

Media literacy training in youth work.

Mediatrain: effects of media literacy training in special youth care in Belgium

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Abstract— As society turns more digital, social care workers today are working in an area where digital competences have become a prerequisite to ensure high quality social care work. These digital competences are, for most of the youth workers, not acquired during their education. There is a need for programs that support youth workers to become more media-literate. The Mediatrain project developed a method to support youth workers in special youth care to develop media-literacy skills. A measurement instrument was created to evaluate the results and identify the gain in media-literacy.

Index Terms— Digital competences, media literacy, youth work.

Introduction

This first paragraph will put some light on the Mediatrain project, its aim, timing, and method and the partners involved. As special youth care is a very particular youth service it needs some clarification to understand the environment, limitations and opportunities for the Mediatrain project.

Special youth care in Flanders

In 2014, the organization of special youth care in Flanders as Integrale Jeugd Hulp (IJH) awaits a huge reform[1]. The principle is that every young person needing help can have appropriate assistance as soon as possible and in as few steps as possible. Until March 2014 hundreds of facilities, projects or services, each with their own mission, offer children, young people (aged 0 to 18 years) and their families support. Children, youngsters and their families sometimes get stuck in a difficult position and external support is needed. The assistance of Flemish Special Youth Care (BJZ) tries to meet needs of minors and their parents when they are in a problematic educational situation (POS). This can be the case because the environment of the child is a threat for optimal development; when parents ask for help in the education of their children, or when conflicts arise between minors and their parents. Also, when a minor committed an offense (MOF) help of Special Youth Care is to be applied. Access to this help is restricted based on a referral by the Committee for Special Youth Care (CBJ) or by the juvenile court.

Mediatrain: the project

The first challenge for the trainers in the Mediatrain-project was to engage facilities to participate in the training. A challenge, knowing that these facilities are facing major changes need all resources to make the transition to a new structure possible. Three informational sessions

were organized throughout Flanders (Antwerp, Brussels, Bruges). Afterwards 50 facilities (as was outlined in the project targets) had the opportunity to enrol in the training. Because too many facilities responded to our call, we had to refuse some organisations to participate.

The training itself covered a six-month period per organisation in which face-to-face training was supplemented with an online coaching module. The start of the guiding process consisted of a training day where the trainers introduced the participants to some 'hot topics' regarding media-literacy in special youth care. Sometimes, transmitting knowledge was a one-way process using interactive presentations, most of the time this was supplemented with interactive discussions depending on the specific facilities interests or scope. During this first day, participants were given a proper introduction in the available tools provided by the project to consolidate the training. These tools consisted of a course book in PDF, an online coaching module and a safety planner. The safety planner helped organisations to detect 'red' spots in their attempts to cope with online safety issues. They were challenged to grow in different topics and to evolve towards orange and green flags. A second tool was a self-developed course inspired by 10 questions regarding media-literacy. Social care workers pointed these topics out as being relevant in Flemish special youth care. The questions were answered by collecting information on needed *knowledge*, needed *skills* and needed *attitudes*. If available, existing methods and extra information sources were integrated. The most important tool though was an online social network site (NING platform) used as a coaching platform for participating social care workers (www.e-hulpvlaanderen.be). The platform had two important purposes. At first participating social care workers can use this 'safe tailored' social network as an experience lab where they could learn to use some online tools (e.g. chat, profile page, forum, blog, ...). Secondly the social network operated as their first-aid-kit when confronted with challenging questions regarding the implementation of media-literacy in their organization. For this purpose different discussion

forums were moderated, blogs and a twitter feed kept them up-to-date and documents were shared in groups. This online coaching module had a strong empowering effect releasing the trainers of their role as the only 'experts'.

Six months after the start the project was closed by a last face-to-face supervision moment. During this session organizations presented their work on the safety planner and their own media-literacy plan, and pointed out their targets for the next years focussing on sustainability of the training and changes caused by it.

A final symposium (Brussels, October 16, 2013) presented some good practices and the test results as described under section IV. Organizations that did participate in Mediatrain, can today hire a trainer to start a personalised guiding process.

Mediatrain: the partners

Tonuso

Tonuso is as a Center for Youth Services an organization for Special Youth Care licensed by the Flemish Youth Welfare Agency for the supervision of 155 children aged 0 to 18 years (sometimes even after 18 years at own request from the younger), their families and their context. The center consists of three departments across Brussels and Halle-Vilvoorde. The organization is piloting in the use of social media and media-literacy.

