

## IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLANS – DID THE PLANS END UP IN A DRAWER?

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**Abstract:** *The University of Agder has organized five courses in entrepreneurship (2012-2017) for teachers in primary and secondary school. Emphasis has been on student-active teaching methods, and each participant developed an action plan for entrepreneurship in their schools. The aim of this research was to investigate what happened to the action plans: were the plans implemented or placed in a drawer? What support did the participants receive, and what challenges did they meet? A questionnaire was sent to all course participants (n=126) using SurveyXact, asking about the action plans: Were they implemented, partly implemented, or put aside? Most respondents (87%) implemented or partly implemented the plan. Those who implemented the plan received support from their management and/or colleagues. Attending the course with a colleague increased the implementation rate. Common challenges were time, uncooperative colleagues and students, and lack of support from the management.*

**Key words:** pedagogical entrepreneurship, action plans, implementation

### Introduction

Pedagogical entrepreneurship is a new learning and teaching method still being developed (Riese, 2010). Pedent.no (n.d.), a digital resource to inspire teachers to use entrepreneurship in their teaching, defined *pedagogical entrepreneurship* as an action-oriented education and training in a social context with the student as an agent in their own learning. The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (2006) has defined the *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* as one of eight key competencies required for lifelong learning. Norway's *Action Plan for Entrepreneurship in Education and Training* stated

Entrepreneurship can be a tool and a working method to stimulate learning in different subjects and in basic skills. Entrepreneurship in education and training may also further develop personal characteristics and attitudes. (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, & Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2009, p. 7)

Entrepreneurship has been primarily related to business, management, and the commercial sector (Mahieu, 2006), and it may still be seen in this way by many. However, using entrepreneurship as a method to stimulate learning in school is a different way of using it. Entrepreneurship is defined in the action plan *Entrepreneurship in Education and Training* as:

[...] a dynamic and social process where individuals, alone or in collaboration, identify opportunities for innovation and act upon these by transforming ideas into practical and targeted activities, whether in social, cultural or economic context. (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Trade and Industry, & Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2006, p. 4)

The Norwegian Strategic Plan *See the Opportunities and Make Them Work!* put forward five criteria for the pupils' learning environment that will contribute to increased entrepreneurship activities in schools and towards the fulfillment of the curriculum. The criteria are (a) stimulation

and development of creativity, (b) pupil participation and active learning, (c) interdisciplinary work forms, (d) collaboration between schools and local business life, and (e) productive work (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research et al., 2006).

The Norwegian Government proposed to rejuvenate the subjects in school to enhance learning outcomes (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016). Schools should allow students to develop creativity, dedication, and exploration, and let them gain experience in seeing opportunities and translating ideas into action. The ability to ask questions, explore, and experiment is important for in-depth learning. Pupils will learn and develop through perception and thinking, aesthetic expressions, and practical activities. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2017) stated that collaboration inspires new thinking and entrepreneurship so that new ideas can be transformed into action. Students who learn through creative activities develop the ability to express themselves in multiple ways, solve problems, and ask new questions.

Unfortunately, few offerings are available in entrepreneurship related to pedagogical subjects and in teacher education. Despite the goal of the *Norwegian Action Plan* (2009) to strengthen the offering in teacher education, a significant decline in such courses has occurred in recent years (Spilling, Johansen, & Støren, 2015). Ruskovaara and Pihkala (2013) claimed that research on teachers' entrepreneurship education is important. However, they also found that the information available on teachers' entrepreneurship education practices is insufficient; there is a lack of tools to support the development of teachers as entrepreneurship educators; and there is not enough information available on the connection between efficient teaching methods and results obtained through entrepreneurship education. To

ensure resources for the future development of entrepreneurship education, it is important to establish this connection between teaching methods and results.

