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WORKSHOPS IN EDUCATION: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES¹

ABSTRACT: In the educational context, the term ‘workshop’ refers to a type of educational programme generally designed for a group of people, in which the content is practical, specific to the needs, interests and affinities of the group, and which enables cooperation and mutual support among participants. Workshops usually consist of a series of specifically tailored activities represented in the form of an intensive interactive educational programme or training, varying in length and content. Workshops can vary widely in their explicit and implicit goals, as well as strategies, methods and techniques employed. The orientation of workshop, the results it is designed to achieve, its objectives and positioning are key aspects in distinguishing different types of workshops and that will be the focus of this paper along with the basic knowledge teachers are required to have in order to organize workshops in the 21st century educational context.

Keywords: workshops, organization of workshops, types of workshops, characteristics of workshops, structure of workshops, trainer competences, digital competences, information and communication technologies.

RADIONICE U OBRAZOVANJU: TEORIJSKI I PRAKTIČNI ASPEKTI

APSTRAKT: U obrazovnom kontekstu pojam radionice se odnosi na vrstu obrazovnog programa koji se generalno osmišljava za grupu ljudi, pri čemu je sadržaj praktičan, odnosi se na specifične potrebe, interese i afinitete grupe polaznika i omogućava saradnju i međusobnu podršku među učesnicima. Radionice se obično sastoje od niza posebno osmišljenih aktivnosti koje se potom stavljaju u okvir intenzivnog interaktivnog obrazovnog programa ili obuke koji može da ima različite dužine trajanja i sadržaje. Radionice se mogu razlikovati u velikoj meri po svojim eksplicitnim i implicitnim ciljevima, kao i po

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strategijama, metodama i tehnikama koje se koriste. Orijentacija radionica, rezultati koji treba da se postignu, ciljevi i početna pozicija su ključni aspekti u diferenciranju različitih tipova radionica i to će biti fokus rada, kao i osnovna znanja koja nastavnici/treneri koji organizuju radionice u obrazovnom kontekstu XXI veka moraju da imaju.

Ključne reči: radionice, organizovanje radionica, tipovi i karakteristike radionica, struktura radionica, kompetencije nastavnika, digitalne kompetencije, informaciono-komunikacione tehnologije.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the educational context, the term ‘workshop’ refers to a type of educational programme generally designed for a group of people, in which the content is practical, specific to the needs, interests and affinities of the group, and which enables cooperation and mutual support among participants. Workshops usually consist of a series of specifically tailored activities represented in the form of an intensive interactive educational programme or training, varying in length and content. They can range from one-hour briefings to several days’ trainings and concentrate on a defined subject, the acquisition of specific skills, attitudes, and knowledge, as well as the exchange of experience among the participants.

The workshop format is an ideal means to engage students, emphasize interaction, and promote active participation and motivation to gain a deeper understanding of a topic in school. It offers an opportunity for students to extend the perspectives of their normal learning and to develop a variety of skills and competences. Furthermore, it is a dynamic and practical approach which helps students to be equal, active and to learn one from another.

Although some of the main objectives of all workshops are the development of group cohesion, creating a positive atmosphere in the group and mutual respect, as well as the feeling of belonging to the group, and the encouragement of involvement and better acceptance of an individual, workshops can vary widely in their explicit and implicit goals, as well as strategies, methods and techniques employed (Gudykunst et al. 1996; Titley 2002). The orientation of workshop, the results it is designed to achieve, its objectives and positioning are key aspects in distinguishing different types of workshops (Ferdman & Brody 1996) and that will be the focus of this paper along with the competences of the teachers to organize workshops in the 21st century educational context.

2. WORKSHOPS: TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS

On the basis of the criteria mentioned in the previous section, all workshops can be divided into two broad categories: creative workshops and educational workshops (Kovač-Cerović et al. 2000: 50). Creative workshops aim at encouraging and reaching divergent expression in the broadest sense. Within this type, the most popular are drama, poetry and video workshops. Educational workshops, on the

other hand, aim at the acquisition of knowledge in the broadest sense. This type of workshops can be divided into three groups: cognitive or educational workshops in the narrow sense, preventive workshops, and social skills development workshops.