Catholic University College Limburg

The Catholic University College Limburg was involved because of their expertise on media-literacy and online social care work as developed by the expertise centre eSocialWork (www.esocialwork.eu). The expertise centre is directly focused on the capacity-building of social workers and is, in connection with the curriculum of the Social Work Departement where it is located, specifically focussing on social care work and the field of remedial education (the disabled, youth welfare, ...). eSocialWork ensures that vulnerable children, young people and adults get more opportunities in the field of ICT and internet use.

Thomas More- K-point

K-point (www.k-point.be) uses 'social inclusion' as a main value and a powerful view on people. Researchers and K-point fellow workers are convinced of the values 'equality' and 'citizenship' for everyone and in particular for social vulnerable groups such as generation indigents, people with a disability, lower educated people, etc.

Informant

Formation Service Informant (<http://www.join.be/>) offers a wide range of training initiatives emanating from frameworks and methodologies developed within youth care and often successfully implemented. Through experiential training focussing on knowledge, expertise and exchange, the professional is offered useful and immediately applicable know-how.

Steunpunt Jeugd

The Support Centre for Youth Care (<http://2013.steunpuntjeugdhulp.be>) provides practical support to youth workers and youth organizations from all sectors. It collects, enriches, translates and distributes practices, research, regulations, ethics and tools for youth care. Cooperation and expertise are key.

Media literacy: definition and scope

In order to measure the effects of the Medietrain project, an initial understanding and definition of the term media literacy is in order.

Media wisdom versus media literacy

As the aim of the project was to raise media literacy of social care workers, it is important to define media literacy. The department of Culture, Youth, Sport and Media of the Flemish government defined *media wisdom* in a policy note in 2004 as follows:

“Media wisdom is the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that citizens are aware of to live with a critical attitude in a complex, changing and mediatized world. It is the capacity for an active and creative use of media that focuses on social participation in the public sphere.

Media wisdom is not just about practical ICT skills such as reading and smooth handling or creative use of different media, but also about media awareness in practice, understanding the mechanisms of commercial communications and media industries, handling information with a critical mind, strategic skills and the responsible and safe use of media.”

Other authors[2]–[4] in the Netherlands and Flanders have also used the term “*media wisdom*” but at the international forum, the term media-literacy is the best match with the above definition.

Focus on Internet and social media

In the case of the Medietrain project, a focus was put on the use of the Internet. For that reason, the focus of the developed measurement tool was put on knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding Internet use. As most of the participants have a degree in higher education, the assumption was made that the target group already acquired basic ICT skills as online reading, writing, handling a computer, writing email, surfing the net. Using ICT skills for coaching young people is of course a very different topic.

The target group

The target group the measurement focused on is the staff working in facilities for special youth care. This includes social care workers guiding young people, members of staff, directors and support staff.

The Medietrain measurement tool

The overall purpose of the measurement tool was to evaluate the impact of the Medietrain project on the media-literacy of the people involved.

Testing media literacy

Testing formal knowledge and technical use of online tools is a difficult process. Existing platforms like the European Driving License (ECDL)[5], the Cambridge IT Skills Diploma[6] or the Microsoft certification[7] put a lot of effort into this. These tests are very elaborate and cover only the technical and formal use of ICT. The measurement tool developed for the Medietrain project did not have the ambition to test these

skills. In the Medietrain measurement instrument, self-assessment questions assess basic ICT knowledge regarding email, www and Internet security. Other questions focus on digital media skills that enable users to active, creative and participatory use of e-mail, websites and online services. The third part of the measurement instrument focuses on the users' critical and responsible attitude regarding digital media. The last part of the Medietrain instrument investigates the Internet comfort of use: how at ease are the users while being online. Does being online feel like a scary experience or is it like a walk in the park? This instrument is developed on the basis of the inventory of the existing instruments and good practices.

In each of the 4 main areas, a panel of experts defined the most important sub-topics as follows:

- Knowledge
 - The basics of E-mail
 - The basics of www
 - Internet security
- Skills
 - Active use of online media
 - Creative use of media
 - Participation in the online society
- Attitudes
 - Media awareness
 - Insight ins the mechanisms of commercial and media industry
 - Critical information and strategic skills
 - Responsible and safe use of media
- Comfortable use of Internet

For each of these topics, questions were defined in order to make the best match between the topic and the specific use of these media in the sector. Some questions covered more than one of the topics.