### **Entrepreneurship Courses at Agder**

The University of Agder developed two different but equivalent courses in entrepreneurship for teachers in primary and secondary schools in Norway. The courses have been held five times, and the participants in the research have attended one of these. Each course gave 10 ECTS [European Credit Transfer System] credits (European Commission, nd). The main content was how to use entrepreneurship as a teaching and learning strategy according to the *Knowledge Promotion Reform* (Utdanningsdirektoratet [Directorate of Education], 2006). The courses were concentrated over one week and held at a small and quite simple hotel in Lesvos, Greece, with lots of Greek hospitality. (The University of Agder has had their own study center in Lesvos for the past 25 years.) During the courses, the participants had to produce an action plan for entrepreneurship in their school (University of Agder, 2012; 2015). The environment around the course, made it possible for the participants to live, eat, attend lectures, work in groups, and they discussed entrepreneurship even when swimming and walking together (Ask, Røed, & Aarek, 2018). They appreciated the time to work on the action plans, and they looked forward to implementing them at their workplaces. However, some participants were concerned about how the plans were going to be received by their management and colleagues and talked about having to be careful and perhaps "sneak-introduce" them. During or after each course the participants created a closed Facebook group where they could share experiences to help and inspire each other.

## Development and Implementation of Action Plans

An action plan is defined as “a detailed set of instructions to follow in order to solve a problem or achieve something” (Action Plan, n.d.). Making plans are important in many parts of life, from business and urban planning to plans for student learning and everyday tasks. Teachers are used to making term plans and lecture plans to help them in their teaching duties. As Ackoff (1970) pointed out

Planning is something we do in advance of taking action [...] a process of deciding what to do and how to do it before action is required. Planning is the design of a desired future and of effective ways of bringing it about. (p. 2)

One of the aims for the course in entrepreneurship was to give the participants an action plan and a tool box full of methods that they can use in their teaching (University of Agder, 2012; 2015). The participants were given guidelines and ample opportunity to develop action plans during the course. The action plans were meant to be a help and a tool for further work with entrepreneurship in their teaching. A resource lecture was given to get them started. To make sure that their goals were clear and reachable, they were introduced to a modified version of Doran’s (1981) SMART goals:

- **Specific:** concrete, easy to understand what to do;
- **Measurable:** possible to measure or notice;
- **Accepted:** I am willing to do what is needed;
- **Realistic:** achievable, within reach;
- **Time bound:** date and itinerary.

Teachers from the same school, level, subjects, or with the same challenges formed groups to help and inspire one another in the work. The content of the action plans varied vastly as the participants were at different stages: some had many

years of experience while others were beginners in entrepreneurship. They also focused on different areas, e.g. starting up pupil enterprises, more creative teaching methods, and assessment in entrepreneurial activities. At the end of the week the different action plans were presented to the other participants, and the plans were submitted to the course leader. A message was sent from the organizer to the principals of all the participating schools to inform them about the action plans. They were encouraged to help the teachers to implement the action plans at the schools.

Hopkins (2009) wrote, “Clarity of how plans work leads to more reasonable expectations of what plans can accomplish and more careful choices about when to make plans, about what, for whom and how” (p. xiii). Implementing new plans may also take time, and it is important to have a longer-time view (New Zealand Government, 2012). Change is more likely to happen if more actors are involved, and support from those involved in the change makes implementing more likely to happen (University of Kansas, n.d.). Ask et al. (2018) found that getting time to develop an action plan for entrepreneurship for the teachers’ own school was an experience that was valuable and useful. During the school year, limited time is available for creative thinking because every teaching day has enough challenges.

Teachers can find a great deal of information about lesson planning available in books, articles, and on the internet. However, there is not much, if any, information on how to develop an action plan for entrepreneurship in school. Perhaps this is a good thing because it means the teacher will have to think through all the necessary steps and decide who to involve in the implementation. Having to think through the process is an important part of planning (Reeves, 2011). As explained by Montana and Charnov (2008), planning can be a three-step, result-

oriented process: choosing a destination (result), evaluating alternative routes, and deciding the specific course of the plan.

Stufflebeam’s and Coryn’s (2014) context, input, process, and product evaluations model (CIPP) is a comprehensive framework for conducting formative and summative evaluations of projects. The CIPP evaluation model “is configured to enable and guide comprehensive,

systematic examination of social and educational programs that occur in the dynamic, septic conditions of the real world” (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014, p. 336). The use of the model should be “not only to prove but to improve” (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014, p. 336). In our research we have used process evaluation to investigate whether the time allocated to make action plans during the course is time well spent.

