STARTUP WEEK – THE PEDAGOGY BEHIND ALL THE WORK

Antti Leppilampi,
South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences

We gathered during June 10.6.2019 – 13.6.2019 with students from Petrozavodsk State University, Karelian College of Culture and Arts and University of Applied Sciences of Oulu for a Startup Week – program. The participants from each school were chosen based on their interest towards entrepreneurship and building cross-border cooperation between Finland and Russia. Each participant was asked a question where they needed to tell, if they already had a company or if they had a company idea, what kind of idea was it. Based on stories told by students we selected 5 different themes, according to which working groups for the Startup Week were built. We didn't build the teams ourselves, instead we let students do that. We gave lots of responsibility of the week's progress for students, which led to building unity inside students and staff members. The pedagogy, which we used in this kind of week based on co-operational leadership and in this text, I will tell examples on how we used it during group works based on what I saw and heard.

Starting from game rules

Since the day one, we put a big focus on building positive interdependence between students, so that they reach a culture where they can teach each other. The first day started with going through the aims of the week and game rules together. The first important part on building positive interdependence and unity in groups were the game rules. They were:

1. Be ready to report on your teams progress at any time
2. Always when a mentor raises his or her hand, everyone else raises their hands and that means to be quiet
3. Let's keep phone sounds switched off
4. Let's be on time during lessons

One of the most interesting game rules here was the one where raising hand means to be quiet. The idea behind that rule is that students learn to be participated all the time, and by raising a hand, students participate on the lessons progress. One good thing in this rule is that the mentor doesn't need to yell everyone to be quiet, but he raises hand and it takes 5-10 seconds, and everyone has their hands high and the room is quiet. It felt like some students even liked this rule, because they used it at their own group work and even after the working days, when we were out eating together.

Second focus was to put pressure on students to teach each other and communicate with each other a lot. This was solved when the students made the teams themselves. We put five big tables across the room so that each table had one theme, based on the ideas students had told before the week. The students went to the table that matched their idea and were advised to introduce themselves in these theme groups. There each of them was asked to share their own idea at first and then together they needed to solve what kind of project or combination could be done from the ideas, which were heard. Some groups had difficulties of course, but everyone managed to find out one project idea, which all agreed on.

On the second day students did a method called "Gallery Walk", which idea was that every one of the team had to teach their ideas to others in small groups. Inside theme groups, students took a count from 1 to 6 and moved on to new groups so that from each theme group all the number 1:s would form a group of number 1:s and those who chose number 2 would form a group of number 2:s and so on. After that, students wandered all the theme tables one by one, where the owner of the theme group had to teach others about their work and got feedback to learn what to do more. This was very a very important exercise because it forced students to learn about their group and taught them presenting skills.

Reflecting the work

Third thing where we focused a lot was the importance of reflecting. We tried to ask from students as many times as possible to think in their groups questions like "What was the meaning of this lecture" or "Why did we just do an exercise like this". As students reflected while progressing at their work, mentors did the same. After each day, we gathered around on table and one by one answered at first, what was good in this day and secondly where do we need to improve. These moments were crucially important when thinking about achieving the goals of the week. When each mentor had their thoughts said, we decided together who is responsible of improving which tasks, and continued to the next day when everyone knew their role on what to do.

Students continued building unity inside their groups on the second day when they individually decided to go and play volleyball and basketball. Some of the students said in the next morning that they played for a long time during night, which was great to hear. In the end, longer friend relationships are built when mentors or teachers are not watching. I hope that students built long-term relationships.

The ending

At the end of the week, we could notice that participating students had managed well. We had asked earlier on the week some of the students to organize a dancing lesson for all of us, which students liked a lot. Two students came to me in the final morning and asked if they could sing a song together and after the final day was over other students wanted to do one last dance.

Students did final reflecting so that they gave feedback to each other in groups. They were told to give each other feedback with post it notes, so that one by one everyone got a feedback which said something like: "I respect you in this area", and "To develop our work, you should focus on developing this area". At the end, the teams made an agreement together, where they each draw a signature to promise to each other to continue the work or to continue the friendship that started. This was the fourth important focus we had on the program, which purpose was to give lots of responsibility for students. In the end it was up to them, what do they want to get from weeks like this and how to benefit from all.

While the students did reflection and gave feedback to each other, mentors had same tasks once again. We ended the week by giving each other feedback and talked where we could improve the next time doing this kind of programs. Now at the end of the year, when I'm thinking about this week, I would hope to start a Startup Week like this again. I am quite sure that every one of us came home after that week having new friends and learnt something new. The biggest thing I learnt was that co-operational leadership works in this kind of environment.

FURTHER READING
1. Leppilampi, Asko 2009. Cooperative leadership – Key to the organizational success and staff development.
2. https://asko.leppilampi.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Cooperative-leadership-Asko-Leppilampi-2009.pdf.