

Educational Values of an External School Project

Christina Nygren-Landgärds¹, Janne Elo¹, Ida Landgärds² & Margita Engelholm³

¹ Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

² Faculty of Engineering and Science, University of Agder, Norway

³ School for Basic Education, grades 7–9 in Kristiinankaupunki, Finland

Correspondence: Christina Nygren-Landgärds, Åbo Akademi University, Tuomiokirkontori 3, 65200 Turku, Finland.

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Abstract

External organizations offer schools projects with different content, so-called *external school projects*. This type of external projects is mainly implemented by people or an organization outside of the school. The projects may be within the framework of a nation's political aspirations. The educational goals of the projects are often far-reaching, focusing on personality or attitudes. This article questions whether external school projects can achieve such far-reaching goals. The aim of the research is to explore the views of young adults regarding how participating in an external project influenced them. In-depth interviewing were used when eleven young adults, at the time 25 years old, were asked about their opinions of an external project in entrepreneurship, implemented as an optional course, ten years after taking part. They were asked how they considered the course have influenced them, their choices and their attitudes. The statements of the informants show that the project had some long-term impact. The results of the research provide insight into whether an external temporary school project may have long-term educational values.

Keywords: external school projects, educational impact, in-depth interviewing

1. Introduction

1.1 The Research Question

The discussion of how to better prepare people for work have become an everyday question for each educational level within the Finnish educational system. But the discussion is kind of difficult because it is often seen as an opposite to the larger purposes and social values of education. From an individually perspective we value education for its contributions to human cultivation and learning. The human capital has been an important resource when the country was build up from dependence to independence through wars and poverty to a country of Nordic welfare. From a national economic perspective the preparation for work is nowadays clarified and added to the former ideals of human capital. As an answer to the broader view of human capital it has become increasingly common that external organizations or groups of interest offer schools projects with different content, for instance, about being an entrepreneur. This is not always perceived to be merely positive by the educational experts involved, because they sometimes perceive it as a distrust against their expertise and independence. One important aspect to this may be the relatively unclear or not clarified division of responsibility for educational questions between educational experts, on the one hand, and the public and political understandings of educational purposes and values, on the other. This may appear as a competition of space and form of activities within the school activities and subjects, and maybe even between the teachers.

Despite the big questions presented above this article will not focus on whether schools should permit, or tolerate, external projects at schools. Neither will the article focus on whether the professionalism of the teachers is enough to guarantee that the need of youngsters' better preparation for work is considered at school. Instead the article focus on the question about whether an external project may have long-lasting educational values. The aim of the research is to explore young adults' views on how participating in an external project in entrepreneurship ten years prior has had influence on their life. The research question is: *In what way do the informants think that the project has influenced them?* Thus, the results of the research are expected to provide insight into whether an external temporary school project may have long-term educational values.

1.2 External School Projects

The kind of projects referred to in this article is “external school projects” and is in this connection to be understood as an external, temporary activity with goals in the interests of society and mainly implemented by people or an organization outside of the school, more or less in cooperation with the school. The projects are often within the framework of the national political aspirations. Hands (2005) refers to Sanders when she uses the expression “school-community partnership” for a corresponding purpose. Community may in this case be individuals, organizations or businesses that want to develop students socially, emotionally, physically, or intellectually. Schools have according to Hands been primarily interested in the projects provided because they give possibilities of variety in the school activities, often at a low cost or at no cost at all. However, the projects often promise and strive for more than simply being variety in the every-day-life at school.

The educational goals of the external projects are often far-reaching or long-lasting goals, such as development of pupils’ personality concerning, for instance, problem solving skills, good working attitudes and cooperation skills. It is questioned whether projects in schools maintained by external people or organizations can achieve such far-reaching goals. The general perception might be that it is the school as a whole that is to achieve the long-term goals (Halinen, 2011; Elo, 2015), while temporary projects support and inspire the school education.

But the external projects are often a result of the society wanting more of the school activities, or a faster or different development within an educational area. This means, in practice, that the teacher's professionalism is questioned (Haapakorpi, 2006). For instance, a Swedish study (SOU, 2005) on whether gender equality is implemented in schools points out the lack of knowledge of teachers as a significant cause of inequality in schools. The report establishes that educators need support, education, tools and resources to fulfil their tasks. One the other hand the report also establish that temporary projects and campaigns are neither enough to achieve lasting change in equality questions.

