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EXPRESS YOURSELF! INCLUSIVE GROUPING IN SCHOOLS

How inclusive grouping influences students' well-being

ABSTRACT

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The 'Express Yourself! Social inclusion in schools' project was conducted in four (4) European countries: Germany, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain. Selected target groups were youngsters between ages 12 to 18, junior high school and upper secondary level. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences in Finland was administering the project. The project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union. The 'Express Yourself!' project was executed from autumn 2019 to spring 2020.

The main purpose of this thesis was to study how inclusive grouping influences students' experienced well-being in life. The data were analysed by comparing the change in satisfaction with different spheres in life during the first session and after the last session. The research tool was the 3x10D online self-evaluation survey. The survey measured the current state of well-being through ten different spheres of life; self-esteem, health, overcoming obstacles in life, number of trusted friends, family, managing daily activities, financial situation, housing, experience of life and ability to develop strengths in life. To get a wider picture, students were also asked to answer three self-evaluation questions after the last session. In these questions, students were asked to evaluate if the 'Express Yourself!' training modules had a positive influence on central project goals such as knowing the classmates better and gaining more self-confidence and motivation toward school.

The 'Express Yourself!' project received over 1 300 student evaluations. The self-evaluation survey was filled out by 677 students during the first session and 575 students after the last session. The results of the project indicated a positive impact on students' experienced well-being, particularly in the spheres of life in general, managing daily activities, number of friends and self-esteem. Two of the major influencers were gender and age. The results were positive, especially among male students in the age group 12 to 13. Students in that age group experienced a positive influence on every sphere. The experienced change in well-being declined towards the older age groups.

Keywords: inclusive grouping, motivation, self-esteem, self-expression, well-being

CONTENT

1 INDTRODUCTION

During the last decade, researchers and social workers have noticed that the social and emotional well-being of students has declined. At the same time, the problematic behavior has increased. As schools are playing a big role in youth, it can be assumed that schools are playing a role in this phenomenon. As a part of the phenomenon, schools have the responsibility to improve the well-being of the student. But finding the right and effective method, might not be an easy task. (Gray, Galton, McLaughlin, Clarke & Symonds 2011, p. 1.)

Since yearly 2010 the term self-expression has been linked to the fulfillment of life and by that to experienced well-being. Self-expression is described to be one of the most important ways we humans are connected, navigating in life and growing. As a vital part of life, self-expression helps us to reach our full potential. (De la Huerta, 2014.) The purpose of this thesis was to study how the improved self-expression skills influences 12 to 18 years old student's well-being in several European countries. The cooperation institute of this thesis was Diaconia University of Applied Science in Finland and their development project Express Yourself! Social Inclusion in Schools.

This thesis is focused on analyzing the quantitative result of the 'Express Yourself!' project. Collected data were analyzed by comparing the change in the arithmetic averages. Participant students were also asked about how the training modules influenced knowing the classmates better, getting more confidence and motivation toward school. To get a wider perception, the data was cross-tabled and analyzed by country, gender and age. The project was designed especially for the teachers and youth workers who are interested to include self-expression and inclusive grouping into their job. The qualitative study of the project was done in the Bielefeld's Diaconia University of Applied Science (Fachhochschule der Diakonie gem. GmbH.). As the information on this thesis is used in project reporting, the structure of this thesis follows the guideline of the project's end report.

Results of this thesis revealed how the 'Express Yourself!' training modules influence students' experienced well-being and for who the exercises were most suitable. The gathered information offered valuable information on which spheres of life had the most impact on students' well-being. The results can be also used to improve students learning experience and preventing dropouts. Collected data and results can be used as background knowledge for future development projects.

The whole project was carefully documented. Exercises and the framework of the training modules can be downloaded from the project's webpage, https://expressyourself.diak.fi/. The information on webpages is free for everyone.

2 EXPRESS YOURSELF! INCLUSIVE GROUPING IN SCHOOLS

2.1 General project information

According to Research and Training Research Foundation the major factors for student dropouts and slowing down the studies were attitude and motivation (42%), health issues (25,1%), workload (22,9%), teaching methods (22,6%) and weak financial situation. Major factors for low motivations and bad attitude were lack of study friends, inadequate study skills, workload, employment prospects and relationships in school. (Nummela, 2019.)

The roots of the "Express Yourself!' project was in the 'Participatory Sporty Theater' project, held in Finland from 2016 to 2019. The ''Participatory Sporty Theater' project combined culture and sport to exercises. The goal was to help participants to find new sides of themselves and to strengthen themselves. The idea of the 'Express Yourself!' project was to take self-expression classes of the 'Participatory Sporty Theater' project, together with inclusive grouping, to several European countries to see if the concept would have a positive impact on students experienced well-being. The selected target groups were youngsters ages 12 to 18, junior high school and upper secondary level. The training modules of the projects were held in Germany, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain. Diaconia University of Applied Science in Finland was administering the project. The project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

Before the 'Express Yourself!' project started the project workers or group leaders had an orientation meeting with teachers to discuss the needs and wishes of the students and teachers. Other topics for the start meeting were the goals, rules, schedules and special needs of the students. The target of the 'Express Yourself!' project was to reach 180 students per cooperation country. The training modules were held either by the project worker or school teacher. Participation of the 'Express Yourself!' project was free for the schools and students. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)
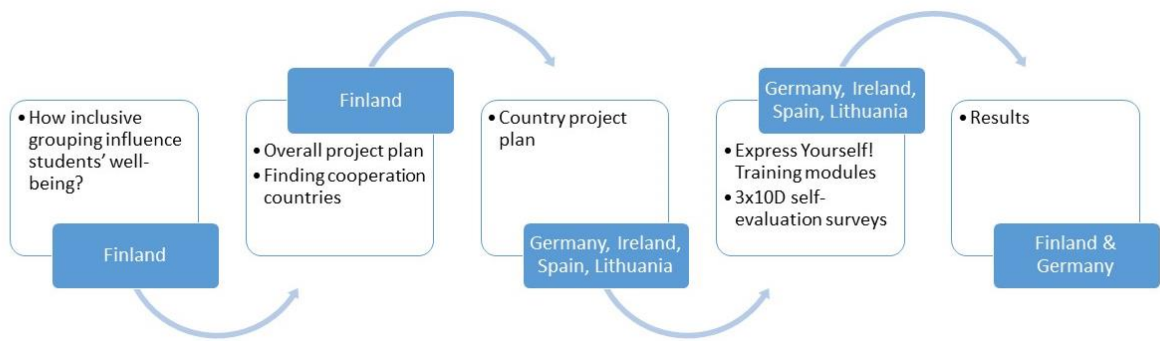
FIGURE 1. Project process flow. Upper box is showing the responsible doer of each stage (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019).

Figure 1 shows the process flow of the 'Express Yourself!' project. The starting point for the project was the curiosity of the 'Participatory Sporty Theater' project's team on how inclusive grouping would impact on students' well-being outside Finland. Project workers from Diaconia University of Applied science started to round up candidate countries and cooperation organizations. Germany, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain expressed their interest toward the project. Project plan, methods and goals were presented to the cooperation organizations which made their own implementation plan. Finland was looking over the project and analyzing the quantitative results of the project. The qualitative study of the project was done in Germany. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

For students the 'Express Yourself!' training modules aimed to improve motivation toward school, making learning more fun and to find ways to work better as a group. Sessions were held during the school day offering a chance to hang out, learn something new and getting to know other students better. For students the participation in the project was free. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

The experienced change in the well-being of students was gathered via 3x10D self-evolution survey tool. 3x10D life situation assessment tool is developed by the researchers of Diaconia University of Applied Science. The tool offers a

solution to better understand an individual's situation in life, to strengthen an individual's voice and to improve the social services in society. 3x10D is also a self-assessment tool. The survey consists of evaluating ten (10) spheres of life by using a scale of 0 to 10. In the 'Express Yourself!' project the goal of the 3x10D self-evolution survey was to give a point of view on changes in satisfaction with the different spheres of life. This information was for the project team and for the student themselves. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

2.2 Goals of the Express Yourself! project

The goals of the 'Express Yourself!' project can be divided between overall project objects and objects for the participating schools and students. The fulfillment of the project was measured with the 3x10D self-evaluation survey filled out by students during the first training module and after the last training module. The top-level objects of the project were (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019):

- To promote social inclusion in school communities
- To improve the overall well-being of the students via self-expression
- To prevent school drop-out and to further improve the learning results of the students

The project was designed for teachers who were interested in combining social inclusion, youth work and self-expression in their work. It gave also tools and methods for teaming up with new students. One of the goals of the project was to give to the participating schools the tools on how to motivate students to continue their studies as planned, to improve the working and learning environment and to support the cooperation between teachers and students. All modules and exercises were also suitable for special needs children. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

2.3 The 'Express Yourself!' training modules and framework

The 'Express Yourself!' project consisted of five (5) different training modules. Every project team had the freedom to design exercises used in modules under the given framework. For example, in Ireland, as it is a very musical country, the project team was using musician in their classes. The ideal time for every module was two (2) hours. The project team can also decide the timeline for the project. The timeline of the project anything between a couples of months to a year. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.) The framework of the 'Express Yourself!' training modules are presented in figure 2.

