

Entrepreneur school



A process that produces reflective, continuously developing entrepreneurial-minded operations and new operational models for vocational education and increases entrepreneurial-minded activity within the region.

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To the reader

The promotion of entrepreneurship is defined as one area of emphasis for the school system in the Council of the European Union. The European Commission's Green Paper on Entrepreneurship was published on 21 January 2003: *“Education should promote entrepreneurship by advancing the correct way of thinking, strengthening entrepreneurship skills and creating awareness of the career alternatives for entrepreneurs.”* (Guidelines and action plan for entrepreneurship education 2004, 6).

Entrepreneurship education has been carried out in Finnish educational institutes starting from the beginning of the 1990s. Entrepreneurship is a natural part of studies in vocational education. Rapid changes in the information society continuously require new competences, new information and new skills. The living conditions are changing and adaptation requires new types of attitudes, initiatives and responsibilities with regard to the lives of our own and those of others. School plays an important role as a builder of the future and an educator of competent professionals.

Entrepreneurship education has been an important object of development in the Jyväskylä Vocational Institute during the last few years. Through projects we have been able to develop and test different models. Currently, entrepreneurship education can be seen in our everyday operations in a number of ways. The majority of our teachers have taken part in different team leader and entrepreneurship training events.

This article describes the development process and operational model, using which we believe entrepreneurship education in vocational education will develop and renew continuously. The first sections describe the factors behind the creation of the Learning Place Network for Entrepreneurship and identify the relationship of the operations with regional development activities. The article illustrates a path – the journey we have taken from the beginning up to this date. Then, the article describes our entrepreneurship development models and operations and the basic operational factors.

A significant factor behind the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship is to encourage students to practice the creation of innovative business ideas and to test their profitability in practice.

Learning is gained by doing in the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship. Backgrounds and theories are studied while doing. The learning process is guided by professional trainers and local entrepreneurs.

1. CENTRAL FINLAND AS A DEVELOPER OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Central Finland considers entrepreneurship and its promotion to be key issues in developing the region. A concrete example of this is the vision of the Regional Council of Central Finland: *“Central Finland is a region of high-quality living building its future with knowledge, skills and entrepreneurship”* (Central Finland’s regional plan 2002, 7). The connection of entrepreneurship as part of the region’s vision has required the common vision of a number of parties and the will to commit to a common objective. This cooperation has launched operations all over Central Finland.

The region has acquired the Y4 entrepreneurship ideology created by Jorma Nokkala, Industrial Counsellor: Yrittäjyys Ylös Yhteiskunnassa Yhteistyöllä (Entrepreneurship to the top of the Society through Cooperation, see www.y4.fi).

“Y4 is a long-term project lasting a minimum of 20 years, which is aimed at achieving a change in general attitudes towards entrepreneurship. When attitudes and culture favour entrepreneurship within a society, people will invent substances, utilise the possibilities and apply for support for their entrepreneurship. If the spring weather is favourable, people will go skiing, even if they are not that good of skiers.”

(Nokkala 2004)

The development of vocational education in Central Finland has formed into regional development work. There is the Skilful Central Finland operational model that expands traditional inspections of single educational institutes into regional field-specific development work led by the development managers of different business fields. In this work the educational institute boundaries are crossed by combining skills into a common competence reserve. Three large educational municipal federations and nearly all educational institutes organising vocational education are committed to the operations of the Skilful Central Finland project through mutual agreements. Development work and the resources used are planned

together and the resulting common resources enable projects that could not be carried out by single operators.

When planning the development of Skilful Central Finland an idea of cooperation across business field boundaries was created in spring 2002. The introduction of the development needs for entrepreneurship in welfare industry in general discussions raised ideas of cooperation between the social services and healthcare industry and the commerce and administration industry.

The common concrete objective set for the development operations was to create a new type of learning environment where students of different fields can practice cooperation and learn by doing.

At the second stage, other industries were involved in the operations.

2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN THE JYVÄSKYLÄ VOCATIONAL INSTITUTE

Entrepreneurship education model

In the common section of the degree-specific curriculum in the Jyväskylä Vocational Institute, entrepreneurship is one area of emphasis together with internationality, sustainable development, technology and information technology. Entrepreneurship education is based on the regional strategy.

The Entrepreneurship School has been built through regional cooperation of entrepreneurs, organisations, representatives of developer parties, students and representatives of educational institutes making entrepreneurship studies and continuous development of entrepreneurship education possible.

Students are central actors in the Entrepreneurship School. Entrepreneurship and related operations are learned by doing and experiencing. This method of learning is the most important criterion in the selection of teaching methods.

One objective is to advance the everyday creativity of students, i.e. seeing possibilities in everyday situations. In addition, it is important that the idea process is made visible and that students are encouraged to share their ideas and thoughts with other members of the group. The main emphasis of evaluations in the Entrepreneurship School is placed on the evaluation itself and group evaluations.

The Entrepreneurship School provides all vocational education students with the possibility of advancing according to their own needs along the study path from an entrepreneurial-minded professional towards a developing entrepreneur.

The Entrepreneurship School consists of four different levels: an entrepreneurial-minded professional (for all vocational education students), an awakening entrepreneur (for students interested in entrepreneurship), a starting entrepreneur (for students starting their business operations) and a developing entrepreneur (for entrepreneurs developing their business operations).

