



# SCHOOL-BASED YOUTH WORK IN FINLAND – CONTEXTS, PRACTICES AND EFFECTS

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# FOR STARTERS: YOUTH WORK IN FINLAND

- In theory
  - Creating spaces: youth peer relations, group activities, leisure and non-formal learning
  - Building bridges: institutional relations, individual counselling, transitions and also formal learning
- In practice
  - Mostly municipalities but CSOs and parishes as well
  - More than 3000 person years in approximately 300 municipalities (youth clubs, school-based work and outreach work as main instruments)
  - Educational degrees: Youth and community instructor (vocational level), community educator (tertiary level) and bachelor of social services (tertiary level)

# RESEARCH BEHIND THIS TALK

- Research conducted as part of a national centre of expertise on school-based youth work (Nuoska, 2020-2024)
  - A consortium coordinated by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences and funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture
  - Production of national-level data on volumes, aims and methods of school-based youth work (two surveys targeted to municipalities in 2021 and 2023)
  - Study on effects of school-based youth work (School-health promotion study 2021, municipal survey 2021, qualitative case studies)
- Previous international and national literature

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the 20th century, teachers together with mostly CSO workers were responsible of implementing extra-curricular activities until early 1990s and severe cut-downs.

Afterwards, in the 2010s, a gradual increase in co-operation between some schools and municipal youth services (sometimes together with CSOs and congregations).

In 2020s, lockdown measures raised concerns about school wellbeing which led into state-level programs promoting school-based youth work.

# CURRENT CONTEXT

- Despite increased state funding and control, there is a strong bottom-up tradition in Finnish school-based youth work
- Thus, in each school, the traditions and practices might differ
- Municipal youth services in 2023...
  - Almost all (94 %) implemented in one way or another
  - Had over 500 full-time or part-time workers
  - Allocated most resources to upper comprehensive schools
  - On average had implemented school-based youth work only for few years

# PRACTICES – AIMS AND METHODS

- Group-oriented aims & methods in compulsory schools and to some extent in academic track of secondary education (creating spaces)
  - Aims: Promotion of peer relations, anti-bullying, school satisfaction...
  - Methods: guiding group formation, recess activities, theme days & classes...
- Individually-oriented aims & methods in vocational track of secondary education (building bridges)
  - Aims: supporting educational transitions and reducing drop-outs
  - Methods: individual counselling & multiprofessional cooperation
- What about schools as communities and school cultures?
  - A mismatch between normative discourses in international literature and empirical observations in Finland

# EFFECTS – RESEARCH SETTING

## DATA

- On outcomes
  - On municipal youth work 2021
  - School-health promotion survey 2021 (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders)
- On processes
  - Three case studies
  - Qualitative interviews and field visits

## METHODS

- On outcomes
  - Test (n=21) and control (n=20) groups
  - Variance and regression analyses
- On processes
  - Content analyses
  - Revealing mechanisms

# EFFECTS - RESULTS

## OUTCOMES

- Group-level effects, particularly in prevalence of bullying
- Minor effects also in "class spirits" and participatory opportunities
- Average outcomes, plenty of variance

## PROCESSES

- School-based youth work both as cause and effect
- School culture: Openness to surrounding communities and porous professional boundaries
- Persistence and stability (both funding and employees)

## Effects – prevalence of bullying (1)

Table 4: Prevalence of bullying in the intervention and control group (frequencies).

|                    | Intervention group (n=3822) | Control group (n=2455) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Perpetrator-victim | 6,9 (n=264)                 | 9,9 (n=244)            |
| Perpetrator        | 4,6 (n=176)                 | 5,4 (n=133)            |
| Victim             | 14,7 (n=560)                | 19,4 (n=477)           |
| Neither            | 73,8 (n=2822)               | 65,2 (n=1601)          |

$p < .001$

## Effects – prevalence of bullying (2)

Table 8: Associations between prevalence of bullying and school-based youth work when independent variables are controlled. The ‘risk’ for being a perpetrator or a victim of bullying (n=6277, logistic regression).

| Variable                                              | p     | Coefficient (model 3) |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| Gender (girl)                                         | .100  | .902                  |
| Origin (foreign background)                           | .671  | 1.045                 |
| Parental education (no tertiary education)            | .857  | 1.011                 |
| Financial situation (5-point ordinal scale)           | <.001 | 1.322                 |
| Location of school (non-urban regions)                | .906  | 1.012                 |
| School structure (classes 1-9)                        | .550  | .952                  |
| Number of students (continuous variable)              | .283  | .965                  |
| Duration of distance teaching (7-point ordinal scale) | <.001 | 1.078                 |
| School-based youth work (intervention group)          | <.001 | .659                  |

# CONCLUSIONS

- Context: The period of rapid growth in the early 2020s is probably over
- Practices: The focus is mainly on group-level instead of communal one
- Effects: One can expect positive outcomes in contexts of sustainability, reciprocal cross-professionalism and willingness to invest in pupil wellbeing
- A Final remark: “What works for whom and in which contexts?”

