



KAMU project - Combining service and learning in promoting integration

The aims and objectives of the KAMU project

The aim of the EU –funded KAMU (*buddy*) project (2013-2014) is to develop a service-learning model that benefits higher education institutions, volunteer work organizations and organizations in which the volunteer service is done. The theoretical background and base for the project is founded in Socio-Pedagogical viewpoints of integrative and participatory social care work. (See Hämäläinen, J. 1999.) A framework of how to combine volunteer work (service) and learning is created in the KAMU project. The partners in the KAMU project are Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Kalliola Settlement and Keskuspuisto Vocational College.

The purpose of the KAMU project is that all parties of the project and the future partners will gain from the project. The higher education institutions provide social services students opportunities to experience real services in focus organizations. This service is included in the curriculum of the social services students and guided by the reflection tools that are developed in the KAMU –project. The focus organization (the context of service) benefits by receiving additional support for their core functions. The volunteer work organization will benefit when students do volunteer work and support and develop civic activities as part of their studies.

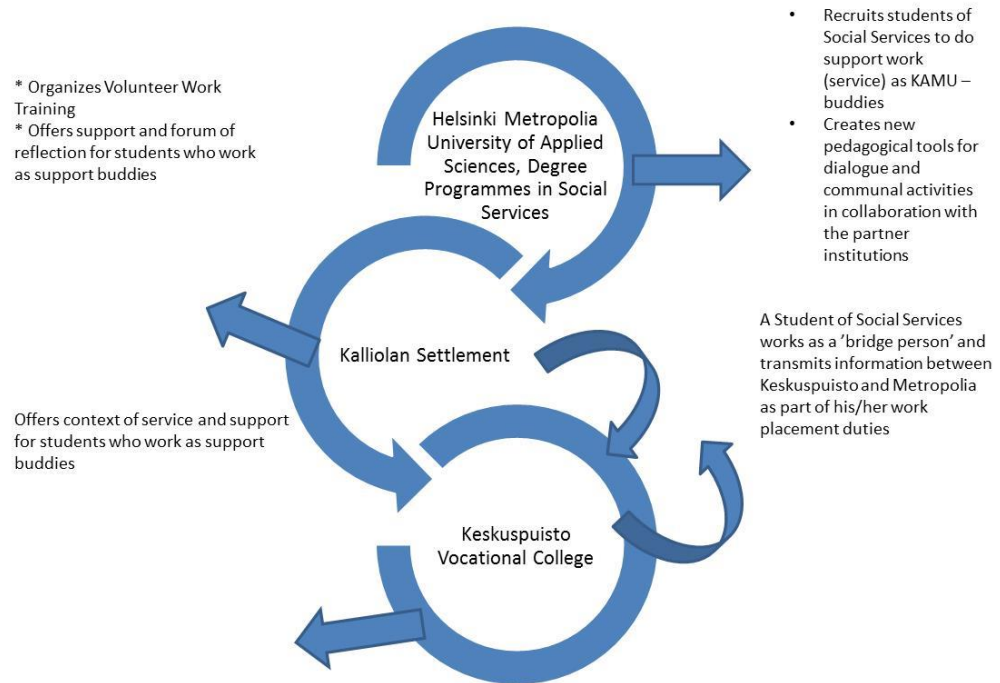
In the KAMU project the context of service is Keskuspuisto Vocational College. The students from Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences work there as support buddies for students with immigrant



background and with mild or moderate learning disabilities. The aim is to provide additional support for the Keskuspuisto students in their path of integrating into Finnish Society as well as learning social and life control skills.

In the KAMU –project the students of Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences who work as support buddies are offered the context of reflection of service in the professional volunteer work organization Kalliola Settlement. Prior to the service at Keskuspuisto, Kalliola settlement organized volunteer work training for Metropolia KAMU students in which the main themes were diversity, interaction, volunteer work and civic activities and aspects of gender mainstreaming. Kalliola has also offered the possibility for individual and group level support for Metropolia students who work as support buddies. Guidance and support for Metropolia students have also been organized by the teachers who are involved in the KAMU project at Keskuspuisto Vocational College and by the teachers who are involved in the KAMU project at Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

An important aspect of the KAMU –project also is that a student from the Social Services Programme at Metropolia is selected to do a work placement at Keskuspuisto and work as a ‘bridge’ transmitting information between the partner organizations in the project. This type of bridging is crucial for the project to work well. The student who works as a mediator between organizations can transmit the wishes and feedback from one organization to another and can give valuable tips to the Metropolia students of how to organize the activities at Keskuspuisto.