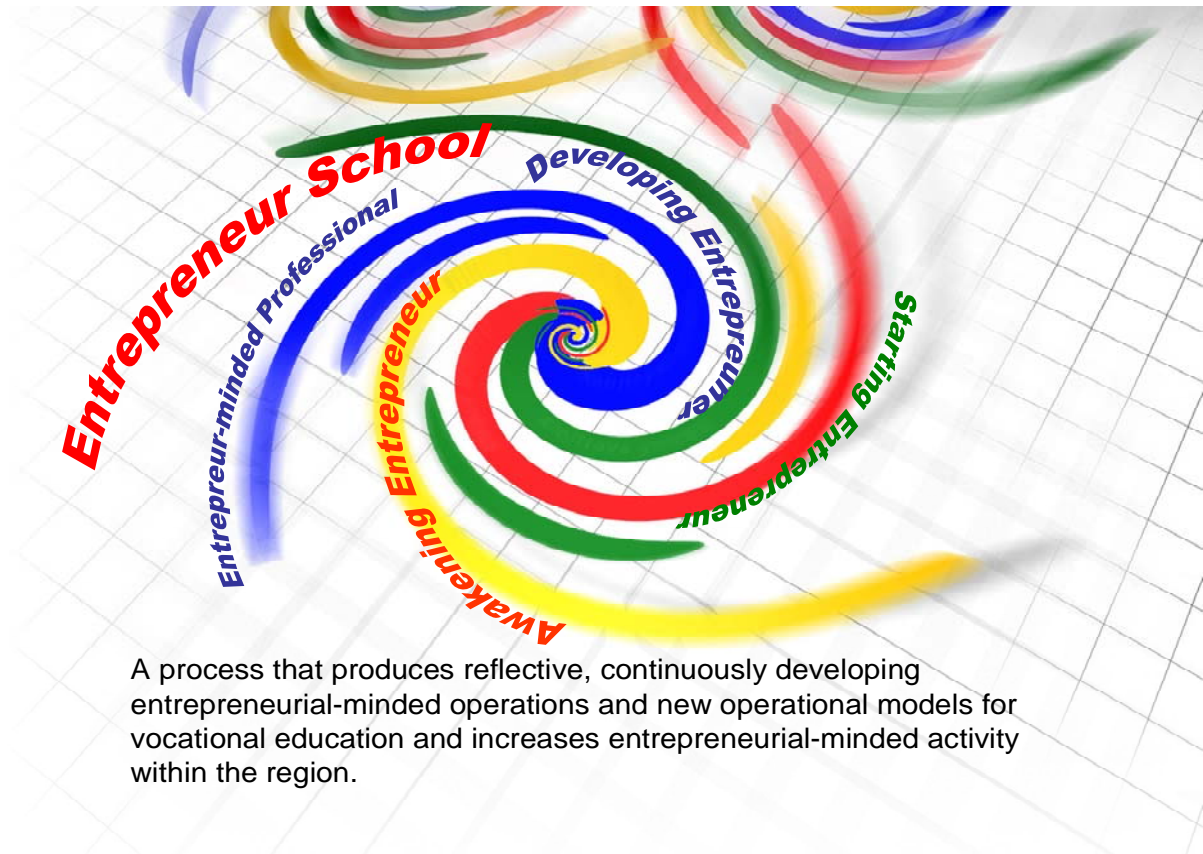


Chart 1. The content of the Entrepreneur School

An entrepreneurial-minded professional: The purpose of the entrepreneurship studies intended for all students is to provide a general impression of entrepreneurship and its possibilities. The studies support the students' growth toward enterprising professionals developing themselves and their work.

The studies include issues related to personal and professional development, getting familiar with entrepreneurship in specific fields, professional skill requirements for entrepreneurship and activities of a company. Students plan and carry out different working life-related projects as entrepreneurs, work in teams and perform different tasks familiarising them with the activities of a company.

An awakening entrepreneur: The objective of these free-choice entrepreneurship studies is to advance the interest towards entrepreneurship awakened within students. Students are provided with the possibility of deepening their understanding of entrepreneurship and the role of an entrepreneur. The free-choice studies deal with the different aspects of entrepreneurship, such as different company forms, the establishment and operations of a

company, customer service, marketing, financial management and taxation. The central point is that students are aware of their development needs on the entrepreneurship path and understand the entrepreneurship possibilities offered by their professional fields. The studies emphasise cooperation between local entrepreneurs.

A starting entrepreneur: The objective of the studies is to learn issues related to the establishment and operations of a company. Currently, the studies are carried out in **Learning Places for Entrepreneurship** (yoppi).

In the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship students are responsible for the operations, production, marketing and finances of a company. Business operations do not constitute the end in itself but they provide students with the possibility of thinking about entrepreneurship and their values and getting familiar with the professional skill requirements of entrepreneurs. Student companies produce services and products similar to real companies but on a substantially smaller scale.

Students are supported by entrepreneurs who act as advisors to and partners of the student companies. Teachers are involved as trainers. They are responsible for the progress of learning and keeping the risks at a sufficiently low level. The studies range from 5 to 10 credits.

A developing entrepreneur provides students establishing or developing their company with the possibility to develop their operations through the entrepreneurs' vocational degree or special vocational degree.

3. LEARNING PLACES FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Learning Places for Entrepreneurship have been developed in cooperation with a number of organisations. Common operational areas include the promotion of entrepreneurship and the development of entrepreneurship education. The operations are carried out in close

interaction between three educational municipal federations and different partners in Central Finland.

Learning Places for Entrepreneurship as models of entrepreneurship education

The development operations of Learning Places for Entrepreneurship are not controlled using a theoretical model but the objective was to follow the learning-by-doing principle in operational planning and implementation and to establish dialogue creating new practices and operational models.

The building process of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship was analysed using an expansive learning cycle where development operations are advanced as a multi-scale spiral, i.e. a learning cycle. The learning cycles leading to significant changes in operational methods last a few months. During the cycles there are unexpected obstacles and steps backwards (Ahlrot et al. 2006, 6).

