

Finland: Workshop Pedagogy

Type of provider

Valtakunnallinen Työpajayhdistys (TPY) – The National Workshop Association (NWA) is an umbrella organisation with around 250 members. Most workshops are municipal. Many workshops focus on youths in particular; youth workshops cover 93% of Finland. In addition, there are workshops that work only with adults.

Objectives

Workshops offer a non-formal learning environment that is flexible and inclusive. Their purpose may be rehabilitative coaching or work training. Activities may include anything from learning life-management skills to metal or woodwork. Especially for younger participants, workshops offer the opportunity for personal growth and self-reflection, as well as learning through trial and error. From the workshop, participants may move on to education or employment.

Assessment approaches

Initial interview, setting goals and steps together with the participant. Monitoring the learning process through portfolios and discussions. Self-assessment and reflection.

Target Group

Strong focus on youth. Most participants are still young adults, with 20-24-year-olds forming the biggest group. In practice, participants' ages range from people in basic school to those close to retirement age. Participants may have a vocational education, or enter the workshop from a vocational school. Some participants are unemployed, others unable to work full-time. Workshop activities are free for the participants, who may be entitled to social benefits.

Potential transferability/ scalability

Government and municipalities involved in financing. The Ministry of Education and Culture finances youth workshops. Some of the costs are covered by services provided by the workshops, e.g. to the local community. Occasionally workshops are caught between the demands from different sectors; vocational education, healthcare and employment services are currently undergoing big reforms in Finland

Summaries or Basic elements of analysis

Workshops provide a flexible and non-formal learning environment, yet with set goals. Activities and their purpose (rehabilitative coaching, work training) depend on the participant's needs. Participants may range from teenagers to people close to retirement age. The ties to different sectors are beneficial for the participants, but sometimes reforms or strict regulations undermine the actual work done in the workshops.

Introduction in keywords

- Workshop Pedagogy
- Finland
- developing skills in workshops
- also rehabilitative coaching
- skills range from vocational skills in fields like metal and woodwork to life-management skills
- youths in particular focus (under 29-year-olds)
- participants include anyone from teenagers in basic education to people close to retirement age

5 areas descriptive text

Organisation and Description of the tool(s) (which skills are assessed)

Valtakunnallinen Työpajayhdistys (TPY) – The National Workshop Association (NWA), established in 1997, is an umbrella organisation with around 250 members. Workshops for youth date back to the 1980s, as a tool to combat youth unemployment. These days, youth workshops cover 93% of Finland. In addition, there are workshops that work only with adults. The majority of workshops are municipal, the rest are foundations or associations.

Mari Ahonen-Walker, executive director for the NWA, tells us many participants have a negative picture of themselves as learners. Workshops offer a flexible and non-formal learning environment, nonetheless with goals and a schedule, which depend on the participants' individual needs. Activities range from training in fields like metal and woodwork, where skills include operating tools and familiarity with work processes, to working with food or media. Other forms of coaching may focus on general life-management skills.

Implementation (how the tool is used, how the assessors are trained, how often it is used)

Entering a workshop starts with an interview and setting goals and steps together with the participant. Their content depends on the participant's individual situation. Other actors, such as the employment agency, may have their own requirements. A key principle is the validation of learning, which has grown from being applied only to participants entering workshops from vocational schools to cover a much larger pool of participants.

During the workshop period, the participant and the coach follow the participant's progress, allowing for discussion. If the participant clearly overestimates their abilities, the coach can specify what is required at the intended level. On the other hand, if the participant underestimates their own skills, the coach is able to point to concrete examples of work having been done at the target level. Portfolios are one way of following the learning process: learning new techniques, using new tools and tasks becoming more

diverse. If the participant is not a strong writer, they may use photography instead, perhaps slowly working on their writing skills. Workshops provide opportunities for self-reflection for youth. They also collect feedback from participants on what they learnt and how the workshop functioned.

Employees at workshops include both individual coaches and vocational professionals.

Description of the target groups

Workshops have strong ties to youth work, which focuses on under 29-year-olds. Of 25,000 workshop participants, 14,500 are youths. Most participants are nevertheless of age, with 20-24-year-olds forming the biggest group (11,500). In contrast to many other countries, workshops also provide services for older adults, and participants' ages range from youth still in basic education to people close to retirement age. Around 30% of the participants have gone through at least secondary vocational training; under 10% have either finished high school or are still students. Some participants have been students at a vocational school, but have faced challenges in their studies and been directed to the workshop instead. Workshop participants may also be unemployed.

In addition to work training, rehabilitative coaching is another focus. Workshops offer activities for people who are, for example, unemployed and unable to work full-time. Moreover, workshops may offer coaching for immigrants. Providing an inclusive and accepting environment is crucial. Many participants have experienced bullying, and thus, it is particularly important that they experience feelings of belonging to a group.

Ahonen-Walker suggests that unemployment is overall a relatively easy challenge to overcome for the participants in youth workshops. More challenging groups to work with are those who face a number of issues simultaneously. Yet workshops operate on the basis that every participant is an individual. Nor is including only easy groups the point.

Policy context

The government covers around 10-15% of the cost of workshops activities, and youth workshops receive financial support from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Municipalities are also involved in the financing. Moreover, services offered by workshops cover some of the costs. Activities are free for participants. On the individual level, participants may be entitled to social benefits during workshop coaching.

The holistic outlook is one of the benefits of workshop pedagogy. Nevertheless, one of its problems has to do with being located between so many sectors – vocational education, health care, social work and employment services – and the fact that all of these sectors are currently undergoing big reforms in Finland. Workshops direct youth to schools and employment after coaching. Still, there is only so much individual workshops or even the NWA can do when the support services those students would need in school are cut, or when employment agencies support ever shorter periods of coaching.

Impact for assessees

A third of the workshop participants move on to vocational schools, while around 15-20% find some form of employment after coaching. Others are directed to additional support services. Although 25% of the participants are unemployed after the workshop has ended, even that may be a step forward for some of them – having moved from rehabilitation to seeking employment.

Most important is, perhaps, the underlying idea of personal growth. Workshops offer their participants opportunities to develop skills and to try their hand at different things, but mistakes are allowed. Even if the workshop ends up being the wrong fit the first time around, it is possible to return to it later at a later stage.

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