Cognitive or educational workshops, in the narrow sense, target acquiring knowledge, developing skills, directing and encouraging cognitive processes such as adopting learning strategies, articulating opinions, the ability of argumentation, and so forth. Secondly, preventive workshops are psychological workshops that aim at personality and identity development and expressing emotions. These workshops are educational because they aim at acquiring knowledge and gaining various insights (e.g. about the self and the other, relationships, etc.). Finally, social skills development workshops focus on improving social skills, for example, the skills needed for constructive conflict management. These workshops are actually a combination of the previous two groups of educational workshops, i.e. cognitive and preventive ones. Besides encouraging the understanding of one's needs and self-awareness, the aim of this type of workshops is becoming aware of basic communication phenomena and principles (such as verbal and nonverbal messages, stereotypes and prejudices) as well as influencing the understanding of conflict situations and exploring strategies for their resolution.

Although workshops can be of different types, most of them have several features in common. Firstly, they have a purpose, clearly defined aims and are planned to produce clearly defined results. Furthermore, they are realistic in so far that their aims must be achievable and the subject should derive from the living circumstances of students and correspond to their interests. They are also limited in time and space since they have a beginning and an end and are implemented in a specific place and context. In addition, they are complex and call on various planning and implementation skills and involve various participants (the facilitator(s) and the focus group). They are also collective as they involve teamwork and attend to the needs and interests of others. Workshops help participants feel part of a special "learning community" and create a certain team spirit. They are unique, innovative and creative since they provoke a specific response to a need or problem in a specific context, and they can be assessed because they are planned and divided into measurable aims, which can be evaluated. Finally, workshops have a structure and are made up of a series of activities with distinct, identifiable phases. The body of workshops is built on specific content elements and methods, which are holistic and process-oriented, participatory and learner-centred, based on experience and action, start from the needs of participants and involve individual and group learning with a collective approach (Ferdman & Brody 1996; Martinelli & Taylor 2000; Titley 2002).

3. STRUCTURE OF WORKSHOPS

Each workshop consists of different phases. Therefore, good planning at the very beginning is crucial, bearing in mind all the characteristics mentioned in the

previous section. The more carefully the phases of the workshop are described and planned right at the beginning, the more likely it is that the workshop will be successful. According to CTB (2018), each workshop has three main phases that need to be carefully followed: the planning phase, the implementation phase, and the follow-up.

3.1. The Planning Phase

Planning a successful workshop demands a lot of work. If enough time is spent on thinking through the details and if all the steps are followed, the workshop will be useful for all participants. First of all, planning should begin with broad concepts and organizers should then work down toward the details. Deciding on content elements (or what the topic(s) the workshop should address) is the first real step in planning and preparing a workshop. Once the topic is decided on, planning and drafting a workshop can start. A written plan helps to provide clarity and direction for everyone involved in the workshop. It summarizes the expected outcomes of the planning process and provides an overview of the objectives, planned activities, and results. It contains a timetable, lists skills and competences, can and should be altered and adjusted if necessary, and serves as a practical tool for the implementation phase as well as for the follow-up.

3.2. The Implementation Phase

The second phase of a workshop is implementation. According to Green (n.d.: 7), implementation is “doing”, or “delivering a well-planned learning experience that is relevant and interesting to the target group” (n.d.: p.7). It is a work stage characterized by: (1) a step-by-step guidance, (2) actively involved participants, (3) common work on a subject, (4) intensive communication developing on the workshop topic, (5) the trainer’s facilitation of the learning process, (6) methods and techniques employed to secure the outcomes, (7) monitoring and evaluation.

A workshop, especially a longer one, has three distinct phases, as stated by CTB (2018): the introduction, the substance of the workshop, and the closure. The introduction “covers the time when the first participant walks into the room when the first topic-related activity begins.” (CTB 2018). The welcome, introduction and getting to know each other phase is useful at the beginning. Participants are welcomed to the workshop, and personal, thematic, and technical introductions are made. This period overlaps with a concerted group-building phase, crucial for stimulating integration, building trust and encouraging participation. Group building is also the first step in recognizing and working with differences. This phase serves to build a sense of community within the group. Sharing experiences intensifies these aims by giving participants opportunities to share their backgrounds and become aware of the scope of other participants. While sharing

experiences should be present in all phases of the workshop, concentrating on it at this stage establishes the principle of working from the particular to the general, while also creating room for identity negotiations. The process of group building is inherent in determining the programme flow of a particular workshop, as it is likely that the group will go through various stages of cohesion and motivation throughout the whole programme.