The expansive learning cycle is divided into seven different acts of learning, the highly simplified order of which is presented below:

1. Questioning the prevailing practices
2. Analysing the prevailing practices
3. Modelling a new solution
4. Studying the new model
5. Introducing the new model
6. Assessing the process
7. Stabilising and expanding the new practice

(Engeström 2004, 60-61).

In practice, the acts of learning do not advance in this order, but all of the stages can be separated from each other. In addition, the duration of the stages differs and they advance as partly overlapping processes. Some stages are returned to frequently. Dialogue between different operators is particularly important for the processes. Acts of learning take place through dialogue. The clash of different perspectives and debate are characteristics of the expansive learning cycle.

The development of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship was divided into two different stages considering chronology and content. At the first stage (2003), the common language and concepts were identified (rather strongly at times), learning entrepreneurship was studied, different models and learning environments were developed and test operations were launched in four Learning Places for Entrepreneurship. At the second stage (2004), the operations were expanded involving new operators from different fields. Each new field introduced new ideas and challenges for further development.

Because the development operations were carried out in cooperation between many different organizations the operations have taken place at a number of levels.

1. **Internal level** (a key operator group, development work carried out within an educational institute and a municipal federation)
2. **Regional level** (a regional development group, mutual development work carried out within a region)
3. **Network level** (a regional network formed by all educational institutes, companies and partners) (Ahlrot et al. 2006, 6)

At the first level each educational institute and municipal federation had to understand the following factors:

- What changes are taking place around us? What is our role among these changes?
- What will be the future vision aimed at through our operations?
- What kind of operation will produce added value to the educational institute?
- Which efforts and investments will keep us involved in practice?
- What are the practical measures we are prepared to commit to?

Critical factors for development include defining the objectives and measures within the educational institute and municipal federation, mapping the available resources (competence, time), agreeing upon responsibilities and complying with the agreed responsibilities. If the aforementioned issues have not been discussed or everyone does not have a clear idea of them, they must be returned to at all stages. This makes cooperation with other parties more difficult, loads single operators and makes commitment to operations slower.

The second level was the regional level, i.e. regional development. Once all issues related to one's own organisation have been identified, discussions and the selection of common development targets can be started with other organisations. In this context, operators included municipal federations developing the Learning Place for Entrepreneurship and their educational institutes and fields of business. The most important task of this group of operators was to learn together and create common information, such as planning and developing guidelines controlling the operations of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship and creating learning methods and operational models supporting the learning of entrepreneurship.

(Ahlrot et al. 2006, 8)

The third level was the network level of Learning Places for Entrepreneurship. Critical factors include not only the formation and stabilisation of the network but also its maintenance and continuous development, both of which often take place through conflicts and irregular situations that are difficult to foresee. In this context, the network level means a regional network formed by all educational institutes, companies and partners (including local associations of entrepreneur organisations, insurance companies and banks). The network acts locally and regionally, enabling the exchange of experiences and learning together. The purpose is to find authentic and continuously developing forms of cooperation between companies, educational institutes and different developers.

When constructing the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship we started to develop a new learning environment for learning entrepreneurship and not only to change previous methods of learning entrepreneurship during studies. The starting point was that the Learning Places were to develop through learning by doing with other students and we did not want them to be completed before starting the operations.

All of the three operator levels took part in the development. This secured the participation and dialogue of all operators at all operational stages. Working methods included joint planning, common training, an entrepreneur council and testing operations. The entrepreneur council is a tool, the purpose of which is to make entrepreneurs share information, experiences and visions regarding issues that are important when building Learning Places for Entrepreneurship. The joint planning was carried out as a common training process between the social services and health industry and the commerce and administration industry. Its first

stage lasted from the beginning of 2003 to the end of the year. The training process consisted of joint regional meetings and municipality-specific work carried out in-between the meetings. Entrepreneurs took part in the development through the entrepreneur council. Students were involved in the development in autumn 2003 when the testing operations were started.

The development work was organised from the beginning so that it would result in a new, stable operational model as part of the educational institute's normal activities. A separate operational key group was established in each municipality, consisting of teachers and educational institutes of commerce and administration as well as of social sciences and health. The task of this key group was to establish a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship, develop its operations, and recruit and guide students. A particularly important task was to secure operational conditions within the organisation together with foremen.

The first step is always the hardest

The first meetings of the training process were disturbing for all of the participants, even stormy for some. None of us knew exactly what we were doing and what kind of a journey we were about to start. It was difficult for some of the teachers that nothing was finished and we needed to build something new out of nothing. There was not a complete model or pedagogy to be applied to the Learning Place for Entrepreneurship. Naturally, the educational institute environment set certain conditions, but we started to boldly envision different possibilities at the planning stage. The prevailing practices were questioned by Villinikkarit Oy, an outside training party. They challenged the participants to inspect the learning of entrepreneurship in educational institutes and questioned the current practices. This engaged those involved in the development in lively and somewhat conflicting discussions that raised tensions.

There were more conflicts when the teachers read documented texts about how the entrepreneurs had commented on the current entrepreneurship teaching practices in the entrepreneur council. The purpose of the entrepreneur council was to make entrepreneurs share information, experiences and visions regarding issues that are important when building Learning Places for Entrepreneurship.

Perhaps this could turn into something?