Training Module 1, Grouping	• Introduction of the project and the first training module • Filling the 3x10D survey • Safe atmosphere, grouping and well-being • Exercises • Reflection
Training Module 2, Trust building	• Introduction of the module • Trust building, sharing and discussion of feelings • Exercises • Reflection
Training Module 3, Roles & interaction	• Introduction of the module • Roles in group, social skills and encountering others • Exercises • Reflection
Training Module 4, Emotional skills	• Introduction of the module • Emotions, soft skills, embodiment, movement and listening • Exercises • Reflection
Training Module 5, The power of self-expression	• Introduction of the module • Talent show • Reflection • Filling the 3x10D after the module

FIGURE 2. The framework of the training modules. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

As shown in figure 2, the first training module started with filling out the 3x10D self-evaluating survey. The theme in the first training module was the introduction of the project, safe atmosphere, grouping and well-being of the student. The introduction part of the module consisted of explaining the project and goals of the training module. To make the project successful, it was important to tell what

students can benefit from the 'Express Yourself!' project. After the introduction, as a part of the safe atmosphere and grouping, the first exercises took place. Selected exercises aimed to make students feel welcome and safe. The training module ended at the reflection. Reflection was done with acting methods, using picture cards or Post-it notes and/or a discussion with the students about the exercises and how they experienced them. The discussion opens up an opportunity for the students to obtain more information about the other person and share their experience with the group. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

The second training module consisted of trust-building, empowerment and reflection. After the session´s theme intro, warm-up exercises started the training module. Exercises consisted of trust-building, experience sharing and discussion of feelings. Like in the first training module, the second module ended with the reflection. The reflection method can vary in different modules. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

Roles in the group, social skills and encountering with other students were the keywords of the third module. The exercises of that module consisted of roleplaying and acting based methods to develop and support teamwork skills. Exercises aimed to help to encounter by giving the students the experience of being seen and accepted as individuals that they are. Students can participate as they wish and thus be able to lose the existing rigid roles of the school group. The third training module included also the first energizer exercise. The students were encouraged to present ideas and tasks, for example, rehearse for a job interview. The module ended with the reflection. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

The theme of the fourth module was dealing with emotions, 'soft skills', embodiment and awareness. The students were introduced to the embodiment, movement, the art of listening and contact improvisation. After trust-building exercises and reflection, the group leaders presented the theme and the exercise of the last module. In the last module, the students were encouraged to present an idea, a talent or a skill, which was possible to share with others by teaching it

or demonstrating it as in a 'talent show'. Students could also form pairs or small groups and work together. The final module ended with the 'talent show' and filling out the 3X10D online self-evaluation survey. (Niko Nummela, Project Manager, personal information 27.5.2019.)

PICTURE 1. Exercise during one of the training modules in Lithuania.

3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND; WELL-BEING

3.1 What is well-being in life

Well-being, sometimes understated as a synonym for happiness, is something we humans are constantly seeking and studying. For decades the concept of well-being has been one of the top issues for studies. The definition of well-being has changed sporadically by the result of the studies. The improvement of society has usually been measured with the citizen well-being matrix. The peak of well-being research was in 1970s, when Erik Allad associated the resources, for example, house, education and experienced (subjective) life, to be the definition of well-being. During the 1980s the well-being was defined to be just things you can own and control, such as a house, car, money and work. The element of subjective well-being was put into the background. As stepping to the new millennium the subjective well-being raised its head and was once again taken back to the concept of well-being. Well-being, being happy, is no longer an individual´s own problem, it is seen as a common problem. A problem which society can influence with politics. (Saari 2012, p. 7.)

The well-being of young adults is built on self-image. A healthy and positive self-image is a realistic and positive way of seeing oneself. One of the most important factors to improve the self-image is to identify strength and dare to improve ourselves. According to Kainulainen (2019) the well-being, or happiness, can be seen through ten spheres of life: self-esteem, the status of health, abilities to win challenges, trusted friends, family (-members), managing the daily activities, financial situation, housing, developing strengths and life as a whole. (Kainulainen 2019; Karppinen, Ruokonen & Uusikylä 2008, p. 15.)

Golding, Patel and Perry (2014, p. 19) stated that the overall quality and well-being of life is depending on citizen participation (volunteer frequency, youth policy etc.), economical opportunities (youth unemployment, entrepreneurial activities etc.), education (youth literacy, public spending on education etc.), health (life expectancy, tobacco use etc.), information and communication technology (digital natives, the dependence of internet etc.) and safety & security

(road injuries, fundamental rights etc.) Kainulainen (2019) is defining well-being primarily by personal features when Golding, Patel and Perry (2014, p. 19) are defining it primarily from the point of society. The approach to the concept of the well-being is depending on the research methods and goals. In this thesis, the concept of well-being is strongly linked to the 'Express Yourself!' training modules, persons' own possibility to influence to experienced well-being and results of 3x10D self-evaluation survey. Therefore, in this thesis well-being is defined according to Kainulainen.
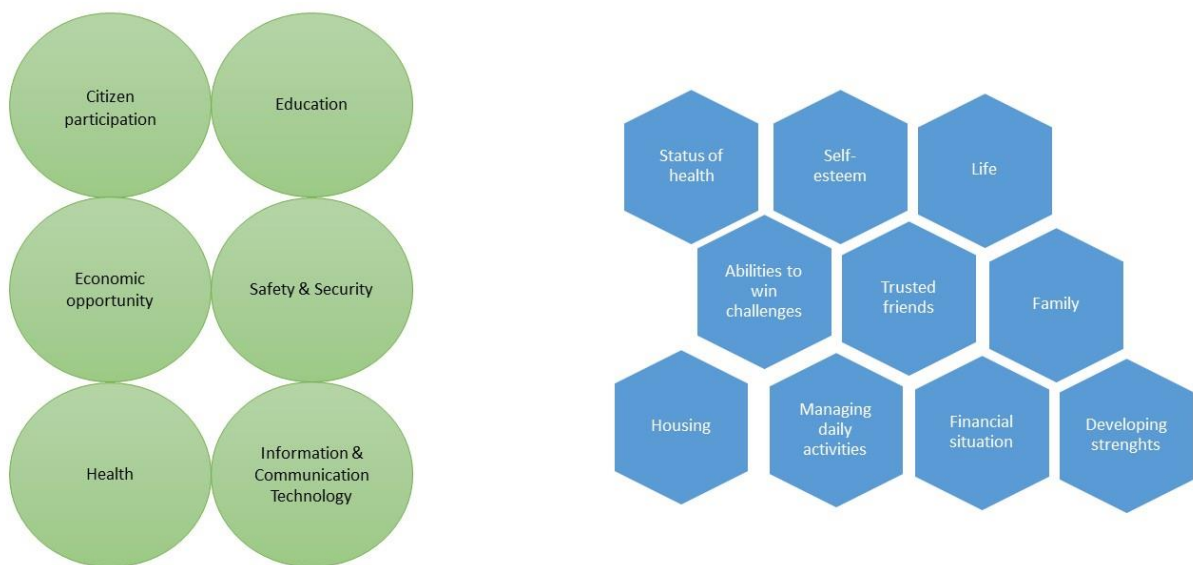
Figure 3. Well-being elements by Golding etc. (2014, p.19) versus Kainulainen (2019).

3.2 Well-being of students

Gray etc. excogitated on their research 'The Supportive School: Wellbeing and the Young Adolescent' (2011, p. 23-24) that the feeling of togetherness in schools is linked to five (5) elements:

- Relationship between young people and teachers
- Experienced level of satisfaction (happiness) at school
- Level of education and schools' affairs and activities
- How school is dealing with academic pressure and stresses
- Schools' functioning: class sizes, tutor groups, house system, teaching, learning and physical environment

All five (5) elements can also be found in the goals of the 'Express Yourself!' project. It is very important that the students must enjoy their time at school. Gray etc. states (2011, p. 12) that according to their studies, students who dislike the school are more likely to fail academically, have a greater risk of dropping out, adopting bad habits and are experiencing a reduced quality of well-being and life in general. The 'Express Yourself!' project aims to give tools to schools on how to strengthen the togetherness and overall experienced well-being at the schools.