The goal of the introductory part of implementation is to create an open and communicative atmosphere and interactive nature of the workshop. This can be achieved by the trainer, whose role is to set a positive, polite and welcoming tone and make the participants feel comfortable, thus receiving support in overcoming their initial insecurity. Other roles of the trainer are to introduce himself/herself to the participants, to help them to get to know each other and the expectations of the workshop, to introduce them to the theme and key ideas of the workshop, to guide and provoke their thinking and listen to them carefully, to clarify the basic code of conduct, i.e. how the participants work together and treat each other (Ferdman & Brody 1996; Kovač-Cerović et al. 2000; Titley 2002). At the very beginning, this can be achieved by setting the tone, greeting the participants as they enter the room, and making personal introductions. Then, an overview of the workshop is presented. It can include a description of the workshop, its purpose and the trainer's expectations. This previewing the programme and asking for feedback on it makes the participants active, including them in the conduct of the session. It also gives them a sense of anticipation, so that they get interested in what comes next and lets them know what will happen at a particular time thus creating a safe atmosphere. Another possibility could be that the participants express their expectations of the workshop. This helps the trainer understand the needs and expectations of the participants. It also makes it easier for the participants to establish some goals for the workshop and involve them even more in the handling of the workshop. Their expectations can be written on a flip chart and reviewed at the end of the session.

After arousing the workshop expectations, the group formulates basic ground rules as a code of conduct for all participants. Some ground rules are essential and obligatory and given by the trainer if the group members do not propose them, whereas others are optional and suggested by the participants themselves. The essential ground rules deal with the acceptable behaviour of the participants and refer to: respect, i.e. everyone should be treated with respect and no verbal or physical abuse, inappropriate and offensive language and/or behaviour is acceptable; space, i.e. everyone should have ample time and space for what they need to express; care, i.e. participants should be sensitive to other group members, to feel welcome to express their own thoughts, feelings and beliefs, listen deeply, be open to new information, try to understand a different perspective, be non-judgmental, encouraging and positive, and make remarks constructively; confidentiality, i.e. participants should feel free to say things they wish, because everything said during the workshop stays in confidence. These rules can be posted on the board or a flip chart.

The trainer can also elicit additional ground rules from the group that they would like to abide by. These rules can include suggestions such as: everyone is welcome to speak and participate at their own comfort level, no one should feel obliged to say anything that could make them feel uneasy and anxious, everyone is encouraged to take some risks to challenge their own prejudices and biases, everyone should have fun. These rules are added to the list of the essential ground rules, so that they can be reviewed at the end of the session.

Following the clarification of the code of conduct, a name game can be used. Very often the trainer takes part in this activity as well. Name games belong to a group of short, fun, and simple activities called ice-breakers that are used as a method for introducing the team members and getting to know each other. The aim of these activities is to get the group warmed up, stimulate interaction and communication between the participants, generate interest in group members to cooperate, and arouse positive group feeling at the beginning of a session.

The substance of the workshop includes the presentation and the activities, or the actual “doing”. What is done here depends on the trainer’s planning. A typical workshop has two components: technical, giving a theoretical input, and applied, in which practical outputs are produced. The participants are introduced to these two parts both didactically as well as experientially.

There are some general guidelines that can make a workshop more enjoyable and effective (CTB 2018; Titley 2002). These guidelines include:

1. managing time, which includes giving time markers every now and then and taking care when one is departing from the plan;
2. giving clear instructions;
3. maintaining the consistency of the presentation and the workshop’s theme, or matching the presentation to the content and philosophy of the workshop;
4. using a variation of methods and activities in both the technical and applied parts, such as hands-on activities where people can be physically active, both group and individual work, various kinds of audio-visual material, innovative ways of presenting the material directly (a play, cartoon, or a song). The variation speaks to differences in learning styles and will make the workshop more interesting and fun for the trainer and participants;
5. trying to be entertaining and designing the activities in such a manner, for example, using humour;
6. being enthusiastic: if the trainer feels enthusiastic, he/she should show it; it will have an impact on the participants;
7. encouraging the participants to make a connection between the workshop content and their reality;
8. debriefing and evaluation, or allowing plenty of time to reflect on all activities, and complete them. People often need to talk and think through their experiences or new information in order to understand them. In addition, participants also have a chance to share their opinions.