The educational process in relation to long-term learning goals is generally more multi-faceted in comparison with knowledge goals. Long-term goals are often about a change in attitudes, including different ways to look at things, and concern the school as a whole. For example, Halinen (2011) discusses competence education in relation to the national project *Global Citizen in Finland* (2010–2011) that focused on global citizenship and what competences global citizens need. Halinen establishes that competence education strives towards goals including the development of the ability to successfully meet the multifarious demands of each situation and the ability to use one’s skills effectively. It is a question of a packet of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes with a core of willingness and the ability to reflect on actions. According to Halinen, such educational goals require that the teachers think about both their understanding of human beings and their perception of knowledge and learning. This has, in turn, an effect on what teachers consider to be important in school and how the goals are to be understood. Halinen also highlights that the more coherent and integrated a curriculum is, the better one can assume that it supports both teaching and learning. Therefore, teachers should cooperate and reflect on the school curriculum together, and think about how education is built up from one grade to another to enable the goals to be achieved.

Similarly, Elo (2015) discusses entrepreneurship education. He establishes that when society needs more entrepreneurs in society, one way of “solving the problem” is to offer entrepreneurship projects to schools. The goals are to gain more positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and teach basic knowledge for becoming an entrepreneur. However, the character of entrepreneurship education requires cooperation within the whole school culture. This means that entrepreneurship education cannot be limited to temporary projects, studies or theme days. A positive attitude to enterprise should permeate all activities at school. In this context, Elo points out that a positive attitude towards enterprise is also important for teachers themselves in order to succeed in entrepreneurship education. A school that expects enterprising students should have enterprising teachers and school leadership. In addition, the pupils’ opinions and experiences have great impact on education and its success.

According to Halinen (2011) and Elo (2015), attitude education requires holistic engagement of a school. Hands (2005) focuses on school-community partnerships and highlights “the necessity for all partners to share a vision of the partnership and to value the collaboration.” The principals are, according to Hands, in a central position, and she establishes that support for the cooperation project among the staff is not enough, if the principal is not interested. The principal and the teachers’ willingness to cooperate within an external project is the key to a successful project. Haapakorpi (2006) asks what is left when a school project has ended. She discusses whether an external project has educational effects on the activity of school, the work of the teachers or the education of the pupils, and she establishes that how the project is implemented greatly determines how the project influences

the school and its activities. The implementation of the project should continuously be in relation to the goals of the project, the target group, the school itself and the surrounding organizations of interest. It is also of importance that the conditions and requirements of the project are clearly defined and expressed. Haapakorpi establishes that projects that are able to weld together the teachers and administration at a school tend to influence the working culture in a positive, holistic way, for instance, concerning the way of perceiving and understanding the needs of the pupils.

Another topic of discussion (Vetenskap & Allmänhet, 2007) is whether specific non-integrated activities or projects can have educational benefits, not only for the teachers and the school activity as a whole, but for the individual pupils. The goals of external projects are often ambitious. In the report some project evaluations are analyzed to find central factors for successful school projects. The analysis shows that the way of working within the project is the most important factor for what kind of influence the project will have. The best way is to have a mix between theory and practice in the project and a balance between operation and reflection. Another central factor for a successful project is an active, inspiring leader with good subject knowledge and with good educational ability. Furthermore, it is established that the educational idea of the project should be motivating and therefore built on freedom to act, as well as on control and frames and the use of the project. Moreover, role models are important. This may be the teacher or somebody else in relation to the project. The most central key for creating knowledge and commitment seems to be that the teacher brings out a holistic view in the project for him-/herself and for the pupils.

This discussion has established that successful education needs integrated and well-rooted activities, and that it therefore may be hard to reach educational goals through explicit activities. Perhaps that is why it is hard to find project evaluations that focus on the educational benefits for pupils in relation to external projects. A cause for why evaluation of educational projects seldom focuses on whether educational goals are reached may be that it would require long-term evaluation, and as projects come to an end, there is not time for this. It is also difficult to know whether the effects measured are caused by the project alone or by other contributing factors. Follow-up research in the field of entrepreneurship education focuses for instance primarily on whether participants in entrepreneurship projects become entrepreneurs or not (Lange, Marram et al., 2011). The study shows how taking part in one or more courses in entrepreneurship during studies at college influenced students' intentions to become entrepreneurs. The informants taking part in the study were alumni who had graduated from college during a 25-year period. The study shows that taking two or more entrepreneurship courses influenced intentions to become entrepreneurs, but taking only one course did not have a strong influence.