3.3 Culture, ethnic, personal and economic factors of well-being

We all are born into a culture, we all have ethnic features, we all belong to some economical surrounding and we all are our own individuals with interest, values, ideology and sexuality. As we all are limited editions, the way we are defining success, well-being and happiness is different. Culture, ethnic, personal and economic factors are guiding these definitions. To some success in schools means good grades, high test scores and acknowledgements from the teachers and to some, the success in schools means just graduating. (Nunn 2014, p. 10.)

Students from low economic backgrounds are more likely not to finish their studies. According to *Suomi seuraavan sukupolven kasvuympäristönä* (Kääriälä, 2020) the economic background plays a big role, especially among immigrant families. If the family can't support their children financially and guarantee the basic needs, it will lead more likely to poor success in schools. For students with the low economical background, working is more important than graduating. But without a degree, these students are more likely to have only low salary positions and therefore their economical situations will not improve. The same phenomenon can be seen also among immigrants. For both groups, low economic backgrounds and immigrants, access to health care might be limited, or even not possible. These factors are strongly linked to the experienced well-being in life. (Nunn 2014, p. 107.)

The legal rights and approval atmosphere among adult lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) has become more acceptable but

LGBTQ children have not fully shared this progress. For example, in some schools, safe school policies are an unfamiliar terms. Wellness in minority communities, such as LGBTQ students and students suffering from mental illness or drug-abusing, is a wider concept than in mainstream communities. For minorities, the wellness concerns are strongly linked to larger social problems such as racism. These larger social problems, and even negative experiences, can impact a person's willingness to go medical attention, on finalizing their studies, taking part in society or even leaving home. These obstacles are impacting how individuals are experiencing, and also on how they are defining their stage of well-being in life. (Collins, Rocco & Bryant 2014, p. 5-6; Morrison, Morrison, Carrigan & McDermott 2011, p. 128-129.)

3.4 Motivations and preventing the dropouts

Richard Ryan and Edward Deci from the University of Rochester have defined the concept of motivations as: "Motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality - all aspects of activation and intention-- motivation is highly valued because of its consequences: Motivation produces. It is therefore of preeminent concern to those in roles such as manager, teacher, religious leader, coach, health care provider, and parent that involve mobilizing others to act." (American Psychologist. January 2000, 69.) Motivations is at the core of success in school, whether it is good grades or just graduating.

According to Kainulainen (2016) loneliness have a straight influence on the experienced well-being of life. Loneliness and exclusion are some of the factors which have been proven to have an impact on dropping out of school and slowing down the studies (Junttila 2010, p. 44). Another big factor in preventing dropouts and slowing the studies among students is motivation. Motivation is something that is not born by itself. As we humans grow older and our physiological development develops, we can keep our mind motivated. An individual who is not able to keep his/her mind, soul and body motivated, is in danger to have learning difficulties in schools. Safe and positive surroundings enable individuals to have the tools to master the skill of staying motivated. For parents, teachers and other

grownups, this means the responsibility to create suitable conditions for children and students. One important tool for this is the interaction among adults and children. (Sajaniemi, Suhonen, Nislin & Mäkelä, 2015.)

Marshall McLuhan stated in his groundbreaking book *The Medium is the Massage*, that learning and the whole learning process has been for a long time connected only to the word boring. Our time offers different ways, fun ways, to learn. Why don´t we teach with humor – sometimes a clever or observed joke is more effecting for students than a bunch of words. (McLuhan 1967, 65.) Students can learn a wide range of sentences, but after the exam, if the motivations have not been good, all of those words will vanish. Teachers and group leaders have the opportunity to change this. (Järvilehto 2014, p. 36.)

Projects such as the 'Express Yourself!' aims to create and strengthen the students' motivations towards educations and by that in future planning. After all, social cohesion has a major impact on learning and one of the effective ways to learn is to share knowledge with other people (Järvilehto 2014, p. 37). Projects like the 'Express Yourself!' aims to support the social skills, group skills and ways of expressing yourself which are key elements in communications with other humans. A motivated student is more likely to find the flow, which will keep him/her going. The flow, which answers to question: what I want to do when I grow up.

3.5 Groups and grouping

Youth can be described to be the most confusing time in life. As a social creature, humans need to feel to be part of something and have a safety zone during the stormy time in their life. Groups, and friends in general, can help youngsters cope better with crises such as problems with their parents and friends. Young people also need to have a safe environment where they can experiment safely with their identity while maintaining the feeling of being part of the group. Groups also teach us the social skills that we need in everyday life. The group can also have a supporting influence if the group members notice that they are not alone with their

issues and problems. The group is born when its members are sharing a goal, interacting and are aware of who belongs to their group. (Gray etc. 2011, p. 30-31; Aalto 2019, p. 99-100.)

According to Aalto (2000, 69) grouping is a process where via different kinds of exercises the feeling of safety starts to establish, grow and strengthen. Grouping is not happening in the first meeting, it needs time. Sometimes group members can agree on rules and working methods to ensure that all members are working for a common goal. (Aalto 2019, p. 99.) Functionality and working together in groups are important factors when inclusion, the we-spirit, is born. This spirit improves the learning results, working with others, group amusement and feeling of safety at the group. (Salovaara & Honkanen 2000, p. 142.) Gray etc. states (2011, p. 30) that students who can form relationships with other students cope better under different crises in life. Schools can give tools for young people on how to develop their ability to form relationships and how to act in different groups. When the grouping process has succeeded it can help group members to see that even when the attention is not on them, they are not outsiders. This has a strong impact on an individual´s positive and healthy self-esteem. (Aalto 2019, p. 10.)

3.5.1 Feeling safe in a group

Throughout life, we belong to different groups. To all of us, it is very important to feel safe in groups and feel safe to express ourselves. In the safe group, the individual can experience that he/she is enough and being happy is up to them. Creating a safe group is not an easy task. It encounters challenges if group members are unable to identify or express their own needs, feelings, opinions, creativity, morality, inner child voice, dreams, traumas or dark sides. Hand-in-hand with these walks also feelings such as fear, shame, guilt and worthlessness. With different practices, interactions and inclusiveness, it is possible to establish and improve the feeling of safety in the groups. A truly safe group is where a person´s inner me is not threatened. (Aalto 2014, p. 17; Aalto 2000, p. 9-10, 12, 15.)

In the group, the feeling of safety becomes from five (5) elements (Aalto 2000, p. 16; Salovaara & Honkanen 2000, p. 18):

- *Trust*, this can be divided into feel where you can trust your group members and to be trustworthy to others. In a group, you have to trust others to accept you as you are and show also to others that they can be themselves around you
- *Acceptance,* to show others our vulnerability and experience acceptance among others
- *Openness,* in a group when we feel trust, we are more able to be open and show our inner self. When we are truly open, the trust in the group grows
- *Support,* to give support to other group members that they will survive as a winner even from the hardest obstacles and tasks
- *Commitment,* group members have to be committed to each other's and also to the group's task.

3.5.2 The role of group leaders

Interaction skills are especially important for group leaders. If the leader of the group doesn't have the necessary interaction skills, he/she can slow down the safety process of the group. The leader must live in a constant learning process of the interaction skills and also teach and support other group members. It is the group leader's task to create an open and accepting atmosphere. We all need social skills in our everyday life and it is important to understand that those skills can be developed. In interaction with other, the most important abilities are interaction with himself/herself, disagreeing, but also listen to others' opinions, trying to help others to ease the bad feeling and taking part to others good feeling. Equally important is expressing bad and good feelings to others, admitting their own mistakes, grace success, giving and receiving feedback. (Aalto 2000, p. 26-27.)

In schools, teachers can be seen as group leaders. Teachers are establishers of the classroom community and culture. How they are handling crises and how they are making decisions on what and how they are teaching, has a huge impact on grouping and creating a motivating atmosphere. Teachers and group leaders, have to know their group so they can define the group´s needs. The goals of the special needs children's group might be different than others. The group leader needs to understand that the participants prejudices about working together as a group. Prejudices, positives and negatives, are based on the participants' own experience. The role of the group leader is to help the participants to create a positive learning experience through high-class session planning. (Forlin & Loreman 2014, p. 9, 27.)