# Literature on school-based youth work

Bowie, Vaughan (2002) *Youth work in educational settings*. University of Western Sydney.

Bradford, Simon & Byrne, Siobain (2010) Beyond the boundaries: resistances to school-based youth work in Northern Ireland. *Pastoral Care in Education* 28 (1), 19–31.

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Corney, T (2006) Youth work in schools: Should youth workers also be teachers? *Youth Studies Australia* 25 (3), 17–25.

Corney, T., Gorman, J., Woods, B., Benedict, N. & Law, A (2024) ‘Bridgebuilders’ and ‘boundary spanners’: a qualitative study of youth workers’ perceptions of their roles and practices with vulnerable young people in school-based settings. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 29 (1).

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Jeffs, Tony (2007) Crossing the divide: school-based youth work. In Roger Harrison & Cathy Benjamin & Sheila Curran & Rob Hunter (eds.) *Leading Work with Young People*. London: Sage, 97–108.

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Nieminen, Juha (2023) Koulu- ja oppilaitosnuorisotyö professionaalina pyrkimyksenä. In Anna-Liisa Hannikainen-Uutela & Pekka Penttinen (eds.) *Koulunuorisotyö*. Mikkeli: Xamk, 16

## Coming soon...

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Kivijärvi, A. & Kiilakoski T. & Kauppinen, E. (2025) The Effects of School-based Youth Work. A Realist Evaluation. Unpublished manuscript.

# A new period of action

Nuoska, center of expertise of Youth work at schools and educational institutions

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Veronica Hellström

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# The centres of expertise in the youthfield

Funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture to develop knowledge and expertise in the youth field at national level.

The centres are not permanent in nature. For the period (2024-2026) there are 3 centres of expertise, each with its own themes and missions/tasks.

Nuoska, center of expertise of Youth work at schools and educational institutions is conducted by Juvenia Youth Research and Development Centre and Opinkirjo Development Centre.

The missions/tasks of Nuoska are related to strengthening and developing the role of school youth work.

# A few highlights on youth work in Finland

- In youth work, youth is seen as a valuable phase of life and not just as preparation for adulthood.
- The main objectives of youth work and policy, are summarised in the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme, which is approved by the State Youth Council every four years.
- Youth work is governed by the Youth Act (1285/2016). It is a framework law that defines the goals and tasks of youth work at a general level.
- Youth work is defined as supporting young people's growth, independence, and inclusion in society.



# Youth work in municipalities

- According to the Finnish legislation, municipalities are responsible for organising youth work, however without having to produce the services themselves.
- The government supports the youth work of municipalities
- Over time, municipalities have gained much power over the organisation of youth work and have been relatively free to organise activities according to their own objectives. For this reason, youth work has also varied from municipality to municipality.

# Youth work as a profession

- In Finland, modern youth work can be seen to originate at the end of the 19th century. At that time, youth work was not a profession but was often done on a charitable basis by existing professional groups such as priests and teachers.
- From the 1940s to the late 1980s, the professionalisation of Finnish youth work strengthened its status.
- Since 1945, Finland has invested in youth work education, and it is currently available at all education levels, from vocational education to doctoral studies. (Nieminen 2014, 37-42.)
- It is good to note that the profession of school youth worker is unregulated.

# The need for new action arise

- The health and well-being of pupils has become an increasingly prioritised perspective in schools.
- The school already employs many education and well-being professionals, including teachers, special needs teachers and school social workers. In recent years, however, it has become increasingly common for schools to also have people employed specifically to work on preventive welfare such as school youth workers, school coaches and community instructors.
- Despite their different working titles, there are many similarities in their job descriptions, such as working with and supporting groups and group relationships.



# Together we are stronger



- The school youth workers do not do the work themselves, but they are expected to collaborate with other actors and professionals in the school.
- Cooperation is established for example with both teachers and student welfare services and has increased slightly in recent years (Kivijärvi et al. 2024, 94).
- However, cooperation, between youth work and school is not always perceived to work (Kivijärvi et al. 2024, 94).
- Factors for successful: the principal's leadership approach, the operating culture of the schools, common goals between school and youth work and a common language and understanding.

# Towards effective multidisciplinary cooperation

- Low-threshold work, such as school youth work, is not a complete solution to the challenges faced by young people or schools. Nor does youth work replace statutory services that schools are obliged to provide.
- The school youth worker is an important complement to other professionals in schools, although the professional profile of the school youth worker may not be as clear as other professionals working in schools.
- As more professions operate in schools and educational institutions, it is important that responsibilities and professional roles in relation to other professions are clear to all.