1.3 The External Project of Interest

The external project focused on in this article is a national project in entrepreneurship education, the Junior Achievement project (JA, Finland, 2016a; JA, Europe, 2016b). The project is at some schools implemented as optional courses to reach the goals of the entrepreneurial and work life skills described in the national curricular goals of former cross-curricular themes and nowadays transversal competences. The educational idea behind cross-curricular themes and transversal competences is that they should permeate all school subjects and be integrated in both compulsory and optional courses. Each school may plan for themselves how the goals are to be fulfilled. The responsibility for the project investigated in this article was held by the school, but the JA project and the companies cooperating with the JA project had a great deal of influence.

At the time for the external project, implemented as a course, of interest in this article, entrepreneurship education were a cross-curricular goal within the theme of *Participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship* (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2004). In the new national core curriculum, the learning goals of the transversal competences are described as seven competence areas. Entrepreneurship education is a transversal competence, referred to as *entrepreneurial and work life skills*, and the educational goal is to help pupils shape an understanding of society and all of its actors. Furthermore, its goals are to develop the abilities needed to be able to participate in society and to create a base for an enterprising approach (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2014). Since entrepreneurship education should permeate all education, it is evaluated nationally how the themes are implemented in schools (for instance Gullberg, 2012; Seikkula-Leino, 2007; Niemi, 2012; Viljamaa, 2016).

1.4 Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is a global phenomenon, and national strategies for entrepreneurship education are launched at the supranational level. Entrepreneurship education and developing students' enterprise and proactive approaches to life, have, in one way or another, been goals of Finnish public education since its introduction in the middle of the 1800's (Elo, 2015). The Ministry of Education in Finland has published guidelines for entrepreneurship education according to the European Parliament and Commission's definition of

entrepreneurship (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 27; Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2010). The Educational Board and Competition and Consumer Agency (Utbildningsstyrelsen och Konkurrens- och konsumentverket, 2014) have also drawn up guidelines for cooperation between schools and educational institutions as well as companies and associations.

The phenomenon of entrepreneurship education is rather ambiguous, and the field of research is somehow characterized by conceptual confusion (Jones & Iredale, 2010). Several studies (Dahl et al., 2016; Jones & Iredale, 2010) show that two main interpretations or approaches appear: a “narrow” interpretation where entrepreneurship education is seen as educational activities mainly aimed at promoting future business start-ups and business knowledge, and a “broad” interpretation aimed at developing a proactive and enterprising general outlook on life. In the Finnish context, the narrow interpretation has in some cases been called *external entrepreneurship*, and the broader, *internal entrepreneurship* (Dahl, et al., 2016).

The JA project interpretation of entrepreneurship education appears to embrace the narrow as well as the broad interpretation, since business knowledge and activities, as well as an “entrepreneurial attitude and active lifestyle” are highlighted. The overall JA project in Finland aims to “advance entrepreneurial attitude and an active lifestyle among Finnish youths by increasing their knowledge of entrepreneurship, providing entrepreneurial experiences, enhancing readiness for working life and financial management skills” (JA, Finland, 2016a). The course of interest in this article was carried out in cooperation with the JA project, but as a part of the School X’s own curricula and in accordance with the Finnish curriculum for primary school as a permeating cross-curricular theme (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2004).

1.5 One Year as an Entrepreneur

The pupils at School X (the school is referred to here as “School X” in order to protect anonymity of the pupils) had for many years had the opportunity to choose a course in commerce as an optional course in the upper grades of secondary school (grades 8-9). The educational focuses of this course were knowledge and skills needed for economical questions that appear in every-day-life, and a positive attitude for becoming an entrepreneur.

In 2006, a teacher at School X, got the possibility to take part in an inspiration course for teachers. The focus of the course was JA projects and JA activities in Finland. During the course, the idea of having a course in the upper grades of basic education, aiming at establishing, running and closing a company were presented. With great excitement, a course called *One year as an entrepreneur* was planned and held for the first time during the school year of 2006–2007. Twelve pupils decided to take part in the course. They were in the ninth grade and 15 or 16 years old, including four girls and eight boys.

The central educational idea of the course was, according to The teacher at School X (2016), to build a company by transforming ideas into concrete actions. The school considered these actions to require internal entrepreneurship and that the project would thus fit well within the educational idea of the school. The expectation was therefore that the course should bring out internal entrepreneurship, and that the pupils should be creative in planning and running real companies. The hope was for creativeness and the pupils’ own will would guide the learning process and bring out activity and enterprising manners. The schools’ motives for taking part in the JA project where thus to a large degree rooted in the broad interpretation of entrepreneurship.