The goal of the substance of the workshop is to offer numerous kinds of activities to the participants they can use to learn the concepts related to the workshop topic and to keep the interactive nature of the workshop.

In the substance of the workshop, longer activities have three stages: presentation and practice, sharing and transfer, and reflection. At the presentation and practice stage, the main theoretical points of the workshop are communicated to the participants. What is most important here for the participants is to create a basis of their knowledge which they should develop later. They receive the basic knowledge of a new concept. The participants are expected to show their previous knowledge on a certain subject and connect those new ideas and materials with the existing ones. In order to acquire meaningful and critical understanding, the group members must actively participate in the process of learning.

In the stage of sharing and transfer, active participation means that the participants must be aware of their opinions and how they express their knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, points of view, and understanding by active thinking, writing and/or speaking. This part makes the participants think about the topic and their relationship to it. Here, opinions, beliefs, experiences, knowledge and attitudes are tackled.

During reflection, also called final discussion, participants revise their ideas in order to fit in the new knowledge, improve it and attach their perception to it. Reflection is the key to learning so participants should reflect on each part of the activity by discussing it with the group and sharing what they have done and learnt, and by expressing how important it is to them.

The closure or the final phase of the implementation has two parts: reflection of the whole workshop and its evaluation. The goal of the closure is to review what has been done and learnt in the workshop, to discuss the encountered challenges, propose plans for facing the challenges, and evaluate the whole workshop from the point of view of all the participants (the group members and trainer), with the intention of improving the strategy and the way of functioning.

Reflection includes the revision of the major points of the workshop and the identification of the areas and issues that were not tackled, if any. The list of expectations from the beginning of the workshop should be revisited, checked if they were appropriate and met, and if they were not, the gaps should be identified. The feedback on the ideas, techniques, methods, etc. that the trainer presented should also be given. The participants are expected to react to what they have experienced, learnt, and liked in the workshop, and name one thing that they would change about it. This can be done by a formal activity designed for this purpose or by raising some questions and listening to what the participants have to say. This is also a kind of an ongoing evaluation of the workshop carried out by all participants (both the trainer and the group members). It helps to further develop and refine the workshop and to raise the awareness of the learning process and experience. The results of the reflection and evaluation are used for the phase following the completion of the workshop.

Another way to evaluate the workshop is to create an evaluation form as a means of personal or participants' evaluation. Evaluation forms are questionnaires that are distributed to the participants and collected after being filled out at the end of the workshop. The standard is usually a multiple choice form that either asks participants to rate each aspect of the workshop from 1 to 5 or to tick one of five choices ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The goals of this kind of evaluation are to collect feedback from the workshop participants on the most and least significant aspects of the workshop, gather the information for its improvement, and explore the participants' opinions and impressions of the session covering the clarity of the trainer's presentation, the usefulness of each of the various kinds of activities, the relevance of the context to the participants, and general comments, if any.

At the very end, the participants should be thanked for participating actively in the workshop and for the interest they showed in the topic.

3.3. Follow-Up

Follow-up is the third phase of a workshop. Its purpose is to examine whether the workshop was a success. In the follow-up, the evaluation of the whole workshop should be carried out, its outcomes determined and analyzed, and their value judged. "Evaluation should serve to inform and enhance the teaching and learning process, by identifying and meeting specific needs, providing feedback on teaching strategies and on learning process and outcomes, making the necessary adjustments on time" (Aguado et al. 2002: 133). Evaluation includes measurement and expressing opinions on the output and impact of the workshop in terms of the objectives, and it determines a workshop's relevance, effectiveness, and benefits. It helps one to assess the quality and impact of the work done against the strategic plan.