Passing on media-literacy

For the topics “Skills” and “Attitudes” the questions were split in two. The first part of a question would ask how often a certain skill is used (e.g. I use internet as a method in the coaching of my clients, with possible answers: almost every day - every week – every month – seldom - never). The second part of that same

question would probe if this skill is passed on to other coaches and/or clients. (Do you pass on this skill to other coaches/clients with possible answers: almost every day - every week – every month – seldom - never). This was considered as very important to understand the real media literacy within the organisation. It is not enough to be media-literate. It is equally important to pass on media-literacy to co-workers in order to become a media-literate organisation.

How did we measure?

The research design was pre- & posttesting observational study. A selected sample was chosen because of limited time and means. The online questionnaire was presented to a population chosen by the project team. The average time to fill out the questionnaire was about 20 minutes. This time limit was taken into account and tested as one of the design parameters. The baseline measurement took place from September to December 2012, at the very start of the Medietrain project. The second measurement took place after the Medietrain introduction sessions and the Medietrain training and coaching (March – August 2013).

Participants

All participants were employed in a Flemish special youth care facility. The baseline measurement (N=375) gives a good view on the ICT knowledge, skills and attitudes of the organisation as a whole.

| Gender distribution | | |
|---------------------|--------|------------|
| Variable | Number | Percentage |
| Women | 231 | 62% |
| Man | 144 | 38% |
| Total | 375 | 100% |

Table I: Gender distribution

Table I shows a majority of female participants (62%) This is in line with the over representation of females in Flemish special youthcare.

| |
|---------------------------------|
| Experience in the social sector |
|---------------------------------|

| Years of experience | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------------|--------|------------|
| Less than 1 year | 25 | 7% |
| Between 1 and 5 years | 130 | 35% |
| More than 5 years | 220 | 59% |
| Total | 375 | 100% |

Table II: Experience in the social sector

With almost 60%, working for more than 5 years in the sector, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of participants did not get ICT literacy training during their education.

| Function within the facility | |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Function | Percentage |
| Executive | 77% |
| Management | 25% |
| Total | 100% |

Table III: Function within the facility

From the start, the Mediastrain project aimed at involving both management and executive workers as shown in Table III. More details about the kind of tasks people perform are given in Table IV. More than one task can be part of the job.

| Job tasks | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Job tasks | Percentage |
| Coaching: young people | 81% |
| Coaching: adults | 13% |
| Coaching: parents | 45% |
| Coordination | 23% |
| Management tasks | 12% |
| Training | 3% |
| Administration | 42% |
| Other | 7% |

Table IV: Job tasks (multiple answers)

SJC is mainly focused on coaching young people from a specific target group. This is of course reflected in the number of people involved in coaching young people as a part of their job as shown in Table IV.

Test results

Internal consistency and reliability

The answers to the questions were clustered in 4 topics:

1. Skills
2. Attitudes
3. Frequency in use
4. Internet Comfort

A psychometric test was performed. The internal consistency is shown in Table V.

| Internal consistency | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Subscale | Cronbach's Alpha |
| Skills | 0,856 |
| Passing on Skills | 0,851 |
| Attitudes | 0,801 |
| Passing on attitudes | 0,901 |
| Internet comfort | 0,861 |
| Internet frequency | 0,939 |
| Total respondents | 371 |

Table V: Internal consistency

The Cronbach's Alpha values of Table V, all being above 0,7; show that each subscale of the Mediastrain measurement tool can be considered as reliable and consistent. This is also supported by the figures in Table VI that show that 90% of the users have agreed with the statement that the instrument is a good tool to measure media-literacy within the organisation.

| This is a good tool to measure the media-literacy of the workers and the organisation they work in. | |
|---|--------------|
| Answer | Percentage |
| Totally agree | 10% |
| Agree | 80% |
| Disagree | 9% |
| Totally disagree | 0% |
| Total | 100% (N=371) |

Table VI: Agreement with the tool

Media-literacy results

This research shows that participants consider themselves as rather media-literate but it is very likely that they over-estimate their media-literacy a bit.

At the end of the Medietrain project, people were more aware of the vast area of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to cover the topic of media-literacy. The scale to which they measure themselves has changed (N=232) so that the actual scores for skills, attitudes and comfort stay almost the same as shown in Fig. 1.