# Nuoska, center of expertise of Youth work at schools and educational institutions

- Nuoska, the center of expertise promotes school youth work at national level and aims to strengthen the role of school youth work, in cooperation with municipalities, schools and key actors in the youth field.
- The missions/tasks for this period (2024-2026) are:
  - **Defining youth work in schools and educational institutions**
    - Objective: to reach a common understanding of the role, target groups and content of youth work in schools and educational institutions.
  - **Strengthening the visibility of school youth work in school curricula and student welfare plans**
    - Objective: the cooperation between youth work and the teaching staff and student welfare is systematic and youth work is integrated into the school curricula and student welfare plans.
  - **Develop reporting and knowledge leadership**
    - To develop documentation tools to make the results and impact of school youth work more visible, for example to decision-makers.
- All the missions and objectives are based on the idea that youth work should become an established part of the everyday life of schools and educational institutions in the future.

# Thank you for listening!

For more information:

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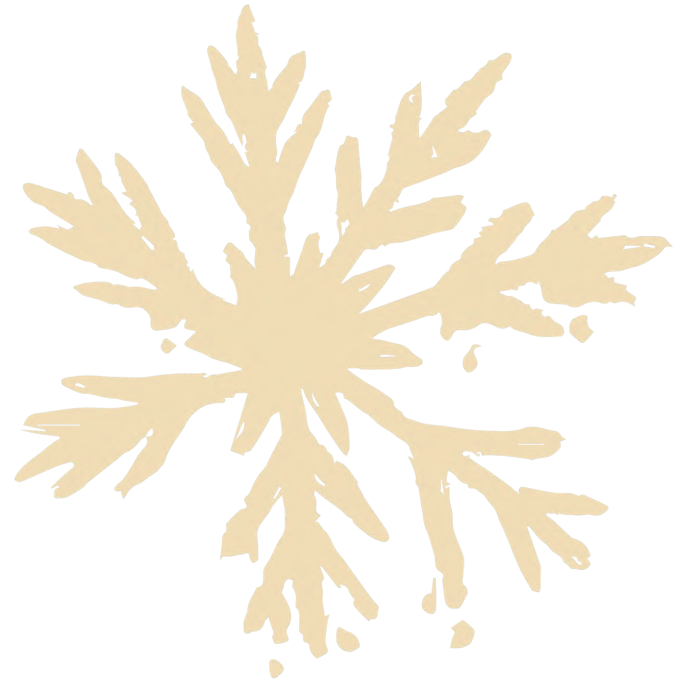
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**Nuoska**

koulu- ja oppilaitosnuorisotyön osaamiskeskus  
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[www.nuoskainfo.fi](http://www.nuoskainfo.fi)



**OPINKIRJO**  
KEHITTÄMISKESKUS





**Tunne huominen - All for the future.**

# Practical Future Coaching: Helping Youth to Envision Positive Futures

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# How did we get into Future Coaching?

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- Development work in a regional ESF project Ohjaamo Olkkari 2.0 (2021-2023) in Etelä-Savo.
- Target group NEET youth (18-29 year olds) BUT future coaching is usable with **any target groups**.
- Future thinking and "faith in the future" has been a big topic in Finland for several years. (See for example <https://tulevaisuusohjaus.fi/english/>).

According to research, there's a **significant** number of young people who are **unable to imagine** a positive future.

# What is Future Coaching?

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- Working either with groups or individuals.
- The goal is to strengthen the ability to think about different potential futures, faith in the future, and also self-reflection and resilience. Envisioning different kinds of possible futures (using for example megatrends).
- Making definitions how would positive (and, on the other hand, negative) future be like. Planning concrete action to take steps to reach the desirable future.
- Youth work mindset
  - Voluntary
  - Participatory (wondering together)
  - Learning by doing (non-formal methods, gamification, creative methods)

**Take a partner next to you.**

**Discuss and share with each other:**

- 1) One thing you would like to change and be different in the future, and**
- 2) one thing you would like to stay the same in the future, even though the world is changing.**

# Key observations and experiences from future coaching

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- Future is a very exciting topic for many target groups (brilliant conversation starter).
- It can be easier for youth to discuss their opinions about general (maybe even distant future) than their personal nearby future.
- Discussion about desirable future offers potential for insights about your core values (inner motivation).

# Practical tips for discussing the future

- Think about the future very broadly! You don't have to be an expert when you are visioning things together.
- More important than facts and "final" answers is to observe the emotions, values and insights that huge phenomena (megatrends) and future scenarios awaken in us.
- Remember these!
  - Learning by doing! Use games, move around, create art, visit different locations, experiment (for example with AI)
  - Encourage using imagination and use it yourself too! There are no right or wrong answers.
  - Question things! What if...?
  - Don't avoid talking about negative things or global threats. Acknowledge them and make an effort to present the positive side of things.



# Youth workers as future coaches

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- Youth workers are natural future coaches (encouraging active citizenship and participation).
- As the world gets more chaotic, the young people need support to maintain their faith in the future.
- In this time, we need more than ever people and organisations creating positive visions of the future: How would we want the world to be like?



# Free material to use:

<https://julkaisut.xamk.fi/materiaali/tulevaisuusvalmennus/>



# Thank you!

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