

SUMMARIES



Using the Experiential Learning Model to Develop a Deeper Understanding of the Profession Prior to Start of Studies

Katri Kütt, Juhan Aus

At the Estonian National Defence College (ENDC), junior officers begin their studies with an introductory course. The aim of this extracurricular course for first year students is to harmonise the basic tactical skills that are necessary to proceed with their studies. The average dropout rate in the first year is around 30%, with “wrong profession” being cited as the main reason. It seems to indicate that the introductory course has not served its aim as the focus has been on low level tactical skills and the learning process teacher-centred with a “foggy” methodological background. In 2017/2018, the ENDC organised a pilot course where the focus was on the student-centred approach, an experimental learning cycle, handing over responsibility for learning to students and integrating subjects. The aim of the course was to give first year students a deeper understanding of the tasks and the role of an officer and to even out their basic tactical skills.

The modified introductory course comprised three modules, each focusing on a different theme: introduction, teaching and battle drills. In Module 1, the cadets worked on administrative documents and participated in a seminar on leadership to prepare them for upcoming tasks. Module 2 focused on teaching skills and cadets were tasked with training each other in weapon skills and battle drills. Module 3 focused on combat activities (platoon attack, defence etc.), with second year cadets acting as coaches for the first year cadet-leaders during the planning and execution phases and also being responsible for holding after action reviews.

After completing the introductory course, the first year cadets (and all the instructors involved) were asked to give feedback in the form of open questions. 70% of the first year cadets (N = 43) gave positive feedback about the course, mainly highlighting independent teaching and leadership experience. Another consistent theme throughout the cadets’ answers was about the feedback they received with regard to their own performance and the opportunity to reflect on those situations with older cadets. On a more critical note, the

students indicated feeling that their teaching and leadership skills were not good enough to take on that kind of responsibility and that they were not particularly satisfied with the result. All things considered, the course provided a good overview of what their future jobs might entail.

In addition, the second year cadets ($N = 35$) were asked to reflect on their experience as coaches and observers. Most of their responses focused on their own development as coaches, giving feedback and conducting after action reviews. They were also impressed by the cadets' gradual improvement in the course of just one week and seeing how reflection actually worked. The feedback from teachers and the planning team ($N = 7$) concluded that the aim of harmonising cadets' tactical skills had not been achieved.

Based on the feedback, it is possible to conclude that the course fulfilled the aim of providing the cadets with a deeper understanding of their future job and gave an indication of the current level of their teaching and leadership skills. However, the harmonisation of tactical skills was not as successful. The feedback from teachers also indicated that there is a need for better demonstrations during the cadets' performances. In addition, cadets were reported to be more satisfied with being in charge of the situations (teaching and leading) and valued the experience highly.

Estonian National Defence College Tactics Teachers' Conceptions of the Contemporary Approach to Teaching and Learning, and Its Applicability in the Teaching of Tactics

Priit Värno, Triinu Soomere, Liina Lepp

In recent years, discussions about the contemporary teaching and learning approach (CTLA) and its importance in shaping self-directed, adaptive and collaborative persons in different study levels and disciplines have become very topical. The aim of the current study was to explore the conceptions held by tactics teachers at the Estonian National Defence College (ENDC) about CTLA and their opinions about its practical applicability in tactical studies. The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 tactics teachers and analysed using the qualitative content analysis method. The results indicated that the tactics teachers conceptualise CTLA as student-centred, including using active teaching methods, information technology and providing feedback on the learning process. Openness was

also considered an important part of CTLA. The ENDC tactics teachers considered CTLA generally applicable in the teaching of tactics, but time constraints and the size of the groups were seen as limitations. The results of this study provide the basis for a follow-up project to raise awareness about the principles of the CTLA among tactics teachers and for further development of the teaching of tactics at the ENDC.

Learning and Teaching Through Web Conferences – Possibilities, Limitations, Challenges

Aigi Piirimees, Maia Boltovsky

The contemporary learning environment has changed: learning is no longer limited to the learner and teacher being in the same classroom. What is more, bringing learners and the teacher together in one room may not always be possible or rational. E-learning is nothing new in the context of higher education, allowing students the freedom to choose the time, location and the pace of learning. However, learning and teaching through web conferences has not received much attention.

This article focuses on learning and teaching a foreign language through web conferences in the form of synchronous learning. In the fall semester of 2017 the Language Centre of the ENDC organised an English language course (B1+ level) for the Viru Infantry Battalion, offering a combination of contact lessons taking place in Jõhvi and web conferences transmitted from Tartu. Two teachers conducted the course, with six students taking part.

The aim of the research was to identify applicable language teaching methods and activities in the lessons conducted through web conferences, based on the gained experiences both from the point of view of the students and the teachers. The effectiveness of the teaching methods was identified and analysed based on the teachers' log of their teaching activities, self-reflection and ongoing analysis throughout the course. The same process was used to identify methods, language learning and teaching activities that were unsuitable for web conferences and the limitations that should be considered when planning a course supported by web conferences. Additionally, the students' self-reflection and feedback were used to conduct an empirical study of learning. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with the students after the completion of the course.

Development of Written and Verbal Self-Expression Skills as Key Competences at Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

Eda Sieberk

The aim of this article is to introduce new ways for teaching and developing written and verbal self-expression skills as key competences at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS). The article focuses on analysing proposed amendments to the existing written and verbal self-expression module. The proposed amendments are based on the analysis of the internal security education module, a survey carried out among employers and alumni, and a feedback questionnaire filled out by EASS students.

