Learning Social and Citizenship Skills in Vocational Schools through Friskie Programme

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Introduction

The chances of an individual to manage personal life and to integrate into society depend decisively on conforming to the systems of education and working life. Reaching adulthood in the 21st century increasingly involves weighing up various educational alternatives, planning one's career ahead, and making appropriate choices. To be able to transfer from school to working life and thus to an independent adult life, young people need to complete vocational qualifications. The vocational qualifications includes professional skills, academic skills and social skills.

This paper presents Friskie Programme – a social skills training programme for initial vocational education, which is targeted for pupils who are not able to take advantage of existing training and are at risk of not completing their vocational education. School educators (mentors) create, plan and run supervised group activities and individual guidance by Friskie Programme to facilitate learning in non-traditional learning

environments e.g. in alternative studies, work places, at employment offices, in workshops etc. The objective is to learn social skills that are necessary for independent living and in working life and for participation in post-modern society. The Programme is being developed by Friskie-EU Project (2003-2006), which is funded by The European Comission's Leonardo da Vinci Programme.

The aim of this paper is to justify the need for social skills programme in vocational training. In this paper I will discuss how it is important to seek and establish new activities, methods and arenas for inclusion to help pupils to learn social skills and find their pathway into adulthood and active citizenship.

Young people in educational society

The reasons for low levels of education, negative attitudes towards education, and lack of motivation might be found in the contents of education. All students receive the same educational contents and are subject to the same expectations irrespective of their previous experiences and personal interests. The prevailing faith in education is closely connected to a belief that storing young people in educational establishments yeilds positive results in resocializing excluded individuals and in preventing social exclusion. She prophesies that this storage function that emphasizes stability and order will be a key ingredient of social integration in the future. By storing away a great number of idle citizens that the society has little or no use for, they can be brought under control and assigned to an apparently meaningful existence. We have moved away from the morality of work towards the morality of education. (Komonen 2001, 83.)

The dropping out from school is a political and economical issue, but it is above all an educational issue. The dropping out is not an ac-

tion, which necessarily leads to social exclusion. For most young people, the time period after dropping out included meaningful work experiences, which clarified vocational goals, and motivated them to acquire occupational qualifications. Entering adulthood and making decisions about one's occupation is a great challenge to young people, and often difficult in today's transformed society. Particularly for young people with poor school performance, choosing one's occupation often takes place in several stages. With these young people, the real decisions concerning occupational choice are made well after the time when they first face selection to secondary education. In studying the phenomenon of dropping out, we should not look for one cause only, but instead see dropping out as part of a larger frame of action, as a process in the individual's life course. (Komonen 1997.)

In a reality permeated by the ideology of individualism, young people's individuality is determined in different ways. The individuality of those young people who move swiftly from one level of education to another and eventually attain good qualifications is determined in accordance with the values of the surrounding society. These young people act purposefully and form a clear and optimistic view of their own future. By contrast, those young people who have fallen out of the educational system and have poor labor market qualifications are confronted with the downside of the ideology of individualism. As social problems are to an ever greater extent interpreted as an individual's personal crises, disadvantaged young people are forced to take more and more responsibility for their own lives and for managing their own affairs. (Järvinen 2001.)

The transitional stage of the welfare state and the weakening social support systems (family, neighbourhood, social welfare services etc.) oblige individuals to work out their own 'personal projects' in their lives. On the one hand, welfare society offers a lot, but on the other, it demands a lot. In post-modern society, making educational choices,

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entering working life and managing one's life in general require the kind of know-how that young citizens do not currently receive at school. This might be one of the reasons why it has recently been suggested that compulsory education in Finland should continue until the age of 18 instead of the current 16, so that all adolescents would remain in education and benefit from the support and guidance offered by schools welfare services for another two years.

In addition to these barriers in one's personal life the high unemployment figures and diminishing employment possibilities have caused young people a serious problem when trying to find their place in society in many European countries. A growing number of young people are becoming more and more 'not involved' in working life and communities. The socio-political management of youth affairs, in other words the guidance and counselling offered by professionals (student counselling, career counselling, joint application systems, tutoring, mentoring), concentrates above all on supporting young people's educational and career choices and on steering them gently from school to working life. However, it remains debatable whether these services aimed at young people succeed in meeting their day-to-day expectations and needs. The choices young people experience are hardly made less dramatic by the fact that nowadays it is easier than before to reverse choices and start over. (Julkunen 2003, 400.)

A part of young people are not able to enter working life despite of diverse support measures. These young people often have many simultaneous social problems and minor learning disabilities. They cannot find employment with the help of career planning but become instead dependent on services. (Linnossuo 2004.)

Starting over is not easy if you are not living in a supporting family. Barriers to successful transition is listed (Thorne 2005) as lacks of:

- lack of understanding of the options available
- biased advice from other people

- lack of a clear future plan

- lack of realism about choices being made

- barriers to progression such as low esteem/self-confidence; poor basic skills; poor presentation; difficult family circumstances; offending behaviour; teenage pregnancy; substance misuse; poor presentation skills, independence skills

- lack of support from someone who can advocate for young person

- not being in a place where there are any resources or support to research options

Group of young pupil are not capable to get advantage of those many kinds of options there are available in extending mainstream schools and are at a risk not completing their studies. These pupils are most vulnerable because quite often they don't get support and guidance from their parents.