The teaching content for the course revolved around building and running a company with a focus on knowledge of, for instance, how to develop a business idea, how to plan a business, how to register a company, how to open a bank account, how to have a board meeting, how to produce artefacts, and how to market, sell, do bookkeeping and write reports. Traditional lessons were varied with guest speakers, and during the school year, the pupils took part in different JA competitions. At the end of the year, the companies were closed and final reports were written.

Only one hour a week was planned for the course, but the ambition was high, and within the course three companies were created. Each company was supported by a business man/woman through discussions about different ideas as well as getting advice and feedback. The regional coordinator of the JA project supported both the teacher and the pupils. At the school one teacher had the main responsibility of the course. However, the teacher also involved other teachers in the project, and it should be noted that the school as a whole had a positive attitude towards the project.

2. Method

2.1 In-depth Interviewing

This research is primarily interested in the participating students' views on the educational effects of a single course ten years prior, thus, the most appropriate method for gathering these views was deep interviews (In-depth Interviewing) with focus themes. The interviewer conducted the conversation through prepared themes. The themes were about how the informants considered that the course had influenced them, their choices and their attitudes about the factors essential to the JA project.

In the conversation, the interviewer encouraged the informant to elaborate on the themes without revealing the interviewer's own opinions. The interviewers were not bound to a particular order of discussing the themes with the various informants. The order depended on how the conversation developed. The interview method is useful for seeking information about topics that may be difficult for the interviewer to perceive, remember or explain in a questionnaire or in another structured way.

2.2 The Interviewer

To achieve successful interviews, it is beneficial if the interviewer has deep insights into the subject area; the interviewer will then more likely be able to ask appropriate supplementary questions at the right moment. Because in these cases the conversations often concern private feelings and opinions, it is also important that the informant is familiar or feels safe with the interviewer (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2011). For this study, an interviewer with suitable insight into the subject being discussed and who was familiar with the informants, was used. A former student with a master's degree, who had taken part in the course, was asked to function as the interviewer.

2.3 The Informants

Since all opinions of the informants are important, the interviewer was asked to write down her own thoughts in relation to the interview themes before the interviews were conducted. At the same time the interviewer got the chance to refresh her memory of the course. This was considered to be advantageous for the interview. Two other informants were also asked to submit their thoughts in free text in relation to the interview themes in writing, as they had moved abroad. One of the informants did not want to be interviewed or write down his thoughts at all. Of a group of twelve students who, ten years ago, were 15–16 years old, our data is thus based on eleven individuals, 4 women (W1–W4) and 7 men (M1–M7), who were 25–26 years old at the time of the interview.

Table 1. The informants

Informant	Were you motivated for school?	Did you get a degree?	What are you doing today?
W1	No	Degree from a vocational school	Is working
W2	Yes	Master's degree	Studies for an additional degree
W3	No	Degree from a vocational school	Studies for an additional degree
W4	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Is working
M1	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Studies for a master's degree
M2	No	Bachelor's degree	Has a company of his own
M3	No	Degree from a vocational school	Is working
M4	No	Degree from upper secondary school	Studies for a bachelors' degree
M5	No	Degree from a vocational school	Is working
M6	No	Degree from a vocational school	Is working
M7	No	Degree from a vocational school	Is working

The informants were asked to provide background information about themselves. In order to relate the informants' statements with the situation ten years ago, motivation for school and study was perceived as important. Table 1 shows that eight of the informants did not see themselves as having been motivated for school in basic education, grades 7–9. Five of the informants have went on with studies at the third stage (bachelor's or/and master's degrees) and one has a company of his own.

2.4 Analysis of Data

For analysis of data, the content analysis method was used. According to Anttila (2000) the content analysis method is especially useful when the research focuses on verbal content, symbolic content or communicative content. The method is a tool that can bring new knowledge, new perspectives, and reveal hidden content. The interviews were transcribed, and data was encoded using keywords of the data content. Meaning-bearing units were sorted and grouped into categories. The content was first categorized into four categories, but after a re-categorization, data were conformed into twelve main content categories with subcategories that reflect both the breadth and the central message of the interviews. The central content of the interviews is rendered and discussed below. All statements are translated from Swedish into English by the authors.