Nowadays, reading, the ability to understand texts, and writing, the ability to create these texts, are skills that are seen as indispensable competences. In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union adopted a recommendation on key competences in lifelong learning (2006/962/EC). The document defines eight key competences and interdisciplinary topics that combine knowledge, abilities and attitudes. According to this document, language competence (incl. mastering one's native language) is one of the key competences. Mastering one's native language allows people to express themselves clearly, purposefully and in accordance with the norm of written language both in speech and in written communication. It is recommended that the general and transferable competences laid out in the Estonian Standard for Vocational Education should be integrated into specialty training programmes. There are four groups of competences that are taken into account when compiling the Standard for Vocational Education: communication, leadership, critical thinking and self-management skills. In addition, the standard also describes general competences such as communication and presentation skills, writing and compiling reports.

In 2002, Eurydice, the EU's Education Information Network, carried out a survey on general competences, indicating that the focus in curricula had shifted, and instead of simply transferring knowledge from teachers to students, the focus was now on putting the acquired knowledge and skills into practice. In the last decade, Estonian curricula have focused on the students, the importance of developing key competences, the need to combine new knowledge with what has been acquired previously, and applying these skills in different areas of life. In order to compete in the modern job market,

having a sufficient level of general competences is indispensable. The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 stresses the need to develop creativity and entrepreneurship, teamwork and problem solving skills, critical thinking, analytical skills and digital competences. The application of the aforementioned changes requires a shift in the philosophy of teaching and some reflection on assessment.

One of the reasons behind modernising the professional higher education curriculum is related to the need to develop key competences, and to combine them more extensively with specialty skills. A sufficient level of general competence is a prerequisite for success in the job market.

At the EASS, the modernization of the curricula of professional higher education is based on surveys carried out within the last couple of years, the most important being the analysis of the model for internal security carried out by Praxis Centre for Policy Studies (2015), the evaluation of curricula groups in September 2016, and the survey of alumni and employers in 2017. In addition, since 2013, the EASS has been regularly collecting feedback via questionnaires. Based on that input, the EASS has devised an integrated education model for internal security. The results indicated the need to develop a new, more flexible and integrated internal security model with greater integration within subjects and modules, as well as between the subjects and modules, among the curricula, and in the organization of teaching of students of different specialties.

According to the Praxis survey (2015), the importance of general competences is growing and therefore it is relevant to delve more deeply into this issue. The Praxis survey clearly points to the need for interdisciplinarity in modern education. The focus group interview conducted in 2017 indicated the need for continued development of communication and writing skills in the course of studies because these skills will be critical in their future jobs. These recommendations have been taken into account in the creation of EASS's new and upgraded written and verbal self-expression skills module.

The main aim for devising a new written and verbal self-expression module at the EASS is to develop an understanding of the essence of students' written schoolwork, as well as the aims, requirements and the ability to acquire these skills along with demonstrating them. The module begins with developing general competences: introduction to effective learning strategies and styles; discussion about learning and scaffolding, and an examination of the student's role and responsibilities in lifelong learning. Subsequent topics are related to the development of verbal and written expression skills. The focus in developing writing skills is on creating and editing students'

schoolwork. The topic ends with a practical task where students have to conduct research using professional resources from scientific databases and then present their research in accordance with the EASS guidelines. Students must write an analytical paper based on the retrieved resources and give a presentation. The module for written and verbal self-expression is interdisciplinary – all discussed theoretical topics and practical works are related to students' professional modules, as well as their future profession. However, it would be beneficial to include more students from different fields and conduct joint studies. In addition, the written and verbal self-expression module utilises the online e-learning environment Moodle. Assignments in the module are graded according to formative grading principles where the end result (grade) is determined by collaboration between student and teacher. The final grade of the module is based on the results of different sub-skills.

Analysing the proposed amendments and taking into account the shortcomings that were encountered in the course of the teaching of the module of written and verbal self-expression, the author of the article concludes with the following suggestions:

- Maximise the potential of e-learning, including the volume of independent learning;
- Diversify the types of tasks;
- Implement individual counselling to promote self-guided learning, if necessary;
- Explain the meaning and need for integrating key and specialty competences;
- Develop the possibilities for joint courses for students of different specialties.

It is possible to interpret learning and teaching in various ways. In the modern meaning, learning is not simply memorisation, but rather an understanding of the content and developing the skills for applying this knowledge in real world situations. The module of written and verbal self-expression is consistently developed and modified so that the students are not just learning, but also understanding its importance and how it relates to their future occupation.

Research Supervision Model to Support Self-Directed Academic Research Writing

Svetlana Ganina

This article provides an overview and an analysis of an action research study conducted by the author over the course of four years, focusing on the role of the supervisor in supporting the process of self-directed academic research writing at the level of professional higher education and master's studies. Feedback from supervised students and the supervisor's notes comprise the main inputs for this research. This article focuses on the following four dimensions related to academic research writing:

- students' descriptions of their research writing process;
- students' descriptions of collaboration with the supervisor;
- problems experienced by the students in the process of research writing;
- students' understanding of self-directed academic research writing.

The results indicate that students must have an adequate understanding of the academic research writing process as a whole and also its various stages. This will enable the supervisor to assist them in that process, while also supporting their role interpretation and behaviour. The research process is further enhanced by successfully identifying problems and lessons learned. The results demonstrate that an adequate understanding and application of principles of self-directed study, something that can be and needs to be developed, plays a critical role in the process of writing an academic research paper.