It has already been pointed out that evaluation begins prior to and continues during and at the end of the workshop teaching and learning process. The evaluation of the trainer's assessment of participants' needs and expectations at the beginning of the workshop is necessary to know where one stands. During the workshop, the participants and the trainer evaluate themselves, each other, and the training process.

An ongoing evaluation covers the evaluation of the whole workshop, including the process (activities, duration, progress, challenges, solutions), the analysis of its purpose and objectives, measuring progress towards the objectives, a kind of approach used to collect the information that will be later organized, analyzed, and communicated in the findings.

The evaluation of the whole process serves to identify problems and their causes in the planning and/or implementation phase, try to find possible solutions to those problems, keep what is good and discard what is not, make adjustments in the defined plan next time the workshop is conducted, provide the trainer with information and insight, act in accordance with the information and insight, help the trainer to reflect on the direction of the workshop and its methodology, and secure

positive results and impact of the workshop. Therefore, both the process and the product should be part of one's evaluation.

Process evaluation covers efficiency, effectiveness, and impact.

Efficiency tells you that the input into the work is appropriate in terms of the output. Effectiveness is a measure of the extent to which a development programme achieves the specific objectives set. Impact tells you whether or not what you did made a difference to the problem situation you were trying to address, i.e. was useful. (Shapiro 2004: 3)

Impact evaluation requires collecting and analyzing the data with the aim to be more objective than in the closure stage of implementation, and assesses the outcome of the workshop after the workshop is finished.

At some point the decisions how to make sense of the collected data should be made and analyzed. This can be done by an external evaluator or an external evaluation team, but most often it is done internally, by the trainer. After the data are organized, the next step is to analyse the findings, on which the conclusions will be based and recommendations made. What follows is writing a report to the stakeholders if the trainer has been hired to conduct the workshop, drawing the learning from the overall process, analyzing the impact that the workshop made on the participants, and making decisions about which changes should be introduced.

At the end, it is worth reviewing the (teaching) objectives as well as the relevance of the methods used. The final evaluation should address the questions relating to the objectives that were achieved, were not achieved, not entirely achieved, the group functioning, and which aspects one needs to pay more attention to. Learning is or should be the main reason for a workshop. The purpose of learning is to make changes where necessary, and identify and build on strengths where they exist.

4. TRAINER COMPETENCES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

In the digital era it is highly likely that trainers will turn to the Internet to find various resources which they can use and employ in the planning and implementing of their workshops. It goes without saying that trainers always have the option of using their own library to select and combine materials for the workshop as well as to turn to a public library or a school library, but the digital era had made the Internet one of the best resources for various kinds of materials which, if observed critically, can be of great use for, among other things, the organization of workshops.

For example, foreign language teachers who intend to organize workshops for their students can find a whole range of different materials on different websites which were made by their fellow teachers. Some of the websites where such materials can be found are: www.teachingenglish.org.uk, www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish, www.ego4u.com, learningenglish.voanews.com, www.usingenglish.com, a4esl.org. The materials on these and many similar websites are sorted by the age of the learner as well as the level of proficiency, language skills,

language content, etc. When the teacher design the structure of the workshop and know which general framework to follow, then they can fairly easily select the materials to use at a certain point in the workshop. The advantage of the materials found on these websites is that they are ready-made (or can be modified, if necessary) and that they have an additional page with instructions for the teacher, which facilitates the implementation of the material.

In case teachers want to include authentic materials in their workshops, which might be highly beneficial in case workshops revolve around cultural topics and intend to raise intercultural awareness of students, the number of available online sources is immense since practically anything found in newspapers, magazines, websites of libraries, restaurants, cinemas, traffic companies, etc. can be used as authentic material during the workshop. In addition, teachers can resort to YouTube (www.youtube.com) for authentic audio and video files, which can serve as a basic input in one phase of the workshop and then this can be developed into a discussion, creative writing, role-playing, etc.

Visual input is also very useful and can enrich workshops and provide an important stimulus during an exercise. However, the issue of copyright can be problematic and that is why the website www.eltpics.com is extremely useful. Namely, this website is made by teachers for teachers whereby colleagues from all over the world upload their own photographs to the website free of copyright for all other teachers to use. This is a wonderful example of digital professional collaboration, which allows teachers to download images free of charge and insert them into their own workshop material.