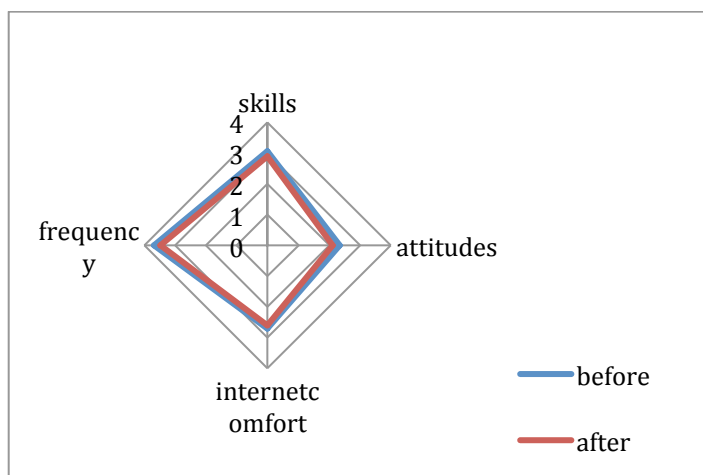


Fig. 1. : Skills, attitudes, frequency of use, Internet comfort before and after the Medietrain project.

This hypothesis is supported by the fact that participants acknowledge that they pass on their skills and knowledge to other colleagues more frequently after the project as shown in Fig. 2. There is an increase of 20% for the topics “*passing on skills*” and “*passing on attitudes*” to colleagues/clients.

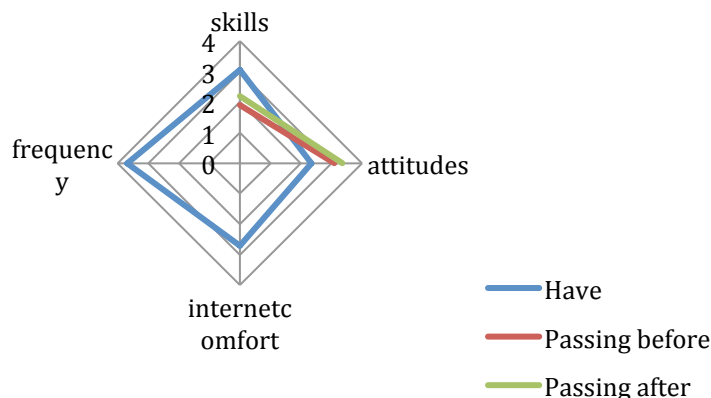


Fig. 2. : Skills, attitudes, frequency of use, internet comfort before and after the Medietrain project

Significant improvements

Safe and active use of Internet

One of the questions of the instrument asks for the existence of an organisation wide protocol regarding safe and active Internet use. Such a protocol can have different formats but mainly describes how clients and workers should use online media in a safe and active way. A good example of that is the online safety planner[8] developed by South West Grid for Learning Trust Ltd. A similar tool was developed for Tonuso social work organisations and it was introduced with success during the Medietrain project. Only 14% of the participants declared that such a tool was available before the project while 63% declared to have a tool in place at the end of the Medietrain project.

Moreover, 97% of the participants declared to personally use this tool at the end of the project. A smaller number (87%) declared to use it, if it was in place (only 14%) at the start of the project.

94% of the participants declared that they also encouraged others to use the protocol at the end of the project. Only 64% declared to do so at the start. (when only 14% declared to have such a protocol).

Common agreements about uploading, downloading, use and distribution of digital materials

A similar improvement was noticed regarding the existence of common agreements about uploading, downloading, use and distribution of digital materials. 74% of the participants declared to apply such a common agreement at the end of the project versus 38% at the start.

Other relations

This research shows a strong relation between media-literacy skills and what we called “Internet comfort”. It also shows that the more skills participants have, the more comfort they experience while being online. ($p < 0001$). There is a strong relationship between media-literacy skills and the frequency of use. The more skilled participants are, the more frequent they use the Internet. ($p < 0001$).

Conclusions

It is important to notice that the instrument is reliable and that the participants estimate it to be a good instrument for measuring media-literacy. But the instrument is a self-evaluation instrument and this means that the instrument stays subjective.

This research shows no statistic significant difference between the baseline measurement and the final measurement in the area of personal media-literacy skills and attitudes. This can possibly be explained by the self-assessment measurement and the fact that participants become more aware of the vast set of skills and attitudes they need to develop. The reference to which they measure themselves has changed after training and support and covers a larger field. So if they score themselves against this new reference, the score may remain constant but the skills and attitudes have in reality developed.

The growth of awareness of the importance of media-literacy is demonstrated by the fact that more participants pass on their personal skills and attitudes to others (1,9->2,3). The Mediatrain project has also lead to a more media-literate culture in Flemish special youth care as more attention is given to the introduction and use of specific protocols and common agreements about uploading, downloading, use and distribution of digital materials.

Also important is the satisfaction of the user with the instrument. Due to the fact that it took about 20 minutes to fill in the instrument, 90% of the respondents found it a good instrument.

Final general conclusion is that these results show that the use of a protocol is increasing.

Acknowledgment

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