When the planning stage turned into a more concrete phase, new crucial issues were created. While creating a model supporting entrepreneurship, we ran up against the structures and practical obstacles of educational institutes. It was challenging to find time for teachers and students of two different fields. The doors of the facilities intended for the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship were locked in some educational institutes after the working hours. As a result, it was more difficult for students to work in the evenings and at weekends. The efforts of the entire group of operations were needed to solve these and many other practical problems. However, we were able to start operating without compromising on the most central principles. Concrete operational planning initiated discussions over the rules of the game. It was discussed whether students can establish real companies and where are the lines of power and responsibility between educational institutes and students. Clear regional rules were prepared with the management and the operations were developed within the scope of these rules.

For example, the following guidelines were agreed upon in the steering group's meetings, in which the trainers, principals and educational directors all participated. The steering group also consisted of the managers of all municipal federations.

The principles agreed upon were the following:

- Acting in the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship is part of normal operations of the educational institutes.
- The educational institutes are to appoint facilities for the operations of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship.
- Students can act independently without guidance in tasks for which they have sufficient competence.
- Companies can pay a small rent to the educational institutes for equipment and facilities. The educational institutes will decide upon the amount of and criteria for determining the rent.
- If students can use materials acquired for the educational institutes in their company, they must pay for the materials used in the educational institutes.

- Students will be provided with the possibility to work in the facilities of educational institutes after 4:00 pm.
- Student companies will operate fully independently and be responsible for any financial risks and distribution of earnings. However, the teacher/trainer will be responsible for ensuring that the risks will not be too great.
- The companies' funds will not be circulated through the finances of the educational institutes.
- The companies will invoice their customers using official invoices.

"Yes! We did it!"

In June 2003 there were four complete operating plans for the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship, the operational forms of which were different forms of business operations suitable for the students. Operations were launched in three municipalities in August and September. In Jyväskylä the students of the vocational institute established three "Junior Achievement–Young Enterprise" or JA-YE companies (www.nuoriyrittajyys.fi).

The idea of the operational model is that young people between the ages of 15 and 20 establish small companies and gain experience in the life cycle of a company's operations. The operations last one academic year, at the end of which all operations are terminated. Within the Jyväskylä Vocational Institute two model companies that operated similar to real companies were established, but their financial traffic was directed through a separate cost unit in the institute's accounting. A project workshop was established in Jämsä and Äänekoski. Students planned and carried out projects of different content and extent and were responsible for their finances. All in all, the operations involved more than 60 students and 13 trainers.

Once the operations were started and the new model was introduced, the solution of practical situations and problems was emphasised. The students started to organise and group physical facilities for the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship, establish companies and plan projects. At the same time, the teachers guided the students, planned future operations, considered the rules and guided the students to solve different problems. At this stage, both the students and teachers acted in the middle of insecurity, solved problems and worked hard together.

Common rules were created, operations described and experiences in training were shared through regional cooperation. The students' operations were focused on making projects and implementing business operations.

4 DIFFERENT MODELS, NEW FIELDS

When building the Learning Place for Entrepreneurship network we wanted to develop a continuously renewing operational model that will never be finished. As a result, we accepted new challenges in the form of new operators when transferring to the second stage.

At the second stage, the development work was participated in by commerce and administration, social services and the health, teachers of technology, transportation and natural sciences, the management of the educational institute and students of the Jyväskylä Vocational Institute and the Vocational Institute of Northern Central Finland. The Jämsänkoski Team Academy of the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences left the project at this stage and it was replaced by the department of commerce and administration from the Vocational Training Centre of the Jämsä Region. Development managers of mechanical and metal engineering as well as wood and construction engineering took part in expanding the operations and organising the development operations. Villinikkarit Oy continued as the outside training party and its purpose was to ensure that discussions and development processes will continue.

More setbacks

The new departments took part in training in spring 2004, after which the group's work was restarted. Veterans and newcomers alike started to analyse the future of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship through expanded operations. The process was not started easily but the team had to be developed from the beginning. There had to be discussions about the central factors within the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship and the issues not to be abandoned in operational changes. There were comments such as the following: *"Do we need to go through the same training process again after we have just been able to get the project rolling?"*, or *"OK. Now everything will be all mixed up."*

Once again the regional team proved its strength. During the spring, there were regular meetings where the practical problems faced were shared and discussed. Many problems were solved in discussions with superiors but some required wider discussions within the entire organisation. For example, special discussion within organisations was raised by the selection of the operational model as the operations were expanded. Experience was gained in the suitability of the JA-YE model, model companies and project workshops for learning entrepreneurship. Each model had its strengths and weaknesses. The JA-YE model proved to be a fairly functional and efficient method of learning entrepreneurship. It emphasised all of the sections of real business operations and the basic factors of entrepreneurship education, such as correct operations, learning within companies, risk management and utilisation, networking and creativity.

Within organisations it was discussed whether the JA-YE model or a cooperative should be selected as the operational model. There were experiences of the suitability of the cooperative model for learning entrepreneurship in the College of Social Sciences and Healthcare of the Jyväskylä Vocational Institute and the Muurame Upper Secondary School. These experiences were utilised in discussions over the operational model to be selected. Discussions were also raised by the special features of different fields and their impacts on the business operations practiced by the students. The special features were brought up in the form of investments related to starting business operations. For example, the students of building engineering had to have a car and mobile equipment for practising their business operations.

However, the special features were visible in questions over responsibilities. If the students of building engineering take part in different building stages, the responsibilities for structural durability may be in effect for a long period. These conflicts and differences raised new discussions and expanded the target of operations, i.e. learning entrepreneurship.

In addition to the rules, common learning started to produce information about the basic factors of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship, i.e. the factors that remain stable and common to all Learning Places for Entrepreneurship. These factors made sure that it is possible to learn entrepreneurship.