Picture 1: KAMU -service-learning -case model

Service-Learning and Socio-Pedagogical framework in the KAMU project

The students from Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences who participate in the KAMU project are studying to become future social care workers. Participating in the KAMU program is part of their training: so called 4th Work Placement. The idea of the 4th work placement is that students work as support persons in various social work sectors and learn how to promote civic activities and promote participation and integration according to the socio-pedagogical framework. (See Hämäläinen, J. 1999.) Socio-pedagogical framework serves as a solid base for service-



learning program (Kurki, L. 2001). In the KAMU project the civic activities and serving others is linked with learning.

The core of service-learning is reflection (Eyler, J. and Dwight, E. Giles. Jr. 1999). KAMU project creates both framework and tools for this reflection for the students of social services at Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The perspective of learning in the project is that the learning processes should be meaningful, empowering and promoting critical reflection; Learning should be based on trust, dialogue and meaningful communal activities (Freire, P. 1970/72). The core idea of service-learning in KAMU is to promote student's reflection and understanding of the role of civic society and volunteering and experience real, meaningful events that can be analysed in order to create transformative learning (Eyler, J. and Dwight, E. Giles. Jr. 1999., Mezirow, J. 1991).

KAMU activities are the base for learning experiences. These experiences are reflected and analysed by the students with the help of the reflection tools such as learning diaries, reflective discussions and questionnaires which are planned and developed by the KAMU project workers. For educational institutions it is important that future professionals in social services area are well equipped for meeting the diverse needs of the service users. It is important that the students also understand the importance and role of the civic activities in welfare societies where economic structures are rapidly changing. Here the socio-pedagogical viewpoints of active citizenship, integration, participation and use of pedagogical tools in social care work form a solid background the working principles of the KAMU –project.

For students' learning, it is crucially important that service-learning is linked with the contents of the curriculum (Kurki, L. 2001). Rather than being based on random observations, the learning must be analysed and



conceptualized by the tools that link service and learning and the contents and learning aims of the curriculum. In the KAMU project we can clearly find and establish the links between the curriculum of the Bachelors of Social Services at Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and the service. The themes of diversity, otherness, inclusion vs. exclusion and integration vs. marginalization are crucial both in the curriculum as well as in the KAMU Project's service-learning model. In the very center and core of all the KAMU activities is dialogue. (See Mönkkönen, K. 2007.)

Individual and group level activities in the KAMU project

Keskuspuisto Vocational College has been the platform of KAMU activities. At Keskuspuisto the Metropolia students of degree programmes of social services have met with the students of Keskuspuisto who study in the courses that prepare immigrant students for vocational and other types of further education. There is a big need for support buddies at Keskuspuisto. Many immigrant students struggle with integration in the Finnish society due to the fact that they have very little or non-contacts to the Finnish people outside of school. This basically hinders the development of their language as well as civic skills that are needed in Finnish society. The students at Keskuspuisto also have mild or moderate learning difficulties which make them even more vulnerable to the challenges in the new home country compared to the immigrants who do not have diagnosed learning challenges. The need for KAMU project in which the students in degree programme of social services are offering extra support and partnership for the Keskuspuisto students have been acknowledged to be crucially important by the staff at Keskuspuisto. This need also manifested itself in the study that was conducted by the Metropolia students of social services at Keskuspuisto



Vocational College. This study served as a starting point for the KAMU – project.

In the beginning of the project (fall 2013) KAMU activities mainly focused on group activities which were planned and coordinated by the KAMU project staff at Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The main idea of the group activities was to teach Metropolia students how to facilitate groups and how to promote dialogue and interaction by using creative, participation provoking tools and games. Games were planned and developed by the students at Helsinki Metropolia University of applied sciences as part of their innovation studies. The purpose of group activities and methods was also to teach Metropolia students to pay attention to gender mainstreaming and the aspects of gender in multicultural work.

After the group activities that was organized by the KAMU staff, the Metropolia students have planned and organized KAMU activities by themselves. The students from both Keskuspuisto and Metropolia have met according to their timetables and participated in various activities. KAMU service-learning-case model will serve as a base for service-learning handbooks that will be created in the project.



Sources:

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