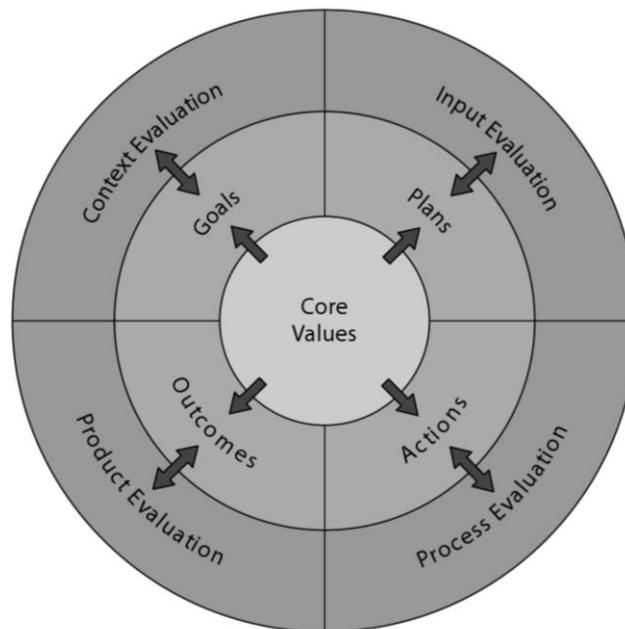


Figure 1. Key components of the CIPP evaluation model and associated relationships with programs (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014, p. 318). Copyright 2014 by Wiley. Reprinted with permission.

Elements of the CIPP evaluation model have been used in our research. In the course, the participants worked with the *context* and the *input* of the plan. They decided what was the need at their school or in their classes and developed a plan for what and how to work with entrepreneurship. In this article, we concentrate on the *process* of implementing the action plan. To what degree did the plans get implemented, and what obstacles did the teachers meet when implementing the plans? According to Hrebiniak (2008) there are obstacles to effective implementation of any plan. Planning and

execution are dependent on each other. The plan is more likely to be successful if there is an overlap between planner and implementor. Effective implementation takes time and involves people at all levels. For entrepreneurship in school, the plan should be anchored in the school’s management. Hrebiniak added that managing change is difficult, and that execution often involves changes in structure, incentives, controls, people, objectives, and responsibilities. Implementing the action plan in entrepreneurship may lead to changes like extended cooperation between teachers and

students, changes in time table and type of exam.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was a follow-up of previous studies conducted about the entrepreneurship courses for teachers (Ask et al., 2018). We wanted to know if the action plans created during the course were used by the teachers and their schools. Ultimately, the aim of this research study was to discover how the action plans were received at the different schools. The main research questions were

1. What happened to the action plans when the participants introduced them to their schools?
2. What support did the participants receive, and what challenges did they meet?

### **Method**

The method used in this study is a mixed method design collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. The research was conducted in the spring 2018. A link to a questionnaire was sent to all participants in five courses (n=126) using the internet tool SurveyXact (Ramboll Management Consulting, n.d.), but only 97 participants received the questionnaire. Some participants had changed their e-mail address since attending the course and were not reached initially. To reach these participants, a message about the survey was posted in the respective Facebook groups, asking them to contact the authors. This resulted in one extra response. A total of 71 participants responded.

The questionnaire contained five multiple choice questions regarding the participants'

workplace, whether they attended the course alone or with a colleague, whether the action plan was implemented at their school/workplace, and how positive the management was about supporting them in the implementation of the action plan. Two open-ended questions regarding support and challenges in the implementation were also included in the questionnaire.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SurveyXact and Excel, and qualitative data were interpreted by the authors by categorizing the answers according to topic. The project was shared with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. No sensitive personal data were collected, and the answers were anonymous.

### **Results and Discussion**

Of the 97 participants who received the questionnaire, 71 participants (73%) answered. Two respondents did not make action plans and were excluded from the analyses. Of the 69 remaining respondents 67% worked in upper secondary school, and 20% worked in lower secondary school. Only 4% worked in primary school, while the rest (9%) worked in higher education, adult education, and *Young Enterprise*. Forty respondents (58%) attended the course with a colleague, while 29 respondents (42%) were the only one from their workplace.

In the survey, the participants were asked what happened to the action plans when they introduced them to their schools, were they implemented, partly implemented, or not implemented? As shown in Figure 2, 60 respondents (87%) implemented or partly implemented the action plan, while 9 respondents (13%) did not.