The group leaders are playing a big role in the 'Express Yourself!' training modules. They have the responsibility to teach and to offer tools for self-expression. In cases where the 'Express Yourself!' project team members are not allowed to keep the classes they have to teach and motivated the teacher towards the project and be the spokesmen for the project. Positive and negative attitudes can catch easily from people to people. Poorly done familiarization can impact the result of the project.

3.6 The importance of inclusion in life

How inclusion is understood? Is inclusion just smiling, behaving good, saying hello, making others feel good and include others in the discussion? Is inclusion happening when you are agreeing with others or when others are agreeing with you?

Helen Turnbull (2016) argues that to fully understand what inclusion means one has to understand the exclusion and what that means for a human being. Exclusion brings up feeling such as depression, anxiety and distress. It has been studied that pain and exclusion activate partly the same part of the brain, showing the same brain patterns of physiological reaction. These studies are good examples of how exclusion feels for individuals. Researchers state that for human

nature, it is easier to perform exclusion than inclusion. Inclusion is something we humans have to learn while exclusion comes naturally to us. (Turnbull 2016, xiii, p. 3-4.)

Social inclusion is a concept of opportunities to participate, contribute and influence on matters which are influencing society, community or other groups. Among that, it is described to be a merge of hearing and being heard, doing things together and sharing experiences. All of this is based on the trust in the group. (Helminen 2019, p. 46, Jämsén & Pyykkönen 2014, p. 9; Särkelä-Kukko 2014, p. 35.)

The 'Express Yourself!' project was executed by using inclusive grouping methods. In this thesis inclusive grouping is defined to be different expanded activities that are aiming to influence positively on participant's well-being. The watchword for the project can be defined to be 'learning together by doing together'.

3.7 Self-esteem is in the core of well-being

The term self-esteem was discovered and described in 1890 as a positive self-image which develops when an individual meets or exceeds important goals and aspect of their personal life. A decade later the self-esteem was seen and described to be part of self-knowledge which reflects on how an individual sees and feel about themselves, what is their assets and as a fundamental human need. Individuals who have high self-esteem have a highly favorable image of themselves and individuals who have low self-esteem have uncertain or even a negative image of themselves. As self-esteem is seen as individuals' own feelings and views on their strengths and weakness, self-esteem is not accurate or inaccurate. That is to say, self-esteem reflects an individual's perceptions rather than reality. (Zeigher-Hill 2013, p. 2, 5.)

Due to the belief that self-esteem plays a central role in numerous important life events, it has been widely researched and studied for decades. The first studies

of self-esteem started in 1970 when the concept of self-esteem was strongly linked with a variety of social problems such as academic underachievement, unemployment, violence and drug abuse. Countries and organizations around the world founded programs that aimed to help citizens to build up their self-esteem. Some of these programs showed changes. For that reason, the value of self-esteem has been debated in recent years. Some of the researchers associated self-esteem with a wide array of importance in all life spheres and some researchers state that self-esteem only has limited value in life. (Zeigher-Hill 2013, p. 1.)

Self-esteem plays a different role in an individual's life span as the feeling of self-worth is seen as age-related. During childhood, the self-esteem is relatively high before it drops remarkably at the first steps of adolescence. The progression of self-esteem increases throughout adolescence, adulthood and reaches its peak at the age of 60. After that, it started to weaken again. (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling & Potter 2002, p. 17.) Experienced self-esteem is different between girls and boys and between women and men. During childhood experienced self-esteem is at the same comparable level between girls and boys. At adolescence, the experienced self-esteem is no longer comparable as boys feel a higher level of self-esteem than girls. This pattern continues among women and men until old age when the self-esteem of men drops considerably. (Guidon 2009, 125; Zeigher-Hill 2013, p. 3-4.)

As an answer to this phenomenon some researchers stated that in classrooms, girls are facing sexism, negative changes in body image due to puberty and gender norms like female modesty. There are also differences between major groups and stigmatized groups, such as for overweight, mental illness, drug abuse and sexual minority groups. The members of stigmatized groups often report a feeling of low self-esteem. Some researchers state that this is because the members of these groups usually adopt the negative view, stigma and opinion, of their group held by bigger, more traditional groups. (Guidon 2009, p. 125; Zeigher-Hill 2013, p. 3-4.)

As a fundamental human need, self-esteem has a protective function in life. Good and healthy self-esteem can protect and help to handle negative events in life, such as failure and rejection. In the academy world students who can face failures and rejections are more likely to utilize more effort and determination to succeed next time. Individuals who have a positive self-image usually possess also better tools to manage and deal with stress than individuals who have lower self-esteem. Some studies also show that individuals who have a good self-image can face negative social feedback and negative achievement feedback better than those individuals who have a lower self-image. High self-esteem is impacting on how an emotionally stable individual is. Some researchers also state that high self-esteem protects an individual from psychological distress. (Zeigher-Hill 2013, p. 6-7, 10.)

3.8 Social skills

We all are born with different kinds of social skills. Even though social skills training is usually connected as a method of behavior therapy, the practices can be used in all fields and with everyone. Whether we are doctors, managers, salespersons or students, we all need social skills so we can communicate effectively, get along with others, make friends, ask for help, develop relationships and interact with each other and with society.

We need social skills to achieve social competence. In this thesis, the social competence is defined to be social skills which help individual to understand, analyze and act correctly in social situations without offending others. To master social competence, an individual has to master social skills, to know how to regulate feeling and behavior and what factors impacts on them. Without social competence individual´s interaction and skill to establish and maintain relationships are imperfect. Among student, this might lead to exclusion. (Junttila 2010, p. 35.)

To achieve the group´s goal, the group members usually need tips on how to develop social skills to establish and maintain good interaction with each other,

understanding their social environment and understanding how to respond to social situations effectively. Without good social skills a person is in danger of low social status, poor achievement, dropouts, victimizations and violence. Some of us are born with the good social skill, but to some, it needs to be taught by various methods. Cultural differences also give some framework on what is appropriate behavior to their culture. (Mitchell 2014, p. 58-59.)

Social skills can be taught with methods that includes the doers to analyze themselves and the anatomy of social skills. The modeling methods can be for example role-playing, miming or giving explicit feedback. (Mitchell 2014, p. 61.) According to David Mitchell (2014, p. 63-66) social skills training is especially needed among students with special needs. Unfortunately, his studies revealed that social skills classes had only limited value to improve social skills. Natural contexts of teaching social skills might have more effect, but to back up this argument one has to collect more data.

For the group leader, it is important to understand that it is unrealistic to assume that after the group session all the group members will be close friends, there are no dropouts, all are highly motivated and have good and strong social skills. Friendships are also based on other factors such as mutual interest and compatibility. The change and development need time, guidance, practice and patience. (Mitchell 2014, p. 59.)

3.9 Self-expression – play and learn

Self-expression is a wide concept which can be understood as a way individual is expressing his/her opinions, emotions, but also it can be seen as a theatrical tool to express feelings, opinions, situations or phenomenon. The outcome can be both verbal and non-verbal, it is full of body language, tone of voice and words. How we express ourselves can be seen as our voice to the rest of the world. (Aalto 2019, 99; Hyvärinen, Lindholm & Nummela 2019, p. 91.)

Playing has been connected strongly to motivation and therefore playing is important for both children and grownups. Different kind of plays allows us to explore ourselves, our boundaries and help us to find new ways to see the world around us. Above all, playing strengthen the fellowship with people we are playing with and it helps us to find the flow feeling. In today´s world where humans seek to find the most important thing in the world, we forget to play. Sometimes as we seek ways to make more money or gain power, our overall well-being drops. As we play, we are expressing ourselves creatively. (Järvilehto 2014, p. 113-115.) Maybe in the future, creativity will be the most meaningful competitive advantage.

Self-expression and grouping is something that can be rehearsed. Some of us are born with good self-expression skills and some of us have to learn them as we grow older. Self-esteem is strongly linked to self-expression as people who have low self-esteem have difficulties in expressing themselves because they don´t feel secure among others. The interaction might remain or appear one-sided or superficial. People who have low self-esteem need more work and time on developing their self-expression skills. As we practice our self-expression skills it gives us an opportunity to learn something new about ourselves, recognize and accept different feelings and thoughts. (Aalto 2019, p. 99-100.)

