

# Experiences of Vocational Students over Participation in Wellbeing Coaching Program in Finland

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## Background

The guidance and counselling of vocational school students have focused more on pedagogical challenges whereas students' unhealthy behaviour and social problems have extended and more or less been ignored. Anyhow, students' wellbeing has been considered to have a great impact on coping in everyday life during education and later on in life, and also in employability after graduation.

To promote vocational students' wellbeing the multi-professional comprehensive eBoss coaching program was developed and piloted in Central Finland. The developmental eBoss project was funded by the European Social Fund (ESF).

## Aims

The main aim of the eBoss project is to promote healthy life habits, life management, life skills, and social interaction of the vocational students. The goal is to create an effective coaching model for promotion of wellbeing of students of vocational education institutions.

The aim of this study was to illustrate the experienced benefits of the piloted eBoss coaching model in the first phase of this developmental project.

## Intervention

The eBoss coaching program (Figure 1) is based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) approach. The main idea is that students will be supported to accept their own thoughts, feelings, values and habits to acquire and reflect issues affecting their wellbeing.

The selected themes of the coaching program are based on expert knowledge and on individual goals of the students. The main themes in this pilot program concerned everyday activities, sleep and relaxation, nutrition and intoxicants, physical activity, social activity, mental wellbeing and life management.

Each student set meaningful goals with support of coaches to improve his/her personal wellbeing. The coaches supported the students to achieve their goals and to participate in group meetings or in online training.

Varied coaching materials and tasks were used. After the sessions the students were encouraged to apply their reflections in their everyday life. Furthermore, the students used activity trackers and individually selected wellbeing mobile applications to monitor their own activity and sleep and to support their goals.

## Materials and methods

### Participants:

Vocational school students (n=65; male n=19, female n=46) participated in the three months comprehensive wellbeing coaching program in groups (n=6) during years 2016-2017. Three of the groups participated in group meetings and three in online training. Students were 16-29 years old (M = 18,6). In group meetings the students were present in average 80% of the sessions and those who participated in online training completed 70 % of the given tasks.

### Data collection:

Individual goals for the intervention were set with the Goal Attainment Scale (GAS). Achieving of the GAS goals was monitored at the end of the program and in six months' follow-ups. Experiences of the students were collected with semi-structured interview in the end on the intervention and in six months' follow-ups.

Students' perceptions over their occupational performance were collected using the Occupational Self Assessment (OSA). Thoughts related to psychological flexibility were collected using The Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth (AFQ-Y). These self assessments were made at the beginning and after the program. Students' experienced benefit was evaluated with scoring line (1= no benefit, 5= extreme benefit).

### Data analysis:

Analyzing the experienced benefits statistical and qualitative analyses were done. The raw scores from achieved GAS goals, benefit scales of program, trackers and applications were used in the analysis. The raw scores of the OSA and AFQ-Y assessments were configured to logit scores with Rasch-analyses by using Facets. Differences within and between groups were calculated with SPSS (Independent Samples T-Test) and interactions were studied with analysis of variance (ANOVA). Correlations between the different data were illustrated.

## Results

68 % of the students achieved their GAS goals and many even exceeded them. Almost all the rest of the students made progress with their goals. In group level students achieved their goals (M=0.05, SD 0.97). There were no group differences between contact meetings and online training.

Students experienced that they benefitted from the coaching program (M=3,8, SD 0.97) and from the activity trackers (M=3,66, SD 1.07). Benefit from the mobile wellbeing applications was less (M=2,77, SD 1,35). Benefit from the coaching program correlated meaningfully with achieved individual goals (r=0,462).

Students' self-assessed competence and values of occupational performance seemed to be good enough for them to cope in everyday life. Likewise most of the students' psychological flexibility seemed to be relatively good. During the program there were no statistically significant changes within groups and no differences between the coaching groups. In more detailed analyses it was found that the group level measures did not show the individual changes. There were several cases where the self-awareness over competence of occupational performance improved during the program and therefore the total scores decreased.

55/65 students participated in six months follow-ups. 69 % of them had maintained their achieved goals and 91 % of them reported that they are willing to continue to maintain or to achieve their goals in the future. The students further experienced that the program was beneficial (M=3,6).

## In conclusion

Students achieved their wellbeing goals during the coaching program. Overall the students experienced that the coaching was beneficial to them and that using the activity trackers was meaningful and motivating to most of them. Students' self-awareness over competence and values about occupational performance seemed to be improved during the coaching. The results from the coaching program seemed to be permanent in many cases.

These findings can be used for developing health technology, online and group based programs to improve the wellbeing of young people in different settings during vocational education and in other environments like youth services.

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Figure 1. Process of the eBoss Coaching Program

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