

# Beyond Diylab in high school level: Erasmus+ project “Better Teaching, Better Learning”

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## Background

We had been planning an international project for High school of Teacher Training School of Oulu University for some years. At the beginning of 2016 we got money from our national agency for a preparatory meeting of Erasmus plus project. Two of our teachers travelled to Bielsko-Biela in Poland to plan the project.

During the meeting we discussed with Polish teachers what would be the most important matter to be developed in our work. We agreed that it is changing our teaching methods so that our students will learn better and get skills they need in the future. This time we thought mostly about the digital competences they would need.

We found partners from Poland (IV Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Komisjii edukacji Narodowej), Italy (I.I.S. “Falcone-Righi) and Catalonia (INS Montserrat Colomer). Writing the application was a long process which we partners did together by using Google docs. We summarized our needs for improving our teaching skills so that the students will acquire a more active role and learn better. We agreed that our students need to learn life skills to get better possibilities for the future. They need better use of ICT, better social skills and better orienteering in their careers. We teachers were interested in improving our work and cooperating together to acquire new incentives, skills, and knowledge. Our application was accepted and we were ready to begin the project in autumn 2016.

## Why “Do It Yourself”

In the application, it was said that our project will be divided into 6-month periods. Every school will in its turn introduce a new teaching/learning method to the partners and everyone is going to use that method in practice before the next meeting. The first meeting was in Oulu in November 2016 and then we had to be ready to introduce a method to help us toward our goal. How to motivate students, make them responsible, help them be creative, get them to collaborate and strengthen their social skills.

I had been working in DIYlab project with my lower secondary school students and really liked this approach. I thought this could be the answer to our needs. It is well-known that high school studies have heavy curricula. The students are often more objects than subjects who accept what they are given by teachers without any opportunity to contest or process knowledge. Another problem is that students are not guided to collaborate. They don't get used to working in groups when sitting isolated in classrooms, listening to their teachers, reading by themselves and trying to do different kinds of tasks alone. In a globalized world it is inevitable to be able to collaborate to survive.

I suggested using DIY approach to our partners and it was accepted. During the meeting in Oulu in November 2016. Paula Vaskuri from TOPIK introduced DIY to the partners and told about her praxis, Future Factory, for new university students. We had long discussions about DIY during the meeting in Oulu. Especially science teachers were skeptical because they thought that the subjects they teach are so difficult to understand that they have to teach themselves and they also have to obey their curricula. It was important to talk about the method together. DIY supports our goals in many ways: students will be activated, they will collaborate and learn self-regulation, and they will use ICT and learn self-assessment. After all, before the next meeting in Poland at the beginning of April 2017 all partner schools were committed to try DIY.

## How we implement DIY in Finland

As in all school projects you have to find colleagues who are interested in the topic, who don't have any prejudices and who are not afraid of hard work without extra salary. But in Finland high school differs from other partners and it makes everything more complicated. There are not any classes but students are in changing groups in which they study. Minimum number of courses in a high school program is 75, of which 47 - 51 are compulsory and the rest are optional. The school year is divided into 5 periods and during every period the students will learn different courses. So, Finnish teachers have only 6 weeks to work with the same group. In secondary school I had found it useful to collaborate with the English teacher who was teaching the same group but in high school we seldom, hardly ever, have the same groups with other teachers.

We had a team of 4 teachers and 5 subjects: history, health education, social studies, German and English. Because of our school system we could not integrate our subjects and everyone worked alone and decided which would be the most reasonable way to try the approach. Every group was supposed to make their final product in digital form so it would be shared easily. Our high school students have been given free iPads to use during their studies and they mostly used them to produce material. At the beginning of the courses the students were told what kind of perspective DIY is, why it is used and how many lessons of the course it would last. The students' attitude was quite positive before they even knew what was going to happen.

Our German teacher used padlet in her project, the other teachers gave their students free hands. I used it in a social studies and in history course "Turning points in Finnish history", which is a mandatory course and thus gives a lot of work. To get time for the project my students had to take responsibility of their studies, for every lesson they had to read one chapter from their history book and do some other assignments. At the beginning of the lessons we used 10 – 15 minutes for checking their homework.

Students formed the groups themselves, chose their topics from the list and decided their products, power point, prezi, video, mind map or poster. Only one group made a video but they worked self-sufficiently and also used their own time for it. One group wanted to make an old-fashioned poster. They enjoyed the kind of tinkering, drawing, using handwriting, scissors and pasting. We also went out of the classroom, some groups worked in the library, some in the corridor or in the school cafeteria.

To assess the project I made an inquiry. Nearly everyone thought that all members in their group had been working fine. Many students said that the best thing was that this was the first time when they really had enough time to concentrate on something. Normally they have only one 75-minute lesson for group work. Only two groups had learned new ICT skills, which is because we already use ICT a lot. As a teacher I was satisfied. I got to know students better when I was only guiding them. They found information on the internet but they mostly used wikipedia, so I had to ask them to find other sources, too. I guided them to use books. It was useful also for me, because I noticed that some students do not even know that there is a table of contents in alphabetical order.

## Assessment of DIY in our project

Our next meeting for presentations and assessment of using DIY was in Poland in April 2017. Every school sent some students and teachers there to present products and to assess the project. There were brilliant videos in various subjects, for example science, math, philosophy, music, languages and history and also examples of integrating subjects. We had one whole day for assessment. The Finnish problems have already been mentioned here, but all other partners had a different kind of problem, evaluating the students. In Finland DIY was a part of certain courses and we also evaluated it as a part of the course.

In other countries it was easy to integrate subjects but students had done their project work mostly in their own time, not at school. Teachers said that they have to teach everything that is in the curricula and DIY was extra work for their students. And especially in Italy they did not know, in which context they evaluate the students' DIY projects. Some students had used camera, some edited, some written the manuscript, some were playing. Teachers were stressed about everything having to be evaluated, but they wondered how for example a science teacher can evaluate all the work the students have done.

As an approach everyone thought DIY was interesting and surely most of us will use it in our work in the future. The students had enjoyed DIY projects and they thought that they have learned better. They had to work in groups to get their products ready. The teacher's role was to guide their students when they needed help.