The 'Express yourself!' training modules can be seen as a big playground where players can take the game where ever he/she wants. As Ryan and Deci stated (2000, p. 59) the students which are guided strictly will in the end lose their gumption. In the 'Express Yourself!' playground there is no right or wrong, all participants will be winners when they step-up and create something important to them or just listen and let the mind take them to different places to seek the flow for the future planning.

3.10 Art and performance as a learning tool – garden of mind

The target groups of the 'Express Yourself!' project were teenagers and young adults. Students who are living in the era of changes. Puberty, independence from parents and changes in the body are new things in life. At the same time,

you want to be independent, be your own master, but in reality, you are still strongly linked to your parents. For some youngsters, this means also changes in school, its environment and in their social circles. For some, this is a very hard, chaotic phase of life. Art and ways to express yourself are one way to handle these mixed feelings. When doers learn to know themselves better they can improve their social life, identity, ways of expressing themselves and how they deal with emotions. Being part of the group is important to these youngsters. (Karppinen, Ruokonen & Uusikylä 2008, p. 7, 15, 26; Olsson 2018, p. 68-69.) Participation in projects like Express Yourself! is one way to feel to be a part of something.

Young adults are full with the tendency of self-expression, self-actualization and ambition to become everything he/she can be in life. Via art and performance, students can improve their concentration, learn ways to manage their personal life and increase their well-being. For youngsters, it is also a playground where they can be silly and carefree. It is all about partnerships and networking among others. But as we are living in the world of competition, is there still room to freely express yourself? (Karppinen, Ruokonen & Uusikylä 2008, p. 7, 16.)

4 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework supports the newly gathered information and links it to the research problems and key terms. The framework is always presented in visual methods, such as in a chart or diagram, but it is also explained by words. The main goal of the theoretical framework is to give an overall outlook of the research, used research methods and used key terms. (Vilkka, 2015.)

In this thesis, the theoretical framework consists of the concept of well-being and how the 'Express Yourself!' training modules can support it. Inclusive grouping is seen as a clue that holds life elements together. One of the elements consists of a person´s personal life, such as family, friends and hobbies. On the other corner, there is personality factor such as self-esteem, social skill and group skills. Both of the elements, together with inclusive grouping in school, create motivation among the student to finish their studies and to think about their next step in life. The 'Express Yourself!' training modules aim to support all of these elements to increase the overall well-being of the student and to give a positive impact on their future plans.
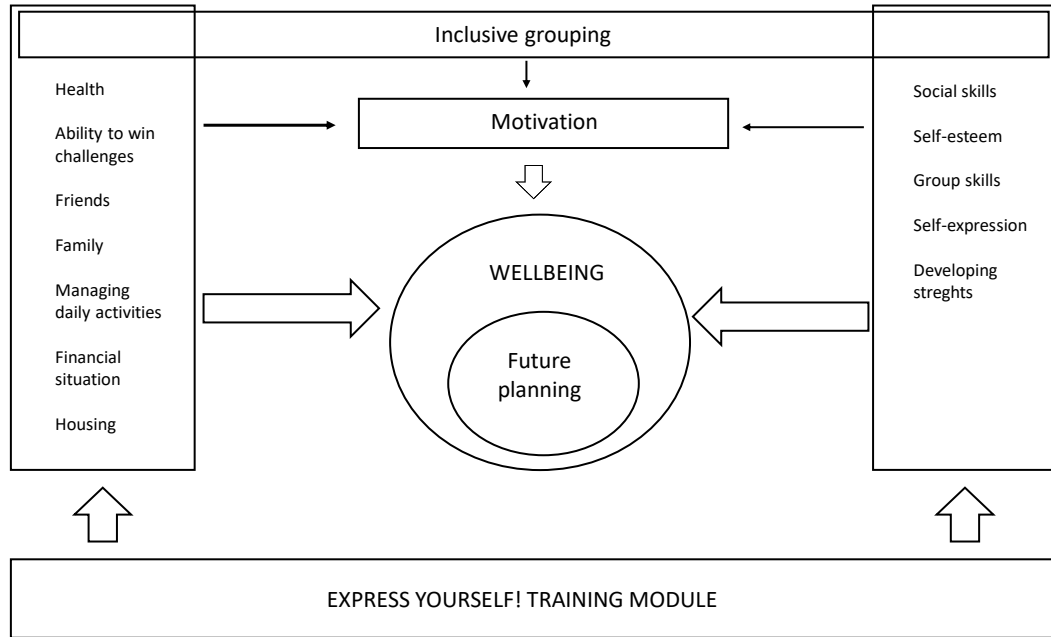
FIGURE 4. The theoretical framework.

The goal of this thesis is to analyze the 3x10D self-evaluation survey answers. The questions are based on the goals of the 'Express Yourself!' project; promoting social inclusion in school communities, improving the overall well-being of the students via self-expression and preventing school dropout and further improve students' learning results. The study questions of this thesis are:

- How the 'Express Yourself!' training modules influences students' experienced well-being in life?
- Is inclusive grouping a good and effective way to promote inclusion in schools?

4.2 Research method of the thesis

The research tool in this thesis was a 3x10D self-evaluation survey where respondents evaluate their life situation via ten (10) spheres of life. Project goals or use of 3x10D specify the spheres of life. Therefore spheres can vary in different 3x10D surveys. Evaluation can be done by using three (3) different life angles; importance rate that of different spheres in life, currently experienced satisfaction with different spheres and life goals of different spheres. Originally the tool was

developed by researchers of Diaconia University of Applied Science from 2015 to 2016 during a municipal trial project with the city of Kuopio. The purpose of the 3x10D self-evaluation tool was to find out how to support the well-being of young people, 16 to 19 years old, who needed multiply services. The tool got positive feedback and it was further developed for even younger children, ages 7-9, 10-13 and 14-17. (Kainulainen, 2019.) Since then, the survey tool has been used with numerous other similar projects with good feedback and experiences. Therefore 3x10D was a natural choice as a research tool in the 'Express Yourself!' project.

Successful and comprehensive results call for the right kind of measuring methods. The 3x10D self-evaluating survey was based on ten different spheres of life; self-esteem, status of health, ability to win challenges, friends, family, managing daily activities, financial situation, housing, life as a whole and possibility to develop strengths. When defining the spheres, it is important to keep in mind the target audience. The students were youngsters, aged 12 to 18. When the 'Express Yourself!' project team defined the spheres, the key question was on how these terms were understood and how relevant the terms were to them. Selected spheres should also be relevant to research objects.

The data is collected via the 3x10D self-evaluating survey. The 3x10D self-evaluation tool is based on a numeric variable, therefore this thesis is quantitative research. In the center of the quantitative research is the conclusion of the previous researches, theories and concepts. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2006, p. 131.) The research method is based on evaluations of numeric answers, which are construed and explained verbally. (Vilkka 2007, p. 14.) The main goal is to get the answer to the research problems via research methods and results (Heikkilä 2005, p. 13).

As a multicultural study, the quantitative research of the 'Express Yourself!' project is facing challenges, such as cultural differences and teachers' impact on the result. Due to the cultural differences, in some schools, the project workers were not allowed to hold the 'Express Yourself!' training modules. In these cases, the success is strongly linked to the teachers and how well he/she was prepared

for the 'Express Yourself!' modules. How well he/she understood the concept of inclusiveness, collaboration, creating a positive social climate, engaging students, respecting diversity and what was his/her own attitude toward the project, impacted on how well the modules were received among students. Poorly done preparation can have a negative influence on the results of the project (Forlin & Loreman 2014, p. 94).

4.3 The spheres of 3x10D self-evaluation survey

Self-esteem is at the very core of the study and it has a huge influence on individuals' well-being. The term is common and it is recognized around the world. Although the term is common, it is very important to define the term before the students are filling out the 3x10D self-evaluation survey. For researchers' it is important to recognize that the term might have slightly different shades as the concept of self-esteem might play a different role in the life of a youngster at the age of 12 or 18. In some terms, youngest students of the study can be defined as children when the oldest can be defined as young adults and by that their stage of self-awareness might be on at a different level. Self-esteem is something that can be affected and improved by projects like the Express Yourself!.

Like self-esteem, *the status of health* is an important concept for the study and it is recognized worldwide. Health has a great influence on everything, for example, a youngster who has cancer looks and experiences the well-being and the concept of the future differently than a youngster whose stage of health is good. A physical state of health is something that the 'Express Yourself!' training modules cannot influence, but it can help students to deal with the emotions.