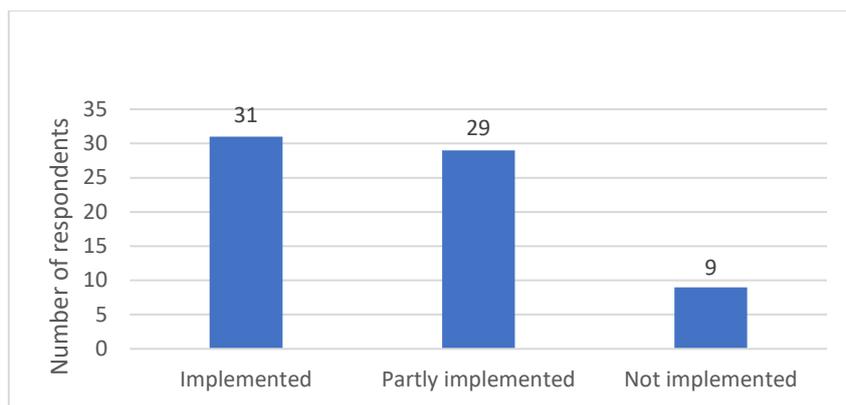


Figure 2. Number of respondents who implemented, partly implemented and did not implement the action plan. n=69

Furthermore, the participants were asked how supportive the management was in implementing the action plan. The possible answers were – very positive, positive, neither/nor, negative, very negative, or management was not involved. The very positive management took part in planning and implementing the plan, the positive gave support but did not take an active part. The neutral (neither/nor) management did not support or discourage the implementation of the plan, while the negative or very negative did not want the plan to be implemented at all.

Figure 3 shows that 38 respondents (55%) said that the management was very positive or positive in supporting them in implementing the action plan. Twenty-seven respondents (39%) reported a neutral management or that the management was not involved, and four respondents (6%) said that the management was negative or very negative. The latter coincides with the findings of Hrebiniak (2008) who found that managing change may be difficult to the people involved.

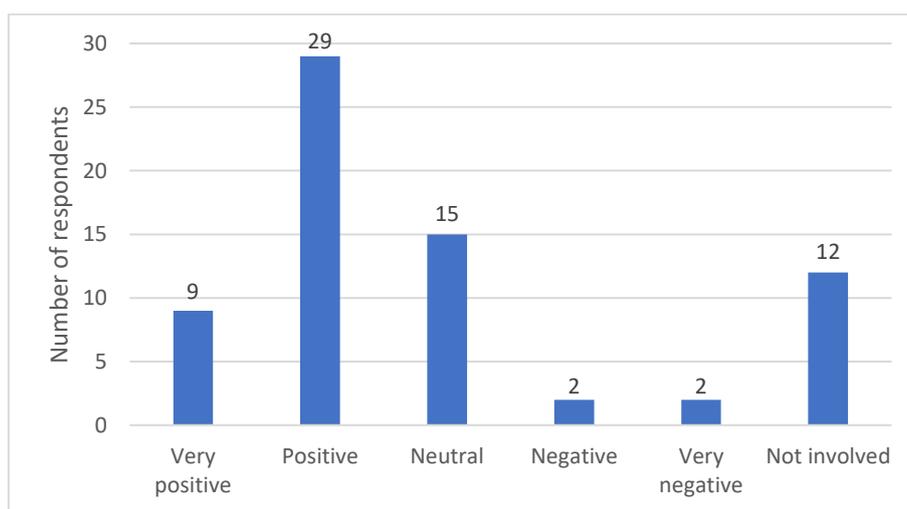


Figure 3. Management support in implementation of action plans. n=69

Some of the participants were colleagues from the same school while other schools had only one representative. We looked at

how this influenced the implementation of the action plan. Of the 40 respondents who attended the course with a colleague, 36

(90%) implemented or partly implemented the action plan (Figure 4). Thirty-four (83%) of the 39 respondents who attended

the course alone implemented the plan at least partly.

