate students. You have to ask from questions time to time which are silly or bothersome. You give them tasks they find annoying. And you cannot demand learners to read books if you don't read yourself. You have to perform as an example and truly believe in it.
2. In the project they had to study with the same Tiimiakatemia's methodology – no one gave them lectures about the teampreneurship, they had to study it themselves and read loads of books about subjects which never earlier looked appealing. And then they met at seminars and talked a lot. This is totally different of what a typical Estonian imagine what a normal learning process should be.  
Bit by bit people started to change, first with piloting results and finally they started to read too. And can you believe IT – till now, time to time some of they TOY coaches announce that they recently read a book related to the team coaching or entrepreneurship on their own initiative.
3. For the real change in a school or in whatever organisation you need supportive leadership. They are quite sure if their school's director had not been in the project team from the beginning and not supportive of this method, they would have never achieved such results. This was evident as in the project other partners did not have such advantage, so they witnessed very different processes in their partner organisations. The leader has to be an example, especially when you want to change others.
4. Team coaching is actually not easy at all, it is a challenge. As a teamcoach you may have a kind of authority at a TOY circle but this does not help when your task is to make participants to talk. And some students don't let them force to read or participate in team work. You need different tools, lots of practice and skills. But all in all it is fun and extremely interesting, because learners are so creative and resourceful. A challenge teaches most.

The journey with TOY method will be about motivation, change, personal growth, listening others, friend leadership, hunger to learn and lots - and I mean it - lots of reading.

The text is based on interview with project manager Juta Vallikivi.

### Links/References/Materials:

<http://inku.ee/toyvet>

[https://issuu.com/letshope/docs/toy\\_english](https://issuu.com/letshope/docs/toy_english)



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