Abilities to win challenges is a more widely concept, which needs more definition. The sphere is based on the concept of resilience. Especially for the younger students, this might be a difficult concept to understand. To the concept of experienced well-being and the research objectives, the term is relevant. As that is said, it is very important to define this term and maybe give some concrete examples to make sure that all understand the term alike. If the term is not

understood, it might lead to the point where the student won't answer the question or answer is 'wrong'.

To us all trusted *friends* are important and they play a big role in life and well-being. For some, it is enough to have one or two trusted friends, but others might need ten trusted friends to be happy. To the research goals, the concept of trusted friends is very important. The subject is studied also in three self-evaluation questions filled by students after the last training module.

The concept of *family* is easy to understand, but one has to recognize that the meaning might vary in different cultures. For example, in some culture, the concept of family means only parents and siblings while in another culture it includes all relatives and friends. As we grow older the role of the family is changing, the concept and the meaning of the family, especially parents are shaping. The knowledge and the feeling of loving and supporting family is important throughout life. Family members are proving security, guidance, support and love to each other. Therefore the family is an important sphere of well-being.

Managing the daily activities is a more difficult concept to understand and therefore it needs definitions and examples. Do the term daily activities mean dressing, making dinner, going independently to the toilet and taking showers on a daily basis? Or is it something else? If the concept is not fully understood, it might distort the results of the study.

The Financial situation has a great impact on experienced overall well-being, even though it is said that money will not bring you happiness. As previously mentioned, the financial situation was one of the main reasons for students to slow down their studies or dropout. The difficulty with this term is that finance plays a different role in the life of 12 years old or in the life of 18 years old. Younger students don't have to pay their daily meals, electricity bills or house mortgage. Those are their parents responsible. Older students have to take care of these by themselves. This sphere might need examples for different age groups; does

12-year-old student have the money to go to the movies and does 18-years-old student worry about how he/she is going to pay his next month's rent.

The term *housing* might be a little bit confusing for the youngest students. As they are living under their parents' roof, their ability to influence housing is limited. It might be a good idea to keep this term as simple as it can be; housing means that you have running water, electricity and privacy when needed.

The concept of *developing strengths in life* can be understood widely, especially for younger students. To make it more clear, the project team should give examples. Examples and definitions should be understandable for all ages, for example, pleasant hobby, an opportunity to improve skills or learn a new skill. When an individual is developing the strengths in life, at the same time he/she is also influencing the experienced well-being in life.

Life as a whole is the biggest concept, which can include all the other spheres. It is the overall feeling of life and well-being. This might be a confusing term without proper examples and definition. Examples can also be guideline questions; do you have worries when you go to sleep or do you smile/laugh on a daily basis.

As conclusion, the 3x10D self-evaluation survey spheres are substantive when you think of the big picture of overall well-being through the eyes of an adult or independent youngster. The problem is among the younger students who might not be as used to think about big entireties or the sphere is not playing the same role in life that in older students' life. To succeed, the sphere needs age-appropriate examples and definitions. The project team wanted to keep the data as comparable as possible, therefore the spheres were the same for all the students.

5 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

5.1 The reliability of the research

Generally one can say that the results are reliable if the research is measuring the right spheres compared to the research problem, the answer percentage is high enough and the collected sampling data is extensive. Well defined and deliberated questionnaire ensures the validity and reliability of the results. For a researcher, it is vital to keep in mind the critical and impartial point of view when analyzing the results. All of the results have to base on the collected data, one can't deform them to meet their personal interests or views. (Heikkilä, 2014.)

When analyzing the results of different groups, it's important to make sure that there are enough data in each of the groups. By a rough guideline, it is recommended that in every comparable group there should be at least 25 to 30 answers. Equally important is to make sure that in cross-tabulation there aren't any empty "shells". (Sakari Kainulainen, docent, personal information 6.11.2020.) Due to this academic practice, in this thesis, the different ages have been combined into age groups. The purpose of the age groups is to secure the reliability of the results and adduce the trend lines of the changes in students' well-being in life. The age groups used in this thesis are 12-13, 14-15 and 16-18.

The main goal of this thesis is to find out how the 'Express Yourself!' training modules influence the well-being of students by analyzing the 3x10D self-evaluation survey data. The survey was filled out during the first session and after the last session. At the survey, students evaluated the current stage of the different spheres in life. The comparison was done by calculating the arithmetic average of different spheres and variables of both answering times. After the last session, students were also asked to answer three self-evaluation questions on how the 'Express Yourself!' training module influence their well-being. Comparing these different results, the project team gets a wider view of how the training

module influence the well-being of the students. The project was executed from autumn 2019 to spring 2020. Due to the COVID19 pandemic, some of the sessions were canceled. In some cases, this impacted the answer percentages of the final self-evaluation round.

When evaluating the reliability of the result, it can be defined to be adequate. All the participants of the training modules answered the 3x10D self-evaluating survey, making the data high enough. All the 3x10D questions and end self-evaluating questions were defined to meet the objects of the 'Express Yourself!' project and to fulfill the project's goals. The data analysis was done according to good analyzing methods and ethics.

5.2 General results

The 'Express Yourself!' training module was implemented in four countries; Germany, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain. The training module captured approximately 1 300 answers together in target countries. As shown in the graphic 2, the 3x10D self-evaluating survey was filled out by 677 students during the first session and 575 students after the last session. The experienced change of individual students cannot be identified from the data. The gender distribution was even but there were differences between the countries and age groups. Uneven distribution of gender between cooperation countries can be explained by the selection of the school. For example, in some countries, the participant schools were meant only for boys. Graphic 2 shows the 3x10D answers by gender.
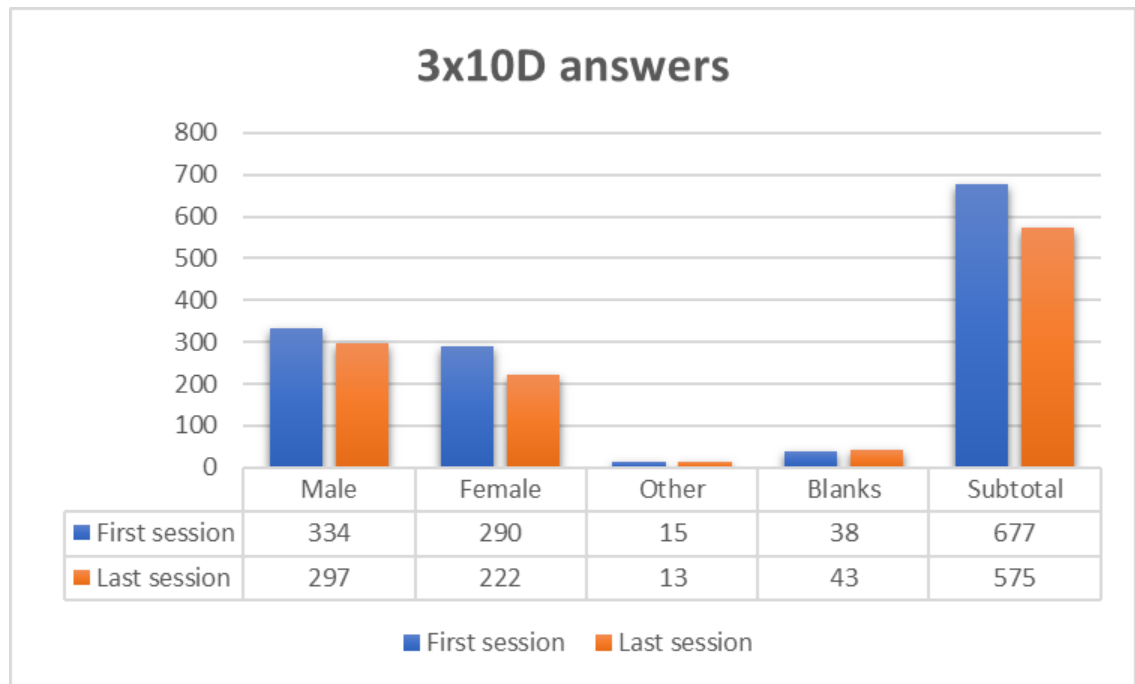
GRAPHIC 2. 3x10D answers of the 'Express Yourself!' project by gender.

The distribution between genders was as expected. The difference between male and female gender was even, while students who identified themselves as other or didn't want to inform their gender was remarkably lower. The number of students who didn't want to inform their gender were higher than students' who identified themselves as 'other'. As shown in graphic 2, the biggest gender group was male with a total of 631 answers while students who identified themselves as others included only 28 answers. Students who didn't want to inform their gender or identified themselves as 'other' were left out of the result analysis due to the lack of data.