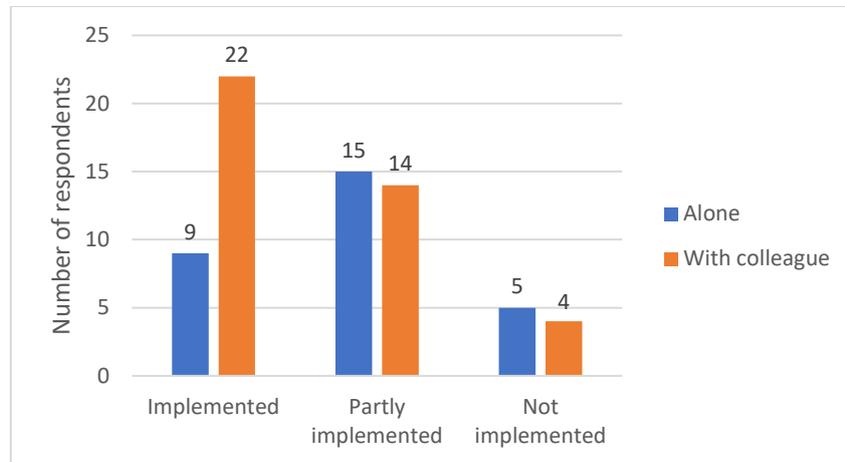


Figure 4. Relation between implementing action plan and attending course alone or with a colleague. n=69

The participants were asked how supportive the management was in implementing the action plan. We thus investigated how management support influenced the implementation of action plans. One respondent reported that the action plan was well received, but it was

“eaten up” by all the other things the management had to relate to. Of the 38 respondents reporting a positive management, 37 (97%) implemented the action plan, at least partly (Figure 5). None of the respondents reporting a negative management implemented the action plan.

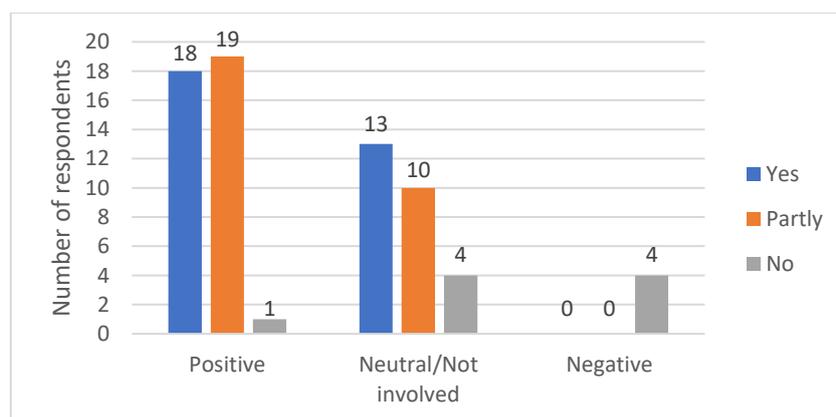


Figure 5. Relation between implementing action plan and support from the management. n=69

While 27 (68%) of respondents attending the course with a colleague reported a positive management, only 11 (38%) of those attending the course alone did (Table

1). A negative management was reported by 5% of those attending the course with a colleague, and by 7% of the remaining respondents.

Table 1

*Relation between Support from the Management and Whether Respondents Attended the Course with a Colleague or Alone*

	With colleague	Alone
Positive	27	11
Neutral/Not involved	11	16
Negative	2	2
<i>n=69</i>		

### **Challenges in Implementing the Action Plan**

The participants were asked to describe their challenges in implementing the action plan. Six main categories evolved with some respondents describing more than one challenge. The largest group had no or few challenges (n=24). Time was the most limiting factor (n=18). Uncooperative colleagues (n=7), challenging students (n=7), and uninterested and negative management (n=5) were mentioned. Some miscellaneous (n=9) challenges were also reported, e.g. one school already had an action plan and other schools reported conflicts with other projects.

It is positive that a large group encountered no or only a few challenges. That time was a limiting factor was not a surprise. At work, there is limited time for creative thinking. Every day has enough challenges (Ask et al., 2018). This result also coincides with the New Zealand Government (2012), which stated that implementing new plans may take time, and it is important to have a longer-time view. Hrebiniak (2008) pointed out that effective implementation takes time and involves people at all levels. For some, the problem was that the time table for the term was already in place, and the management and the colleagues did not see how pedagogical entrepreneurship could be integrated as a learning strategy. One headmaster argued that entrepreneurship was not a priority in the strategic plan for the school.