3. Results

3.1 Opinions of School and Expectations for the Course

As a framework for the statements, the first result discussion relates to the situation of the informants when deciding to take part in the course. Though the group interviewed was relatively small, it is still possible to find different opinions of basic education, grades seven to nine. There are those who seem to have experienced school as necessary but boring, those who thought it was both necessary and fun, and those who thought it was just boring. Accordingly, some pupils seem to have experienced that school was just a place where one had to be for a while: “Basic education was something you had to go through in order to be able to go further. I did not have especially good grades... I had no motivation for that...” (M2). Some saw no reason to work for good results: “Yikes and yah for grades seven to nine! I did not want to be there. I had no motivation to go to school... homework was not my thing... I did not get such good grades. But they could have been better if I had wanted them to be...” (M7) and “I was for the most part not motivated but did well in school with minimum performance. The second year (eighth grade), I got the best grade in math, just to show that I could if I wanted to, but that was the only course (ha-ha)...” (M4), while some were very motivated: “Ninth grade is the grade I remember with special warmth in my heart. I was pretty pleased with myself. I enjoyed having many irons in the fire... I fought hard during the last school year. Many things were fun, and I had a lot of responsibility... I received high grades...” (W2) and “I was motivated for school, not 100% focused, but pretty good grades. I got eights and nines. I would have been ashamed to bring home a five or six.” (W4).

With these varied opinions of school, it may have been a big challenge for the teacher to start the new course. At the same time, the following statement shows that opinions of school may not only be caused by lack of motivation: “I have never been motivated for school... but giving speeches is really not my kind of thing, it was really tough, and we had to give many of them in grade nine... and the pupils sat back in class and said that they didn't hear anything...” (W1). The statement shows that, at the age of 15–16, youth may have strong psychological perspectives, and these may affect their motivation for school. On the contrary, the following statements show that this period of life for some may be a time that could be characterized as a vacuum period of life—as stage when one may lack concrete thoughts about and goals for the future: “I had no special plans for the future.” (W3), “I had no plans for the future. I took one day at a time” (M4) and “I did not think of future.” (M7).

Thus, when the students decided to take part in the entrepreneurship course, most of them were not motivated for school, some did not like the school itself or the school tasks, and others lacked the motivation to study and to get good grades. With reference to the heterogeneous starting situation regarding the pupils' motivation for school, it is interesting to get an answer for why the students chose to take part in the course and what expectations the pupils had for the course. Statements show that some thought that it would be interesting to do something different like running a business: “It seemed like an interesting and different course. I chose the course because I like to try new things.” (W2) and “The course sounded interesting... I was motivated. To run a business sounded interesting...” (W3). But perhaps some of the pupils' expectations were not so high: “I chose the course because I was interested in entrepreneurship. I thought that the course was interesting—for once—but I still thought it would be normal lessons and I would sit there half-tired...” (M2).

Although some of the earlier statements indicate that thoughts of future were not dominant at the time, the decision to choose the course anyway shows that the pupils may have in fact had thoughts about future when they made their decision: “When I heard about the course, I thought that it is something you can benefit from... how to start and how it is to run a business. I was very motivated for the course” (M1), “I took the course because I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn something new.” (M5) and “To be able to run a business attracted me... because of money...” (M7). They made their choice in spite of others' choices: “The entrepreneurship course was a fun idea... I chose the course because it seemed the most interesting. I chose the

course although my friends didn't. I often did as my friends did..." (M3) and the informants expected to learn how to run a business. One informant describes her thoughts about the purpose of the course: "I believe that the purpose of the course was to get an idea of how a business works so that, in the future, if we would like to start our own business, we would know a little bit about it... and to take responsibility and such, do something of our own and not just sit in school, like something from real life and not just books and books and books, but to get to do something practical, too." (W1).

It should be noted that the pupils dared to choose the new course, although they could not thoroughly know what could be expected of it. Neither could they ask older pupils. It is therefore possible to assume that the choice of taking part in the course was quite an independent act. Considering the majority of the informants' perceptions of their lack of motivation for school and lack of thoughts about the future, the expressed motivation for the course is to be noted.

3.2 What the Students Learned

According to the goals for entrepreneurship education the entrepreneurship course strived to have an influence on the informants' individual ability to turn ideas into action and abilities needed in day-to-day life at home and in society (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 27). The informants' statements were therefore analyzed based on perceptions highlighting the process of turning ideas into action and the working process. When the informants were asked to reflect on the content of the course, they spoke about four perspectives: the idea, the working process, the amount of work and the results.