Social pedagogy as a perspective in working with young people

Bent Madsen (2003) has analyzed the concepts 'integration' and 'social inclusion' to establish professional dialog and to show how to create (school) communities allowing individuals to live as social participants by playing important roles in social practice. This dichotomy is convenient tool to question the detailed tasks, which are put into practice in every day in schools and to clarify the direction for development work of Friskie Programme.

INTEGRATION	INCLUSION
Deviance as individual deficit	Deviance as otherness in social context
Intervention directed towards individuals	Intervention directed towards community
Dissimilarity is a problem	Dissimilarity is a resource
Resources supporting individuals	Resources supporting communities
Minorities representing special	Each person has special needs
Compensation - past oriented efforts	Competency- future oriented efforts
Development concept of shaping identity	Learning concept of social participation
A legal right to human development	A legal right to citizenship
Re-integration caused by exclusions	Avoiding exclusion inside normal institution

In a social pedagogical theory, the individual's capacity of human growth and learning are emphasized. Exclusion from education does not only reduce individual's opportunities of integrating into the employment system of society. Society's demand for a high level of proficiency also sets new knowledge and skill requirements for citizens outside working life. Attending a school produces the academic and the (general) social skills, which an individual needs as a member of society. Education is also not only the door to working life but also to participation and individual coping and life management. (Hämäläinen 1996.)

The prevention and alleviating the social exclusion from the socio-pedagogical point of view is an attempt to find an alternative way (from

e.g. social work, special education, etc) to understand the changing of societies and the social and personal problems among people. Using the concept of social pedagogy as a basis, there can be seen an effort to transform a vocational training program to break the alarming circle of exclusion from education and working life (Hämäläinen 1996).

Socio-pedagogical work is needed when the ability of the individual, family or group to function has been hampered or is in danger to worsen by internal or external pressures. The aim is to activate those power resources by means of which individuals and groups can, in the here end now situation, have an effect on change in themselves or their environment.

Social pedagogical work orientation means concrete and visible action in every day life. There are four key elements and concepts when considering work in social pedagogical frame of reference. These elements are: community, action/occupation, experience and dialogue. These elements have to be seen *in action* to prove and demonstrate that it is actually social pedagogical approach. Its task is not only to find a solution to an occasional everyday problem but also to support those struggling with difficulties to find themselves activities that change their situation. In practice, this means starting such individual and social processes that make people's own problem solving possible.

The aim of social pedagogical work is to activate the people's resources by means of which they can influence themselves and their studying and training conditions in school as well as master daily routines and take responsibility as independently as possible. The aim is that clients can feel that they are seriously considered to be choosing, influencing and being responsible in relation to their own life, school environment and society. Naturally the degree of the young people's independent action has to be evaluated in relation to his/her capacity to understand and analyze him/herself and his/her action. (Jämsen 2000.)

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The crucial process in the work is the emancipation process of the young person and the group of pupils, which can be regarded as the aim and means of the work. Then the emancipation process is seen as the young person's release from conditions, which hinder him/her from acting and thinking independently. Such conditions are considered to be current and historical conditions defined by natural, external conditions, and inherent and adopted properties of the individual personality. Thus emancipation must be understood as a process of releasing a young person from dependencies, injustices and being badly off as well as psychic constrains, emotional barriers and internal authorities. (Jämsen 2000.)

Socio-culturel animation is seen as part of social pedagogy as its method. It can be conceived as pedagogical and global action, which aims at improving community and society. Animation means the activities aimed at creating and strengthening social change. It tries to encourage sensitivity, motivation and action, i.e. change attitudes and relationships. Animation helps and strengthens the activities and process of groups. It supports practices that bring forth initiative and participation. It helps young people to recognize their problems and needs and find new resources. The primary goal of animation is to build networks of interaction between individuals and groups. (Kurki 2000.)

In vocational schools socio-culturel animation is to accept different ways of learning and *facilitate* meaningful training and everyday life for everyone. There is a need to strengthen the community of pupils and teachers, develop empowering learning environments, develop model of apprenticeship, work training projects, additional jobs and voluntary work. Socio-culturel work is particularly preventive work and thus could easily placed in vocational schools. It is urgent to find and create new means in training programs; "to get in", to intervene pupil's community, peer groups and learning environments to make pupils at school more involved and more conscious in their lives.

Social pedagogically focused practices in Friskie Program put a heavy emphasis on:

- dialogue and identity work alongside the group activities
- listening the pupil → taking ideas, expressions, suggestions and plans seriously
- utilizing the potential which exists in these ideas and expressions
- consulting pupils themselves about ways and approaches to their situation
- clarifying and making pupils' values, goals and sub goals more-visible and concrete
- enhancing co-operation with pupils' family
- increasing pupils' commitment to personal plans in school, working place etc.
- participation in school community and society

Improving socio-cultural respect for empowering young people on their pathway in and out of vocational education means finding employment alternatives and new arenas for activities. These possibilities for integration and participation may be available in 'third sector', where the work done outside a paid job is seen as an important force regenerating society. Voluntary work and hobby circles in the fields of culture and care may create crowing possibilities as well for action on pupil's own initiative.