The main results of the 'Express Yourself!' Inclusive grouping in schools project state that the influence of the course toward students' well-being in life was experienced as empowering. The linear trend line of both survey time was quite homologous, which indicated that the spheres were understood as alike during both survey times. This verifies the reliability of the results. Graphic 3 shows the experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life during the 'Express Yourself!' project.
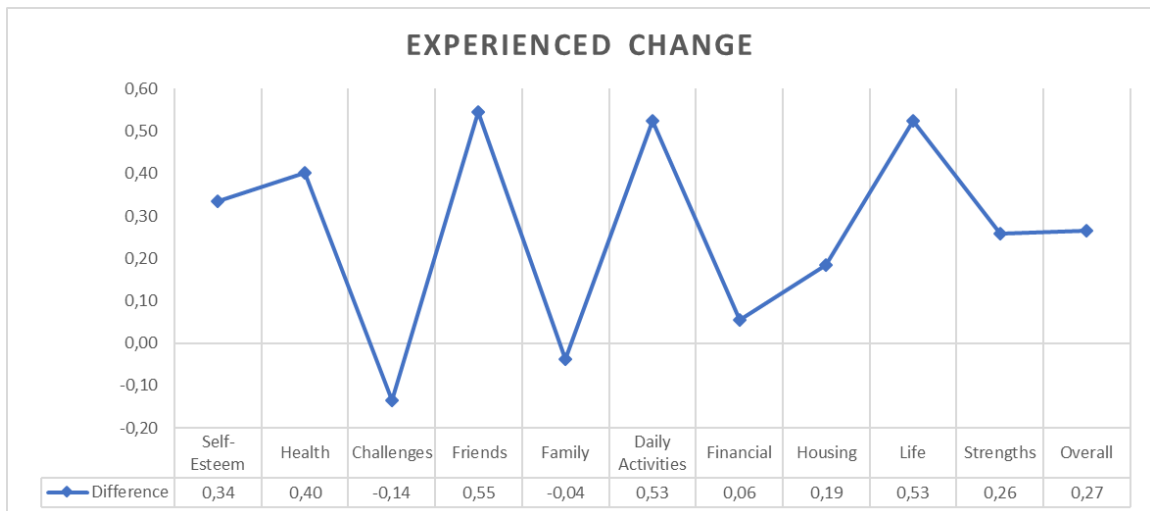
GRAPHIC 3. General results of the changes in satisfaction with different spheres of life during the 'Express Yourself! Inclusive grouping in schools' training modules.

As shown in the graphic 3, the highest change in the satisfaction with different spheres of life was trusted friends, life as a whole, managing the daily activities, health and self-esteem. This highlights the success of the 'Express Yourself!' training module and the positive influence of inclusive grouping on students' well-being. Inclusive grouping is a good and effective way to promote students' inclusion in schools. Ability to win the challenges and family were the only spheres where the influence of the course was experienced as a negative influence. The reason for this can't be identified from the 3x10D self-survey data.

5.2.1 Results by age

Results can be analyzed by age groups. The biggest age group was student age of 14 by 414 answers and the smallest group was 16 years old students by 22 answers. The analysis of the data shows that the 'Express Yourself!' course was most successful among the younger students, at age group 12-13. Students in that age group experienced positive influence on every sphere. The experience a change in overall well-being declined towards the older age group. This also verifies the previously pointed view of Robins etc. (2002, p. 17) that during

childhood the self-esteem is relatively high before it drops remarkably at the first step of adolescence. Graphic 4 shows the experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life by age group.

	Self-Esteem	Health	Challenges	Friends	Family	Daily Activities	Financial	Housing	Life	Strengths	Overall
Age group 12-13	0,13	0,06	0,08	0,91	0,40	0,31	0,18	0,39	0,42	0,24	0,31
Age group 14-15	0,02	0,70	-0,51	0,61	-0,25	1,46	-0,25	0,28	0,56	0,10	0,27
Age group 16-18	0,11	0,16	-0,09	-0,71	-0,60	0,21	-0,52	0,00	0,32	-0,07	-0,12
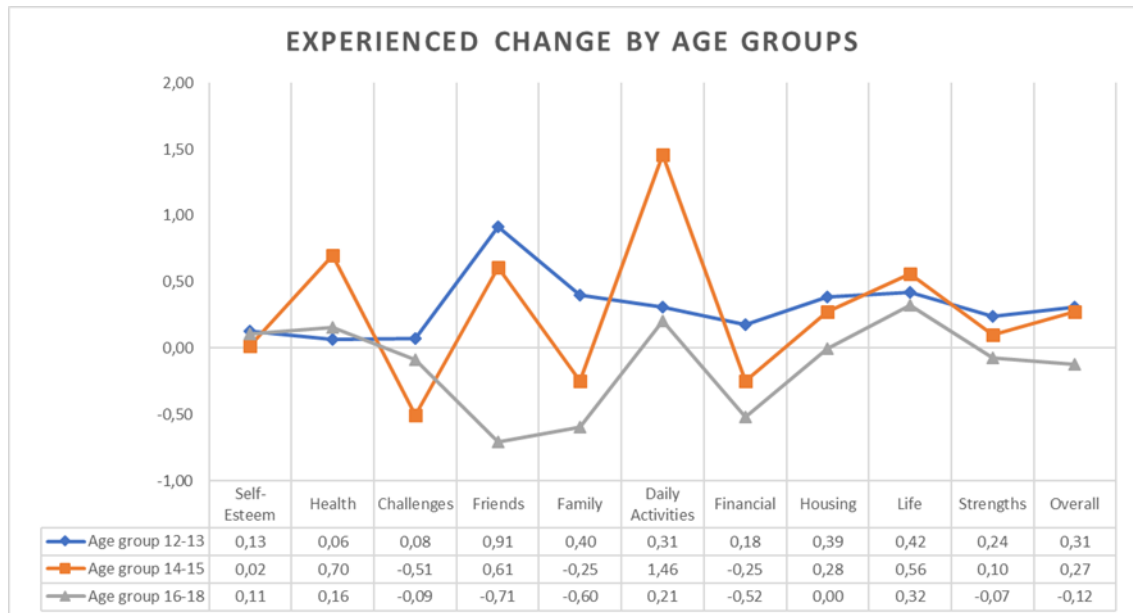
GRAPHIC 4. Results of experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life by age groups.

The experienced change during the course in the age group 16 to 18 was even slightly negative. This might imply that the exercises used during the sessions were more effective and pleasant for the younger students. The older generation of students might need a different kind of approach and structure of the training modules. This can be verified also by viewing the change in the sphere of friends. Among younger students, the course improved the friendship status and the number of friends, while the older student experienced a negative change. This might implicate that the inclusive grouping doesn't support inclusion among older students.

For students it the age group 14-16, the 'Express Yourself!' training module might be a very unpleasant experience. Another aspect might be that as all spheres were strongly linked to the concept of well-being, one might ask if all the spheres were understood correctly or alike during different survey times. Although the trend line of the age group 12-13 and the age group 14-15 was different, the outcome was almost the same. The experienced change in well-being was almost

the same, this might indicate that for those age groups the concept of well-being is consisting of different spheres.

The negative influence of the 'Express Yourself!' training module among the older students might indicate that for them the well-being is something else. In the older age group, the students are also close to being adults. Somethings in life might feel childish or irrelevant to them. Sometimes the study might have a negative impact on results if some students realized the 'real state of things'. In this case, it doesn't mean that the project has backfired. It simply means that the project has worked like a mini intervention for participants.

5.2.2 Results by gender and age

To make more specific conclusions, the data can be analyzed by gender. The data behind 'other' and students who didn't want to specific their gender were too narrow to make reliable conclusions and comparisons toward other genders. Therefore, only male and female genders were taken into count. Graphic 5 shows the experienced change in spheres by gender.