The informants remembered their *business idea* with pride: "Our business was good. We had a good idea of ecology and recycling" (M1) and pointed out the importance of the whole group being behind the idea: "We were quite agreed on what we would do..." (W1). W2 seemed rather surprised that they had such a good idea: "The fact is that in the beginning probably none of us was sure that just the ... was the best idea, but we could all imagine working with that particular product and the raw material was free, which attracted us to believe in milk and honey..." (W2).

Some informants showed the importance of discussing different ideas: "Our business idea became clear pretty quickly after we discussed some different ideas..." (W4) and "It was fun to think about what we should do and what we should sell. There were different ideas..." (M3). M2 and M7 pointed out that they could have thought more about the idea: "Our idea was not bad... we could have done so much more... but at the time, one cannot really..." (M2) and "We would have needed more time to develop the business idea..." (M7) and one could not remember their business idea all: "I cannot remember what the company was called or what we did..." (W3).

The main result of this analysis is that the informants in the unstructured discussion chose to express their thoughts about the business idea. These expressions are interpreted to show that the informants are surprised or proud that they had an idea of their own, and also, that they gained insight into the importance of thinking through an idea before starting the working process.

In the discussion, the informants focused heavily on the *working process*. The statements are interpreted as insights concerning work and the relation between work and income. For instance the following statements are about the relation between thinking and working physically: "It is not only to do, but you have to use your own imagination and think it through." (W3) and "It was a lot of planning and thinking." (W4). Other statements were about the relation between theory and practice: "...accounting and writing the reports... it was something we just rushed through... the knowledge fell completely into oblivion when we started to run the company." (W2), "I wrote the annual report and was in charge of the money, banking and such... took care of the paperwork ... you learned something practically every day of the course." (M7) and "You actually had to work to have something to sell." (W3). Some statements were about the relation between learning motivation and realistic school tasks: "It was fun enough to earn our own money, but it was not most important. The most important thing was to do something adult." (W4), "I was motivated to make the products even though it was after school hours. It did not matter that it was after school hours. It felt like you did something for yourself. Did not feel like homework." (M1), "I remember that it was fun and it did not feel like school because we did a lot outside the school" (M4) and "It felt ok to write ... it was interesting because of the company." (M7). Last, but not least, the informants commented on the relation between independent work and responsibility: "Taking responsibility was important... It was good that we had to think of everything by ourselves." (W4) and "I felt responsibility towards the group and our customers. I remember that I thought that the products had to be as fine as possible so that customers would be satisfied." (M1).

The statements above show different insights concerning the working process. The informants noticed and remembered different things from running the company. The statements can be related to the overall goals of the

course about gaining insights that support every-day-life at home and in society and being aware of the context of one's work.

There was also some discussion of *the amount of work* in relation to running the company: "We worked a lot in our leisure time and at home... there was nothing negative... we realized that it needed to be done... I think I worked a lot..." (W1), "We toiled hard and worked many extra hours..." (W2), "It was not difficult to work and be in school at the same time" (M6) and "Everything was sold outside of school hours." (M7). The informants remembered that the project needed to be done outside the school hours, but they did not seem to have minded it. If you take into account that most informants stated that they were not motivated for school, this is an exciting result. The large amount of extra work that the course resulted in was not perceived as negative as it could have been.

It is natural that the informants also focused on *the results*. The statements highlight the informants' opinions about the results of their company in relation to the idea, praise from others, the amount of money that was earned and what feelings the project left behind.

The results in relation to the business idea: "Difficult ... would have been different if we had had another business idea..." (W1), "It could have become something big ... our idea probably had more potential..." (M2), "It was a pretty limited business idea that we had, we could of course have worked in a different way..." (M3) and "We thought we had a little ridiculous business idea... but the result shows that even a simple business idea can be good!" (M7).

The results in relation to praise from others: "We were successful in national competitions that we barely knew we participated in! The company became known in the region because we got a lot of attention in media such as radio and newspaper... We won two awards... We had a goal and we reached it!" (W2), "The competitions were fun because we won so much... then you know you have a good business idea. I wonder what it would have felt like if we had not won..." (M1), "It went so well... we should have received a bigger scholarship..." (M6) and "At the end of the academic year, the principal said something about the company, we got a diploma. I remember it because it came as a shock. No one thought it would be so good." (M2)

The results in relation to the money that was earned: "The money was the most important issue for us... We formed the company—the thought of this moment makes me slightly touched—with great zeal to earn money." (W2) and "We received €150 per person from the course, it was fun..." (M7).