The basic factors identified together were partially the same, but it was not enough to process these issues at a theoretical level. Only through discussions and experiences were we able to accept and use these basic factors. The basic operational factors, the operational model and

the instructions for operators have been compiled during the operations. This information will produce manuals for the students, teachers and the management of the educational institute. This will secure the transfer of data to all those requiring the information as well as the expansion and spreading of the operations.

New learning places

As a result of discussions and development operations, six operational plans for Learning Places for Entrepreneurship were created in six municipalities, of which Jämsänkoski, Saarijärvi and Viitasaari were new. JA-YE companies, a model company and cooperative operations were selected as the operational models.

Because the objective of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship was to act as a network of entrepreneurship skills and cooperation between companies was regarded as a very significant condition at the analysis stage, the issue was emphasised at the expansion stage. If there is no cooperation between companies, the risk is that we will be introspective learning environments inside educational institutes that have little to do with real entrepreneurship. A sponsor or partner company with which the students cooperated at different operational stages was appointed to each student company.

At the end of 2004 and the end of the second operational period, more than 30 teachers, representatives from 11 fields, 140 students and 20 appointed partner companies were carrying out the operations. The businesses started to be visible within the educational institutes, in the operations of teachers and students, in partner companies outside the institutes and among the customers of the student companies. The organizations started to change and accept the operations of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship as part of their own operations.

At this stage, the challenges were directed to operational expansion. The objective was that the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship will annually provide 500 students with the possibility of learning entrepreneurship by doing.

5. REAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A RESULT

Real learning and doing together

Learning entrepreneurship is guided by factors common to all Learning Places for Entrepreneurship and permanent basic factors that must be preserved even if the operations are changed. These basic factors are real entrepreneurship, **individuals, communities and trainers**. In addition to these factors, there are a group of factors changing according to situations, such as operational models, learning methods and operator networks, etc. However, the basic factors must create stable conditions so that the development and change of operations corresponding to the needs of each area is possible.

Doing together and development are not possible without practical activities. Concrete operations create visions and ideas, break boundaries, gain experiences and help to take responsibilities.

In the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship, students establish a multi-field company as a team. They are responsible for all of the establishment stages, such as the development of the business idea and products, the definition of customers, the selection of a name for the company, the founders of the company and its work division (the appointment of a managing director, marketing director and others), insurance, registrations and any documents related to the establishment. Once the business operations have been started, the students will acquire the capital required to start the operations by investing or acquiring other funding, such as performing odd jobs deviating from their business idea. Then they will market their business idea and try to find customers. When practising already started business operations, the students will be responsible for all risks, products/services, customers, payments and the company's finances.

“Entrepreneurship studies are often read from books but this method shows how business operations are managed in practice. This is a more efficient and motivating method of learning,” said a student of a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship.

Students are trained in taking responsibility to themselves within suitable limits and solving problems in changing situations. Students also terminate their business operations by

terminating the company (JA-YE model), selling their share in the company (cooperatives) or making a financial statement (model companies). When all of the company's earnings and expenses are noted and calculated the fruit of success can be picked, i.e. the profit can be distributed as agreed. ***“The small capital invested in the company was recovered and we made some financial profit. We are on the credit side,”*** said one student of a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship.

The trainers, students and assessing entrepreneurs involved in the activities thought that the pedagogy of learning by doing and experience-based learning create a natural starting point for entrepreneurship education. The following comments describe the experiences gained and thoughts raised from the point of view of trainers and entrepreneurs.

“Business operations can only be learned efficiently by doing in practice. The most important issues seem to be teaching and learning commitment and responsibilities: the students realised that they have to do everything themselves,” said a trainer of a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship.

“The entrepreneurship concept cannot be learned without learning financial affairs. Entrepreneurship is a possibility to earn one's living. It is also a possibility to make money if customer relationships are handled very well. It is always difficult to put a price on work. Therefore it is important to practice whenever possible,” said a sponsor entrepreneur of a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship.

Students have regarded learning by doing in Learning Places for Entrepreneurship as positive and motivating. They emphasised the role of independent working. In the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship they were able to and had to be responsible for their learning and doing. According to the students, they often fall back on teachers too easily. Taking responsibility results in confidence, faith in one's own actions, development and competence. Everyone has started to take more responsibility as the project has advanced. However, the students feel that the teachers' guidance resources and presence could be increased. Similarly, personal feedback is felt to be important. The following comment by a student summarises the basic idea behind the operations: ***“Everyone has realised that we mean business.”***

Individuals

All communities consist of individuals and all individuals enter communities with their skills, competence, attitudes and self-confidence. Each member of a community must be treated as an individual. Individuals grow by testing their limits, exceeding their attitudes, becoming part of a group and sharing their competence with others. Trainers have an important role in supporting each individual along the path of personal growth. After individuals learn to take responsibility for themselves, they can be assumed to take responsibility for tasks and other people. The Learning Places for Entrepreneurship are aimed at supporting this growth by slowly increasing the responsibilities of students through establishing a company and starting and practising business operations.

Studying in a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship requires that students have both self-discipline and time management skills, which train students to plan their work and tasks for future working life or business operations. When starting their studies students have very different qualifications for independent study. In Learning Places for Entrepreneurship trainers and the whole community guide students towards active learning and development by taking responsibility. As a result, the entire team will support the growth of individuals into professionals (Leinonen, Partanen and Palviainen 2002, 128). In particular, being active and self-discipline are emphasised for entrepreneurs. As entrepreneurs, people are active operators for whom entrepreneurship is a method of thinking, acting and taking an attitude towards working.

Groups formed by students (companies, members of cooperatives) do not prevent individual performances or the development of self-control because a significant part of learning by doing is the consideration and utilisation of different business fields, individuals and individual skills and practices. The group acts as a good educational medium for the development of the different qualities of its members as students help each other to identify their strengths through work distribution and the division of responsibility areas.