Friskie Programme – modelling active citizenship

Friskie Programme is targeted for young people who are not able to take advantage of existing training and are at risk of not completing their vocational education. These young people often lack social skills and lack of experience in interaction with other people in working

life, with employers and work mates. The final goal is to support pupils to make choices that improve their lives and lead to responsible adulthood and active citizenship. The programme consists of individual one-to-one guidance and group activities. Both one to one work and group activities are needed when learning and teaching social skills.

Friskie Programme consists of user's manual, workbook and portfolio. The Friskie workbook has three themes: from education to work, responsible adulthood and active citizenship. In Friskie Programme there are tips and hints for worker how to deal with these themes and material for taking up relevant issues in a group. Starting point is to recognize and respect different levels of knowledge. Idea is to offer more alternative possibilities for learning to enable every pupil to progress and achieve.

Table 1. Structure of the Friskie Programme

	From education to work	**Responsible adulthood**	**Active citizenship**
User's manual Tips and hints	How to deal with theme Starting and closing the process	How to deal with theme Starting and closing the process	How to deal with theme Starting and closing
Workbook: Individual and group assignments	Material for mentor Sheets in workbook	Material for mentor Sheets in workbook	Material for mentor Sheets in workbook
Portfolio	Learning products Self assessment Peer review Mentor's evaluation	Learning products Self assessment Peer review Mentor's evaluation	Learning products Self assessment Peer review Mentor's evaluation

The work with Friskie material is an active, creative and experiential process. Young people are the most important persons in the activity and planning process and the material reflects this. The expectations, awareness, needs and the situation of young people is the starting point for the whole programme. Therefore it is important to explore the expectations and to listen to the young people. It is important to have a positive and supportive approach in working with the group. The material stresses learning and involving and inclusion process. Working with programme will concretise pupil's background, interests, achievements (certificates). Portfolios are widely used in many contexts to demonstrate talents, abilities, competencies, achievements and potential. The learning products and outcomes, which are completed as a part of formal and informal learning experiences, may be included in portfolio.

Thus, the individual study pathways in vocational schools, workshops/practical training will hopefully correspond more precisely pupil's own targets and hopes. With a help of the material it can be identified what a young person already knows and what should be learned. The principle is to present positive achievements, which raise the self-esteem of a young person and give preparedness to take new challenges. The final aim of the programme is profound learning, by the means of which a young person will become less dependent on other persons and their decisions. In other words a young person builds up consciously his/hers personal know-how and social competence.

In addition with the individual work with the workbook there is also assignments for community awareness and enabling the participation in the school community. Participation in a community is the place to fulfil one's needs. In that sense vocational training can offer the significant possibility to grow for participation and engagement. In group work and discussions with a group an adolescent's personal interpretation and experience can be brought out to share experience and interpre-

tation for common life situations. This will strengthen togetherness for pupils with the same life situations.

Discussion

In this article I have presented the modell to teach social and citizenship skills for pupils in vocational schools and illustrated the social pedagogical background and the main principles that underpin the Friskie framework and support working by Friskie Programme.

In this social and political context, it is necessary to find new pedagogical solutions to the integration problems of under-achieved groups in schools and to encourage them to commit themselves to education and later on to work or some other social activity. Friskie Programme is an educational tool for explore own targets and values. It is a model to make individual study, career and activation plans more visible and to promote pupils' personal goals and that the plans would be socially just and realistic. Another challenge is to create new alternative learning environments in voluntary work and action outside the school community.

In addition to acquiring theoretical knowledge and vocational skills, the pupils need to learn citizenship skills. Vocational institutions could open up more to working together with the third sector and voluntary organizations. Partnership work would provide pupils with new opportunities for meaningful activities in real-life context where they could meet challenges and feel that they are truly needed.

Vocational institutions could co-ordinate schemes and projects to involve young people in the surrounding society. This would also broaden the pupils' social network and familiarize them with different values and attitudes towards life. Thus, students will be presented with alternative lifestyles and, in the best scenario, this will increase volun-

tary and community engagement. Individual guidance should be improved and provided in general teaching to offer necessary level of support and advocacy near pupils. With younger pupils the work with parents is essential to explain options and support choices.

The project has shown that young people across the Europe share many of the challenges associated with approaching responsible adulthood. It makes perfect sense for the researchers and professionals who are given the responsibility of making this transition as smooth as possible to work together.

Friskie-EU project partnership:

FINLAND: Turku Polytechnic, Turku Vocational Institute
UNITED KINGDOM: Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
THE NETHERLANDS: Drenthe College
SWEDEN: University of Trollhättan Uddevalla
NORWAY: Os Vidaregåaende Skole
SPAIN: Universty of Oviedo
www.friskie-eu.fi

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