The results in relation to the feelings that the project left behind: "Feels good that we made it" (W4), "I would love to join the same group again and do the same thing." (W2) and "Would be fun to try the same business idea today. Saw corresponding products in Germany and thought that we could have continued and earned a lot!" (M2).

The statements show that the course affected the informants mentally. No one expressed that any negative feelings resulted from the project. It is not possible to find out exactly how the informants were affected by the course, but the statements show that the course did not go unnoticed by the informants.

3.3 A Social Perspective

Beside the working process, the informants also discussed what they learned about working in a group for a longer period of time. Here are some examples that show the versatility in experiences: "We had good group cohesion and all contributed to the work... We grew as a company and as individuals..." (W2), "One in the group was often away and was out partying and such... we thought about kicking her out from the group... it was not possible to divide the responsibility ... and it was an uneven workload... we made the best of the situation..." (W3), "I had no hope for the group... we were all pretty wild at that time and had no motivation for school... but all became motivated for the course and all did everything that should be done... no extra nagging or noise... compared to other courses. Through the course the sense of belonging to the group increased ... and the feeling that all was significant. If one would have left, we would have missed her/him... and it wouldn't have been as good. Everybody was needed." (M2), "...we learned what happens if we cannot compromise and make agreements..." (M3).

Ten years after taking part in the course the informants still remembered details about the group, how the work within the group was divided and how the group succeeded in running a business. The informants remembered how the work felt, how decisions were made and how it felt when the group succeeded, or did not, and how the money was split up. Considering that the memories are so detailed regarding the building of and working within a group, the informants may have been thinking about the experiences and insights over the years.

3.4 Did the Course Have an Impact on Your Life?

The central aim of this article is to explore young adults' views on how participating in an external project in entrepreneurship in grade nine has influenced their life in the years after. In the interviews, we wanted to find out whether the course in entrepreneurship seems to have affected the participants. As the participants remembered the course and could discuss it in detail ten years after taking part in it, we can draw the conclusion that the course has had an impact on them. To be more certain, a direct question was also asked: Did your life change because of the course? The answers of the informants are categorized into four sentences:

The course had no impact on my life: "The course did not change my opinion of school." (W3), "The course did not change my life." (M3), "... my life did not change..." (M4), "My life probably did not change." (M5) and "The course did not affect my continuing education." (M6).

The course gave me better self-confidence: "You became more confident when you got appreciation of what you did, and you saw that you succeeded in doing something. We received positive comments. More fun to succeed than to fail." (W1), "I'm pretty shy otherwise, but the course made me think differently... to try for myself... In the course I became a little more open, dared to propose things and say my opinion." (M2) and "I matured, less shy, as it became more involved and included adult tasks that you should do by yourself and take responsibility yourself and not just jump after mom, dad or the teacher..." (M7).

The course gave me possibilities for jobs in the region: "I have noticed that thanks to my energy and positive thinking during basic education... I have been able to find jobs and contact people in my hometown 10 years later. Anything is possible, and everyone is positive when I come up with some ideas or want to work with them." (W2)

The course has had an impact on my life: "In a longer perspective, I think, the course has influenced my opinion of school and education... that variation is needed and learning is different. I also think it affected and helped me career wise. At least, it has taught me to take responsibility and grow up. Perhaps my life changed through the course, maybe in some way. The course was important, and motivated many. We had better things to do than to hang out there and smoke." (W4), "I think the course influenced my interest... since I did not know what the course was about, and I got a positive idea from it... I later applied for education in business economics." (M1) and "The course changed my life because it became a foundation for everything I have tried to do later on, that's business... I realized that entrepreneurship is exciting... The course opened my eyes. I had always been uninterested in school, later also, because you know basically what will happen. It is so boring to just sit there and then do homework... Throughout the course, I got another picture of the school system. I found that they really want pupils to be active and to make decisions of their own..." (M2). The informants' perceptions of whether the course have influenced their lives are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Did the course have an impact on your life?

Informant	Did the course have an impact on your life?
W1	Yes
W2	Yes
W3	No
W4	Yes
M1	Yes
M2	Yes
M3	No
M4	No
M5	No
M6	No
M7	Yes

3.5 Three Main Lines of Impact

When we compile the reflections above and also take into consideration how motivated the informants established that they were for school in basic education, and what they had been doing during the following ten years, we can see three main lines (compare also Table 1). One line tells us that the ones that were motivated in basic education also found that the course had an impact on their lives, and they went on studying after the second stage (informants W2, W4 and M1). The course may have been able to *strengthen interest*.