Students' growth towards self-disciplined professionals taking responsibility for their actions is described by a trainer involved in the activities as follows: *"All in all, we have received good experiences after the first year. The method seems to be functional in many ways. The professional confidence of students increased. Similarly, working in different*

environments, such as in customers' facilities, developed. It was also obvious that cooperation skills improved and self-confidence increased. Towards the end students also started to take more responsibility.”

Communities

A community refers to the entire group of operators who work in a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship, i.e. students, teachers, entrepreneurs, customers and other partners from different fields. A community provides individuals with security and possibilities for development. A community often has the competence required. A community must create common rules and agree upon practical operations. Learning Places for Entrepreneurship have separate operating methods and each established company agrees upon their rules.

A community helps students, particularly at the beginning of operations, to plan their objectives and assess their operations. At first, the objectives are set together with other students and trainers but slowly everyone learns to set their own objectives and assess them independently.

A community must have a common physical space, i.e. a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship, which creates the conditions for being together, planning common projects and meeting customers. In addition to the physical space, it must be ensured that all operators can meet at the same time every week. In practice, this means that the timetables of students and teachers must be adjusted in vocational institutes. Learning Places for Entrepreneurship also act as unofficial meeting places for students. This is very important for successful communities. Learning is present in the lives of learners comprehensively – not only in a specific and authorised space or at a certain time of day.

Operational variety is increased because the students and trainers come from a number of different business fields. At the early stages, the team members may find it difficult to trust each other and decide only to do their own share. However, the establishment of companies forces the students and trainers of different fields to work together in order to reach the common objective. From this point, doing and learning together will be started. The trainers and students felt that the representation of numerous fields and acting in a group advanced learning.

This was described by a trainer as follows: *”The advantages of many fields is that we can work in a group with other trainers. It is a major possibility compared to traditional teaching and it creates new type of interest in working. Enthusiasm spreads across boundaries meaning that us trainers learn from each other. The representation of many fields makes it possible to guide students other than those from one’s own field. Through the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship and a new type of cooperation we can get rid of “Sunday anxiety” which all of us have felt on Sundays thinking about Mondays as working days.”*

Students felt that it has been pleasant to meet new people and the teams have worked well together. Roles within the teams have been identified naturally and the students have learned to utilise the competence within the teams. In addition to their own competence, the students have learned from other professional fields.

Trainers

The task of trainers, i.e. teachers working in the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship, is to create conditions for learning. In addition, their task is to encourage and help individual students and the entire group to work and learn together. They must ensure that the students’ challenges advance learning and the risks are suitable for the students. Trainers must be committed to developing entrepreneurship education and to the students working in the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship throughout the operating period. It is important that students feel safe in continuously changing situations.

All operations take place in cooperation and it is possible for students and trainers to learn from others. However, the instructor is always at the heart of changes, boldly taking the new paths with the students. *”The initial stages seem to demand a lot from trainers: for example, a sufficient amount of time must be reserved for grouping and we need to invent factors that create the sense of community. The initial stages also require organisational skills and basic information about business operations. It would be good if even one trainer had experience in entrepreneurship. There should be versatile skills: professional skills and information (e.g. technology or social sciences and health) and general skills related to entrepreneurship (marketing, billing, law). Networks have been very helpful:*

representatives of business life should be taken along,” said one trainer of a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship.

The task of a trainer is to emphasise that learning is not about giving the correct or incorrect answers but about utilising experiences gained through doing and experimenting in learning, i.e. reflecting and developing one’s own understanding and competence. There usually is not one right and many wrong answers. Every person and each situation is different and learners should learn the suitable operating methods and find methods suitable for different situations.

Experiments with new concepts always involve the risk of failure. The trainer’s task is to explain that it is not always dangerous to fail or make mistakes; instead, they are a natural part of learning. Often a mistake is a sign that a person has had the courage to experiment with something new instead of repeating the same practices. The objective of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship is to learn and create new information and operations. As a result, the task of trainers is to guide students in taking an active role in learning situations.

Trainers also can and should take the role of a learner — they can also experiment and make mistakes and try to learn from them. Problems are to be solved together and experiences are to be learned from together.

”A trainer shouldn’t take too large a part in the students’ affairs: the will to do must come from within the model company. A trainer is to have flexibility and vision to see how to act in each situation. Trainers cannot always act like teachers, but they also need to act like entrepreneurs. In addition, they must be truly interested and willing to do things differently. It would be good to let go of the teachers’ cardinal sin, or playing it too safe, and put up with uncertainty,” said a trainer of a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship.

Students considered the role of the instructor to be significant. The students appreciate precise guidance, a happy and positive attitude and giving space to the thinking of students.

These are also emphasised by Jorma Nokkala, an entrepreneur and Industrial Counsellor: *“Teachers must be put through a special treatment so that they will first start to act like entrepreneurs and then transfer the operating methods to students.”*

6. NEW CHALLENGES

The operations of a Learning Place for Entrepreneurship are built so that they enable continuous development and encourage the changing of time limits and performance requirements related to the traditional school context as well as the structural and cultural factors of educational institutes. Development operations advance in cycles: they spread within educational institutes, between educational institutes and in networks around Central Finland.

Factors maintaining continuous development and renewal include diversification and cooperation between many different organisations. These factors cause new conflicts and situations to be solved. This enables that issues and situations can be inspected continuously and operations developed to correspond better to continuously changing needs. Interaction will be the requirement and resource of development. Conflicts can be endured better when their positive effect on operational development is taken into consideration.