Finally, for those teachers who want to make their own materials from scratch there is an application called Hot Potatoes, which can be downloaded from hotpot.uvic.ca. It allows teachers to make different kinds of tasks on the basis of the parameters they choose for themselves (difficulty, quantity, level of proficiency, age, etc.) and these types of tasks include crossword puzzles, multiple choice questions, mix-and-match tasks, gap-filling, etc. Again, depending on the structure and aim of the workshop, teachers will find an appropriate position for the exercises and tasks they have made.

4. CONCLUSION

Gaining new knowledge, acquiring new skills and sharing experiences is the essence of workshop activities. Workshops are based on specific content elements, activities, and methods, aimed at involving participants in a meaningful learning experience, which is a structured process and takes place on three different interrelated levels, i.e. a cognitive, emotional and behavioural level. People learn most powerfully through their own experience, in situations that involve cognition, emotion and action. The workshop should allow ample time for analysis and reflection. Transfer, which is present in workshops, involves fitting the experience of the training to participants' realities and adapting the newly acquired ideas and skills

to their own life. The transfer phase is not limited to the physical end of the activity, but continues to work and enrich the participants' daily lives and activities, views of the world and ways of life.

Evaluation should always be present to support and monitor the learning process. As well as striving for results beyond its lifetime, workshop activities need to conceive their conclusions and effect closure. Closing a workshop also means closing the circle of the programme. It can include recalling the training process, its main learning points, and experiences. Allied to this, evaluation helps trainers to assess the impact of the training course, and the participants to focus on what they have learnt. Finally, the success of the workshop to a great extent depends on the materials used, which in the digital era can be easily found on the Internet and which the trainer/teacher can download verbatim, modify or create new ones. Regardless of the path the trainer chooses and regardless of the source of the materials utilized in the workshop, it can be concluded that workshops are a necessity in today's system of education as a supportive system of changing and enriching the students' awareness of a whole range of issues in their lives.

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RADIONICE U OBRAZOVANJU: TEORIJSKI I PRAKTIČNI ASPEKTI

Sažetak

U obrazovnom kontekstu pojam radionice se odnosi na vrstu obrazovnog programa koji se generalno osmišljava za grupu ljudi, pri čemu je sadržaj praktičan, odnosi se na specifične potrebe, interese i afinitete grupe polaznika i omogućava saradnju i međusobnu podršku među učesnicima. Radionice se obično sastoje od niza posebno osmišljenih aktivnosti koje se potom stavljaju u okvir intenzivnog interaktivnog obrazovnog programa ili obuke koji može da ima različite dužine trajanja i sadržaje. Cilj održavanja radionice je sticanje znanja i novih veština, kao i razmena iskustava. Suština radionice je smisleno iskustvo u učenju koje se zasniva na strukturisanom procesu i odvija se na tri međusobno povezana nivoa: kognitivnom, emotivnom i bihevioralnom. Ljudi najbolje uče iskustveno u situacijama koje uključuju kogniciju, emociju i akciju, što svaka radionica treba da pruži. Jedna od najznačajnijih karakteristika radionica je transfer, koji se zasniva na usklađivanju novog iskustva stečenog u radionici sa postojećim znanjem i iskustvom učesnika, koji treba da novostečena znanja, ideje i veštine usklade sa sopstvenim postojećim iskustvima. Faza transfera se ne ograničava samo na trajanje radionice, već je idealno nepходno da se transfer nastavi i kasnije te da se vremenom svakodnevni život i aktivnosti učesnika radionice obogaćuju, menjaju i oplemenjuju. Radionice se mogu razlikovati u velikoj meri po svojim eksplicitnim i implicitnim ciljevima, kao i po strategijama, metodama i tehnikama koje se koriste. Orijentacija radionca, rezultati koji treba da se postignu, ciljevi i početna pozicija su ključni aspekti u diferenciranju različitih tipova radionica i to će biti fokus rada, kao i osnovna znanja koja nastavnici/treneri koji organizuju radionice u obrazovnom kontekstu XXI veka moraju da imaju.

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