Implementing the action plans took more time than expected because of inexperienced teachers and colleagues and challenging students. It was also difficult to find colleagues to cooperate with. Some colleagues felt that their allocated time was “stolen” and used for other subjects, and that using pedagogical entrepreneurship gave them extra work. They could not see the value of interdisciplinary work. Some teachers found it challenging to engage and motivate all the students and create good enterprise teams. Students in lower secondary school are not used to working independently, as they do in enterprise teams, and did not always understand how they were supposed to work.

### **Support in Implementing the Action Plan**

Support in implementing the action plan varied among the respondents. Both colleagues (n=16) and management (n=20) were important sources of support. The management provided time, possibility, and resources to work with entrepreneurship. Some respondents (n=13) got support from the management, colleagues, and other relevant persons. More than a fourth (n=19), however, got little or no support, yet one of them replied that they had not missed any support, and two of them had not taken any initiative to implement the action plan.

Most respondents got support from either management, colleagues, or both. This response is uplifting and might have contributed to the high implementation rate.

At the same time, a considerable proportion of the teachers did not get much support. Some implemented the plan, at least partly, without receiving any or much support. Two teachers were given support but failed to implement the plan. One of them struggled to motivate colleagues who did not know entrepreneurship as a teaching strategy, but after a while, other colleagues who knew the entrepreneurial method became involved, which simplified the process. This teacher now uses pedagogical entrepreneurship in several subjects but did not implement the action plan per se. Another respondent got a lot of support from the headmaster, but as the department leader was very negative and the rest of the department was resistant, the action plan was not implemented.

When planning future courses, it will be important to inform both the management and colleagues at the school that part of the course will be to develop an action plan for the school. This plan should build on the common wish of the school to implement or improve pedagogical entrepreneurship. Teachers attending the courses should have a mandate from the management: they do a job for the school not for themselves. In this way the whole school can feel ownership of the plan. This idea coincides with Hrebiniak (2008) who stated that the plan is more likely to be successfully implemented if there is an overlap between planner and implementor. Hopkins (2009) also wrote that if people know how plans work, they develop more realistic expectations of what planning can accomplish.

Experience from other courses was that participants can be inspired during the course, but that very little happens when they return to everyday life. However, the results from this research show that most participants implemented their action plans. Using process evaluation from the CIPP model shows that it is beneficial to use time to develop action plans during the course (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

Furthermore, the course should also teach how to work with the plan so that colleagues can see the benefits of the plan.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The authors of this study have been involved in one or more courses. Therefore, the participants are known to them, which can be both a strength and a limitation of the study. A positive relationship might increase the response rate. The participants may want to contribute to research that they are interested in and give something back to the course leader. However, participants with negative experiences, and participants who did not implement their action plan, might refrain from answering because they do not want their lecturers to know that they did not succeed.

Furthermore, the participants attended different courses from 2012 to 2017. The response rate was highest in 2016 and lowest from 2012. This result is not surprising as the probability that a teacher may change e-mail address (e.g. due to changed workplace) increases with time. It is also possible that they had forgotten about the action plan and therefore did not reply. Those teachers who took part in the course in 2017 had not finished the school year when the survey was done, and it is therefore natural that they had not fully completed the plan. The survey is too small to draw any fixed conclusions, but it can give an indication of what are success factors for implementing entrepreneurial action plans in schools.

### **Conclusion**

In this study we have looked at what happened to the action plans from five courses in entrepreneurship. If time is to be allocated for making action plans, it is important that the plans are implemented. If they are put in a drawer or on a shelf, the work is in vain. "What we think, know, or believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only consequence...is what we do"

(Haines, 1995, p. 61). We believe that this is applicable to other similar courses.

Our research showed that most of the plans were fully or partly implemented. It seemed easier to implement the action plan in full if more teachers from the same school participated in the course and the management was positive. No participants implemented the plan if the management at the school was negative. There is a need for more research in the field to be able to say anything certain about which factors govern the implementation of action plans.

There is also a need for further research on how implementing the action plans can improve entrepreneurial teaching methods in school. More research should be done on the five criteria for the pupils' learning environment that will contribute to increased entrepreneurship activities in schools: (a) stimulation and development of creativity, (b) pupil participation and active learning, (c) interdisciplinary work forms, (d) collaboration between schools and local business life, and (e) productive work. Ultimately, there is a need to include to more teaching about and use of pedagogical entrepreneurship as a learning strategy in teacher training.

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