Network operations have become closer to network benchmarking operations, including planned and object-oriented cooperation between at least two organisations. The objective is to develop new best practices and operational models together and by learning from others. This operational method will be one of the most central methods when developing the Learning Place for Entrepreneurship network in the future.

In autumn 2004, the operations received a significant challenge and a permission to remain part of the educational institute's normal operations. The common objective was that, starting from autumn 2005, the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship would annually provide 500 students with the possibility of experimenting with business operations and networking by learning by doing. As a result, it will be possible to have a permanent effect on the operations of the organisations and develop the educational institutes to respond better to the challenges set for vocational education. One nationally recognised development target for educational institute organisations is diversification and diverse cooperation in order to develop entrepreneurship. Operations within the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship create a significant possibility for developing the competence of students and organisations towards diversification and comprehensiveness.

The networks and cooperation of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship have been expanded to include general upper secondary schools. The first diversified entrepreneurship course worth one study week has been carried out in the Pihtipudas Upper Secondary School, where the majority of studying is carried out through a data network. Networking with other parties developing entrepreneurship education has been started at a national level.

One of the objectives was internationalisation, which is also a central challenge in Finnish business life and entrepreneurship. The development of internationalisation qualifications during studies is very important, for which the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship offer a natural operational environment.

New teachers and students were recruited during the operational period (2005). Power Point recruitment material was prepared to support the process. Students involved in the operations have also taken part in the recruitment of new students.

During the operational period, active operators included a total of 50 teachers/trainers, 20 superiors, 40 companies, 342 students (240 students terminated their operations in May (2005) and 200 students started their operations in August), 5 development managers and a part-time project secretary.

7. LEARNING PLACES FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS PART OF OPERATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES

The 46 student companies operational during the 2005–2006 period terminated operating in full or for the summer. A hair salon continued its operations during the summer as a proprietorship providing employment and utilising its valuable customer contacts.

During August, new companies were established and there were about 50 new companies. JA-YE companies were established for the first time in Jämsä in horticulture as well as social services and health. Two entire classes were engaged in business operations through cooperative operations. One of the groups was in the hair care industry and the other in commerce and administration.

Starting from August, all teacher-trainers in the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship were working using the resources of educational institutes.

The Ministry of Education has prepared bases of a curriculum for entrepreneurship studies of 20 study weeks emphasising learning by doing and operational models, such as JA-YE companies and model companies that have been operating in the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship for a few years. This will provide even better possibilities for developing and expanding the operations of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial-minded operations were also visible in other educational areas through increased project activities in educational institutes. In many institutes, students worked in working life-related projects in a self-disciplined manner under the guidance of teachers. As students are responsible for project planning, implementation and assessment in groups, they will be trained in many skills required in working life, such as cooperation skills, organisational skills, taking customers into account, acting in irregular situations, creativity and the ability to take risks. These skills also represent an entrepreneurial-minded operational method.

International operations are launched

International operations were started during the 2005 period. Two trainers took part in an international JA-YE fair organised in Denmark. The objective was to create contacts and identify any cooperation countries, with which closer cooperation was started.

Contacts were made with operators from Norway, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany and Denmark. It became obvious that JA-YE operations are very wide and of high-quality in Europe. The products and services of JA-YE companies do not need to be incredible and complex; instead, clear, useful and simple products sell the best. JA-YE is a wide international operational network providing operators with possibilities to expand and deepen cooperation between JA-YE companies and with resources to develop international operations through student exchange and international periods of learning at work, etc.

The Leonardo programme has also received funding for international operations. Twenty-two students of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship had the possibility for an international period of on-the-job-training in a foreign company and training in the operations of organisations supporting the business activities in the destination country. Twelve trainers had the possibility of visiting the destination countries before the students or going to the

countries with the students. The countries are Poland, Estonia, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Malta.

A regional office of the Junior Achievement–Young Enterprise was established under the business school of the Jyväskylä Vocational Institute on 1 August 2005. The business school has had a strong impact on the JA-YE's A Year as an Entrepreneur programme, being selected as the model of entrepreneur education at the vocational institute level. The purpose of the JA-YE regional office is to develop and guide JA-YE operations regionally and act as an information centre.

The regional office coordinates JA-YE operations in the Central Finland region, communicates JA-YE operations regionally and spreads information about JA-YE programmes to schools within the region, the Finnish National Board of Education and other interest groups.

In addition, the regional office acts as a local information and support centre for teachers who use the JA-YE study programmes in their teaching.

The Central Finland JA-YE regional office organized the national JA-YE fair in Jyväskylä on 31 January – 1 February 2008. 60 companies, about 250 students (exhibitors) and about 50 teachers participated in the fair.

Communications and material

Reporting the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship is part of normal operations of educational institutes. Reporting is supported by the websites of municipal federations, a magazine for the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship and a DVD. The Life Cycle of Entrepreneurship and online material has been prepared during the 2006 operational period.

8 CURRENT STATUS AND OBJECTIVES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP STUDIES

The popularity of the entrepreneur school is increasing. All young vocational students in Central Finland will be familiarised with entrepreneurship and hundreds of students will advance their studies in the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship by establishing a company.

Currently, 500 students learn entrepreneurship in one hundred companies every year. Our region has 50 entrepreneurship teacher-trainers.

