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THE COMPETENCE-BASED CURRICULA OF PROAKATEMIA

KNOWING, ACTING, AND BEING





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WHERE IT ALL BEGINS EQF LEVEL 6

The curricula of Proakatemia have been of great interest to many, mainly because it seems to efficiently ignore the traditional curricula typically found in use at universities across the globe.

The first question often arises already when you get to the word curricula, because it's a plural, and for a reason. There are students from multiple different academic programs attending Proakatemia, such as IT students, hospitality management students and business students. The core of the curricula for all students is based on the same shared base, but it is customized to suit the learning goals of their individual study programs. In this article, I will be referring to the most commonly used curriculum of the business students, as the alterations are rather minor when it comes to the other curricula.

Recently an event called Academic Adventures was held at Proakatemia, bringing together 37 academic professionals from 12 different countries, the aim to familiarize them with the way of learning and overall the life at Proakatemia.

The question regarding our curriculum was made there as well, and in response, we held a learning session to showcase the curriculum and the way students and coaches alike interacted and maneuvered with and around the different phases and elements of said academic structure.

To the great surprise of our guests, the curriculum of Proakateamia is in fact based on the EQF level 6 learning outcomes, identical to those found at other universities in more traditional Bachelor's programs and even the main BBA program of TAMK.

EQF, the European Qualifications Framework, sets certain learning outcomes to all Bachelor's programs in the European Union, including “advanced knowledge” and “demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study.” (Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe, 2017)

It also includes competence based learning outcomes, such as “taking responsibility for decision-making” and “managing complex technical or professional activities” (Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe, 2017).

And the curriculum of Proakatemia, despite being competence-based, has all that and more.

The competence-based curriculum means the focus is not on lectures, as we have none of those, but instead on the students developing their skills by interacting with each other, with other companies, and experiencing life as an entrepreneur – from innovating new offerings to learning about the different pricing structures and delivering a finished product or service to a customer.

KNOWING, ACTING AND BEING - MAKING ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Proakatemia's curriculum, as well as all TAMK's curricula, have their theoretical base in the three keys presented by Barnett and Coate, which are knowing, acting and being.

Instead of focusing on the contents, suitability for a life of working after graduation or the knowledge itself when forming the curriculum of a study program, Barnett and Coate suggest the focus should be on the way students interpret, analyze and adapt their knowledge. (Barnett and Coate, 2004)

TAMK has made a deliberate change in their curricula for all their programs, including the Entrepreneurship and team leadership program here at Proakatemia, which brings the focus to the way students use the knowledge they are given instead of merely pouring knowledge in and hoping that it sticks. (Marttila, 2014)

At Proakatemia, even though the curriculum is precisely the same and follows the same principles and learning outcomes, it feels like completely different curriculum entirely, because of the way it's applied daily.

KNOWING

Instead of lectures, we gather knowledge in multiple different ways, most common of which include books, seminars and learning sessions. A core part of the Proakatemia curriculum is based on books. Every student must write at least a certain number of essays to be able to graduate, which results in them reading dozens of books over the course of their studies.

Books and seminars can be considered a part of individual learning and knowledge gathering, but learning sessions consist of the whole team taking part and spreading knowledge to each other on a topic they've chosen together.

For example, if a team needs to file their tax returns or devise a marketing plan for a project, they can choose to have tax return filing or marketing plans as the topic of one or more of their training sessions.

The responsibility of hosting the training session is then given to one or more of the team's members, who prepare to either host the training session themselves or they can call in an expert on the topic. This way the knowledge is brought into the training session and can be analyzed and interpreted by each team member as individuals, but also as a team through dialogue and exercises.

However, students cannot only focus on gathering knowledge that is already out there; through innovating and working on different types of projects they also gain new knowledge that either is not readily available or must be learned by doing.

ACTING

You cannot graduate from Proakatemia without analyzing and interpreting information and adapting it to real projects and client work, which is one of the reasons students who study here are often far more comfortable with turning a plan or concept into reality compared to their lecture-going counterparts. When a team full of student entrepreneurs is considering what to offer to the world to get their projects hours going, they need to innovate and then when they've got an idea they need to start the productization process of taking that idea and turning it into a viable and tempting product for their target audience. Customer acquisition is also an integral part of the process.

Working on different projects for different customers also brings us back to the EQF learning outcomes, as they include responsibility and being able to react to unexpected situations (Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe, 2017), both of which are deeply integrated into project work. The contracts and payments from the customer to the students, or investments made by the students, force them to take responsibility for their own actions. Working with different customers will also naturally bring about situations the students were not prepared for nor expecting, thus forcing them to react to difficult situations with potentially high risks with very little time for preparation.

An important part of the acting in the Proakatemia curriculum also comes from working in a team. You are not only responsible for your own actions and the welfare of yourself, but your actions might affect the entire team.

BEING

Learning to work in a team and finding your own role within a team are amongst some of the most important being-related lessons Proakatemia offers to their students, along with learning to evaluate yourself and your actions.

These come naturally to some, but others might struggle, which is where the importance of teamwork and understanding each other comes into play. A good team must be able to support its members in any way possible and give them time and assistance in finding their roles and confidence in themselves.

Psychological capital is a term loved by curricula planners around the world now, and for a good reason. It is defined as “an individual’s positive psychological state of development” by Luthans, Youssef and Avolio in their book *Psychological Capital*.

Psychological capital is commonly characterized by four different aspects of an individual: hope, resiliency, optimism, and self-efficacy (Luthans, Youssef and Avolio, 2007). It is something that can be nurtured and developed, and that is where TAMK and Proakatemia excel and other universities are following suit with curriculum changes to support the development of each individual’s psychological capital.

Understanding the psychological capital gives everyone an opportunity to further improve themselves and allows the coaches here at Proakatemia to further the development of each student into responsibility-taking go-getters who are extremely resilient and confident in what they do.

This entire process takes place within the core aspects of Proakatemia and its curriculum, from the optimism created by the team and the community to the projects that force the students to take responsibility and work hard to succeed.

CONCLUSION

Though some might think the curriculum of Proakatemia is either non-existent or that it doesn't follow the guidelines set by the European Union, the truth is that the reason it seems so different is the way it is applied in use.

Students are given the freedom of choice for the way they go through their path as a team entrepreneur, which comes with great responsibility for their own actions and the actions of their team.

Knowing, acting and being come to life in different aspects of everyday life, and while psychological capital is a key in developing current curricula, at Proakatemia it becomes a natural focus of development, regardless of whether the students even know or understand the concept of psychological capital.

A competence-based curriculum allows the students to develop at their own pace and, due to the high levels of motivation born from the responsibility for their own actions and from the team, that pace is usually very fast.

The program appreciates the individual's ability to constantly learn as they go, and never stop learning, because if one stops learning after they graduate they will one day find themselves in need of a whole new round of education.

In short, the curriculum here at Proakatemia focuses on how the students use the knowledge they gather and allow them to freely choose the steps they wish to take in their professional development – and makes them responsible for those choices.

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