Another line is potentially of interest regarding the aim of this article. Informants W1, M2 and M7 expressed that they were not interested in school during basic education. However, they believed the external project to have had an impact on their lives. The course gave them better self-confidence. Informant W1 established that she became more confident through the course because she got appreciation from others for what she did and that it felt good to succeed. Informant M2 said that because of the course, he began to dare to propose things and to state his opinion. He also realized that school system and the teacher were working in his best interest. Informant M7 stated that he got less shy when he was supposed to take more responsibility himself. These examples may show us the importance of pupils being shown appreciation, a feeling of success and the possibility to take responsibility and be active. The course may have been able to *strengthen self-confidence*.

The third line tells us that some informants were not motivated for school during basic education and that they felt that the course had no impact either, nor did they continue their studies after they got a vocational education (informants M3, M5 and M6). Informants W3 and M4 were likewise not interested in school during basic education and did not either find that the external course had any particular implications on their lives since. Regardless, these informants chose to continue studying after working for some years. However, we see no connection to the experiences from the course. For these individuals, the course may have had *no influence*.

4. Discussion

This research wanted to find out whether former pupils found that an external project in entrepreneurship in grade nine had influenced them. The question is asked within the framework of the fact that it has become increasingly more common that external organizations or groups of interest offer schools projects with different content. The educational goals of the projects are often wide and far-reaching. The article questions whether projects provided by external people or organizations can achieve such far-reaching goals, as they are stated to depend on several different aspects, such as teachers' conscious efforts, the attitude of the principal and the efforts of the school as an educational context. The research focuses on a Junior Achievement project, and the informants include eleven former pupils reflecting on an entrepreneurship course.

Because this study dealt with such a small informant group, we cannot generalize our results. However, this research shows that it is not negative to invest in extra activities in the form of external projects in the school. The statements of the informants show that an external project may strengthen a student's interest in school and education. For instance, realistic tasks in which pupils were able to take responsibility, "act like an adult" and use and improve their knowledge and skills are motivating. The research also seems to have had a positive impact on the youngsters' self-confidence. Informants established that being able to work in a group for a longer period of time, including discussions, had helped them, for instance, to dare to state their opinion and positive feedback has given them a positive feeling of success. Some of the informants stated that, despite finding the entrepreneurship course interesting and different from ordinary school, it has not had an impact on their further choices in life.

Previous research shows that attitude education requires holistic engagement of a school (Hands, 2005). The constellation for the course that the informants are referring to, is something else. Only one teacher was in charge of the course. Based on this and the statements given by the informants, it can be assumed that it is more important that the school as a whole is positive about a project, than that all teachers collaborate on the project, for a project to succeed. It is also asked what is left when a school project has ended (Haapakorpi, 2006). This research shows what may be left in terms of learning and attitudes. It can also be noted that the school still offers the course for its students and that half of the school's students today choose the course. This speaks for both students and society to experience the course as meaningful.

This research was not interested in whether the pupils chose to go into the business world later in life, but from their answers, we see that one went on to start his own company, and others were thinking about the possibility of doing so. It is also possible to characterize the whole group as being rather entrepreneurial, as all of the informants were either studying or working at the time of this study. However, we are not able to state whether this enterprising attitude has anything to do with taking part in the course. What we are able to state is that, by referring to the statements of the informants, the external project seems to have had more impact on psychological aspects than on developing new knowledge and skills. Some of the informants expressed, for instance, that they had succeeded in turning ideas into action and that they had learned to be creative and take risks. It is through this research possible to establish that the external project may have had a long-term impact on the pupils' lives, although we are not able to say that this will always hold true. Effects of such a project would greatly depend on the school context, and maybe, above all, on the engagement of the teacher. Other studies have established that the way of working within the project is the most important factor for what kind of

influence the project will have (Vetenskap och Allmänhet, 2007). The informants seem to be of the same opinion, or, as two of the informants expressed it: “The teacher was actually really good—what she did. Others would not have succeeded. She had patience, tried, seemed interested... not just a job for her... did not feel like a regular lesson,” (M2) and “The role of the teacher is important for the course to succeed. All teachers would not have succeeded.” (W4) Thus, it can be noted that the teacher's professionalism was perceived as a prerequisite for the success of the external project in School X.

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