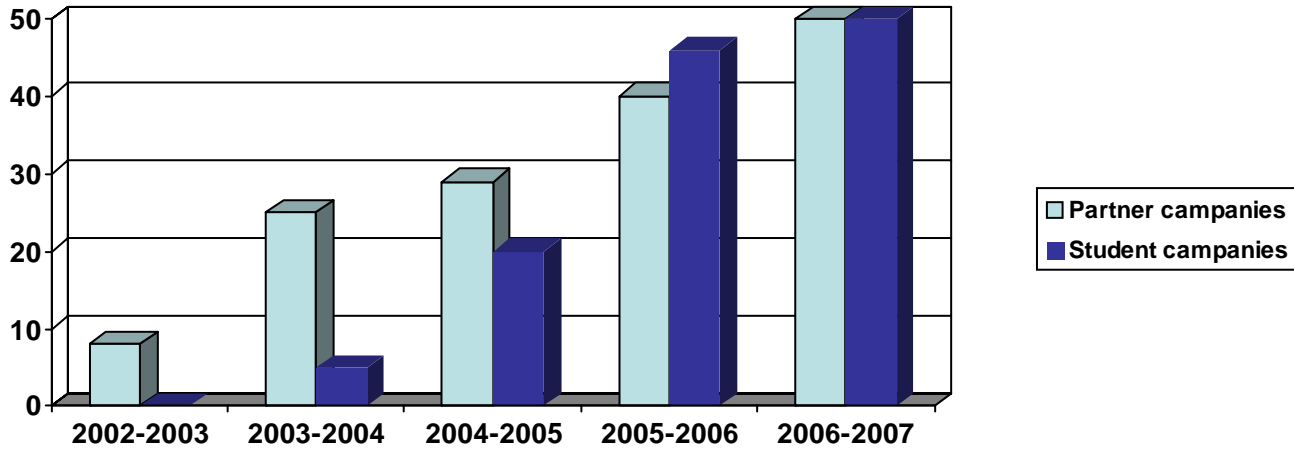


Table 1. The number of JA-YE companies 2002-2007

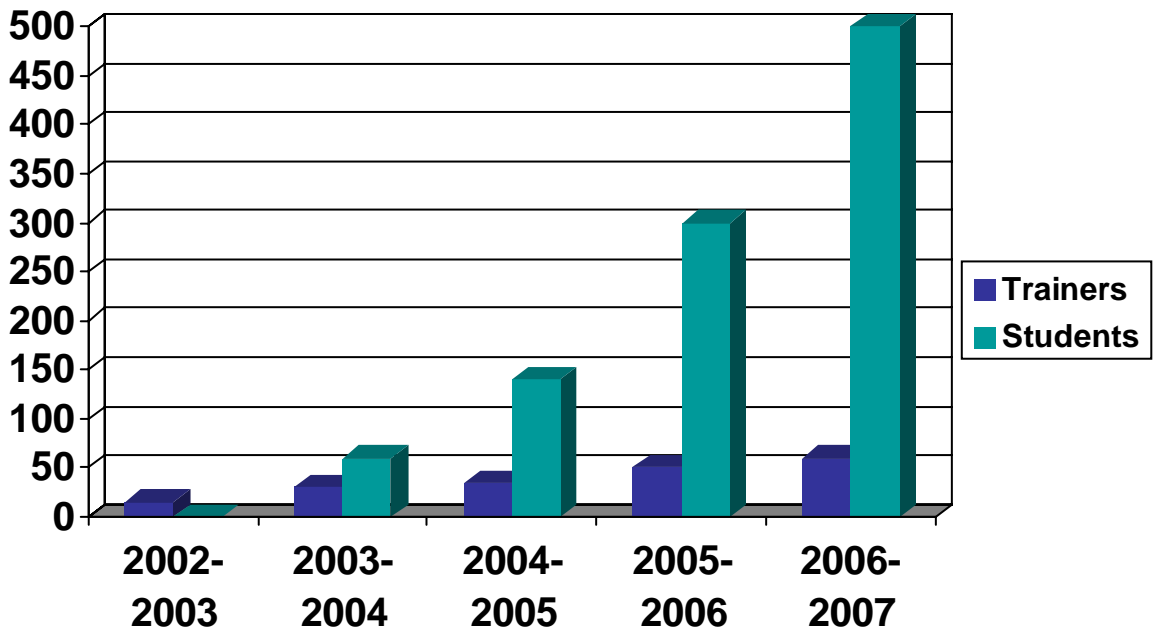


Table 2. The number of students and trainers 2002-2007

Student recruitment will take place in April and trainers are marketing JA-YE operations together with the current students and guidance counsellors. The best way to arouse the interest of young people is to have young entrepreneurs share their experiences.

Similarly, new trainers will be needed and the current trainers will help in finding and recruiting new ones.

The planning of the 2008–2009 academic year will be started and new fields are welcome to take part in the operations.

The objective of the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship is to increase the number of people becoming entrepreneurs in Central Finland. As a result, the operations must be developed further so that it will be as flexible as possible to continue business operations and transfer to entrepreneurship after studies. In order for the Learning Places for Entrepreneurship to renew continuously in cycles developing entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship pedagogy, we need to create operational models for renewing competence and operations.

The JA-YE model is regarded as a clear, safe and well-produced concept well suited for young people. Junior Achievement–Young Enterprise is an international mode with a clear structure that is developed for young people's entrepreneurship education.

The heart of the entire JA-YE process is learning by doing. The entrepreneurship learning process is more important than the idea of services and products.

Vocational education in Central Finland has started to develop a network of Learning Places for Entrepreneurship and respond to the Industrial Counsellor Jorma Nokkala's challenge of raising entrepreneurship to the top of the society through cooperation.

The objective is to turn Central Finland into the most entrepreneur-active region in the world.

“Entrepreneurship forms the basis for the development of a growing and structurally developing region. Companies and entrepreneurs change, the changing business environment and the globalising market create new business opportunities, companies require internal entrepreneurship and, above all, new young people who regard entrepreneurship as a possible way of living.” (Ahlrot et al. 2006, 8)

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