	Self-Esteem	Health	Challenges	Friends	Family	Daily Activities	Financial	Housing	Life	Strengths	Overall
Male	0,09	0,29	-0,35	0,61	-0,16	0,49	-0,44	-0,20	0,69	0,18	0,12
Female	-0,39	0,03	-0,51	0,00	-0,58	0,59	-0,65	-0,01	0,04	-0,41	-0,19
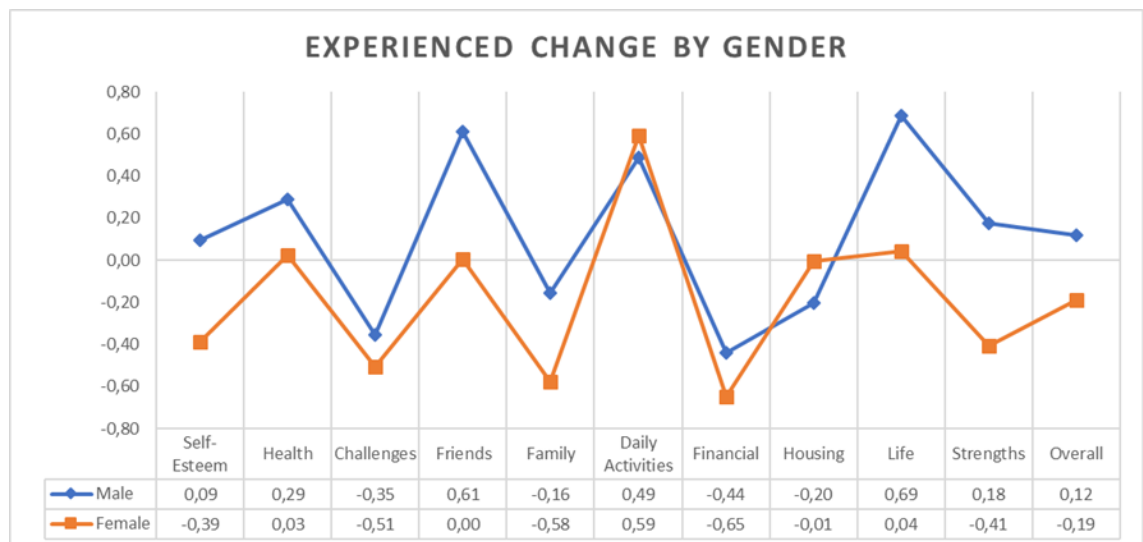
GRAPHIC 5. Results of the experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life by gender.

As shown in the graphic 5, the results of gender distribution state that the male had experienced a more positive influence on the 'Express Yourself!' training module than female. The trend line in both genders was likewise which indicates that the concept of well-being is understood as alike. The biggest differences were in the spheres of trusted friends and life as a whole.

5.3 Results by countries

The 'Express Yourself! Inclusive grouping in schools' project was held in four countries; Germany, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain. As in the eye of the research reliability and for future studies, it is important to analyze the data from the country point of view. All the countries have their own culture, diversity, habits and characters which can impact the results. This might also help the project team to understand the general results better.

5.3.1 Germany

The results of the 'Express Yourself!' project in Germany showed that the influences of the training modules were experienced as a negative factor towards the well-being in life. The results might be influenced by the low number of answers during the second survey time, which was 43,8% lower than in the first survey time. Due to the COVID19 pandemic the 'Express Yourself!' training module was canceled in one of the schools in Germany. Meaning that there was no data from the second round. Unlike the general results of the whole project, girls in Germany experienced a more positive impact than boys. The biggest cap between the genders was in the sphere of managing daily activities. One of the major differences as the result was compared to the general results, was the sphere of financial situation. In Germany the experienced change was negative. This highlights the importance of finance among students in Germany. The lowest results were experienced in the sphere of health. Compared to the general results of the study, this was an exception. Graphic 6 shows the change in satisfaction with different spheres of life in Germany.
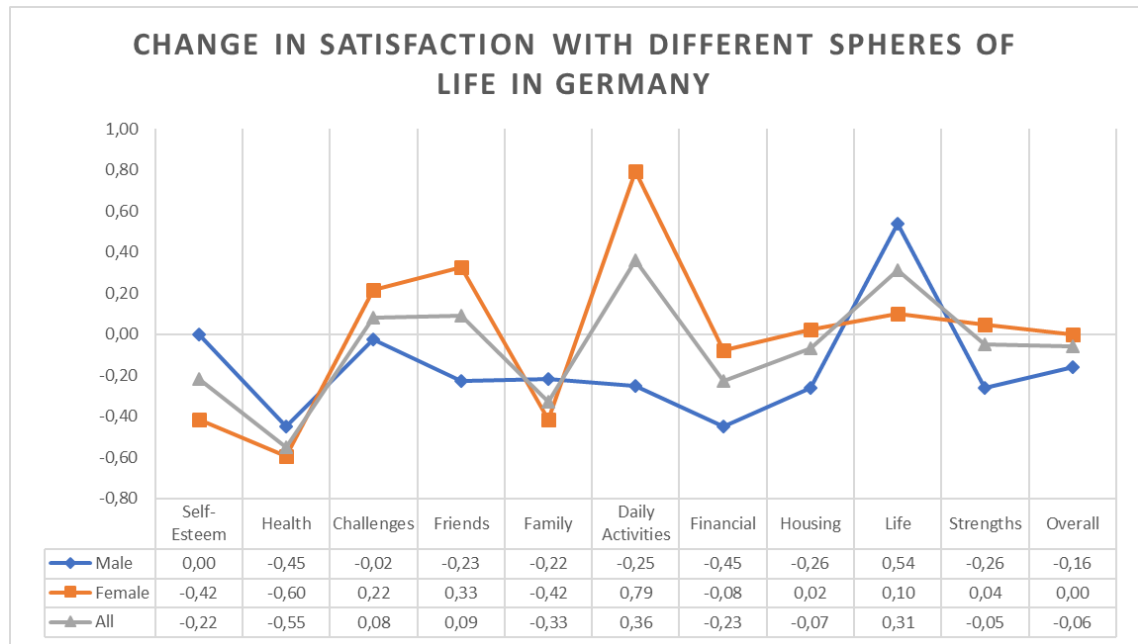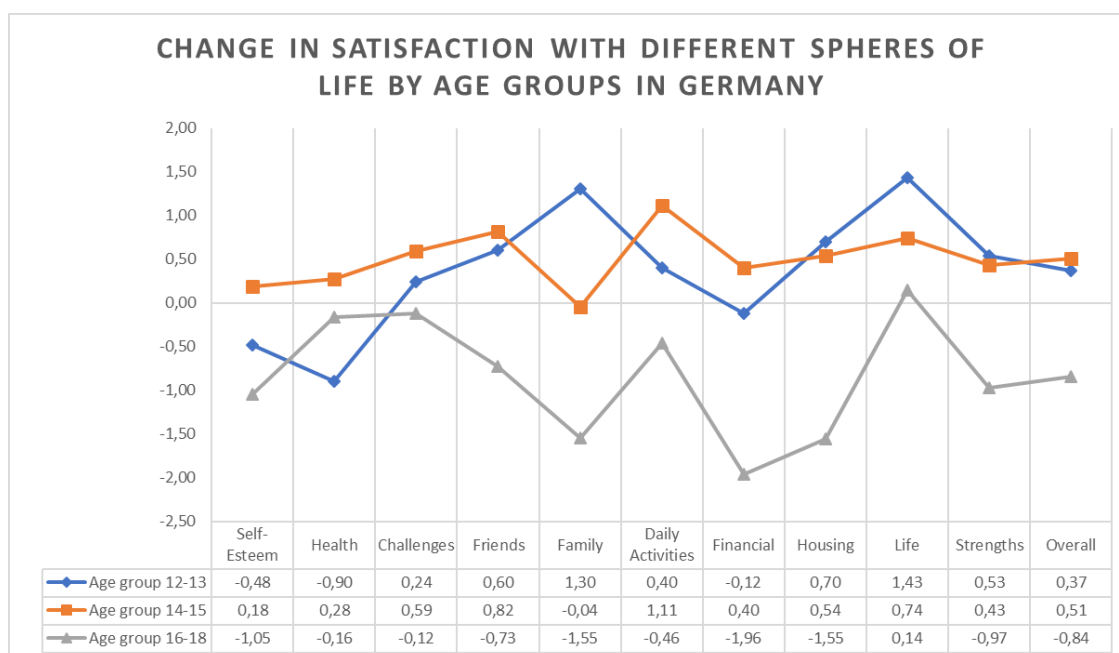
GRAPHIC 6. Germany's results of experienced changes in satisfaction with different spheres of life by gender.

Results in Germany might be explained by the selection of the schools and the COVID19 pandemic. State of the health is something that the self-expression sessions can't influence, but it can help with handling the health issues. One big influencer might have been a lack of commitment and interest. In some schools, the students were ordered to take part in the project. The negative starting point might have guideline the answers to be more negative than positive.

When the data were analyzed by the age groups in Germany, it can be said that the trend line was a little bit different than the trend line in general results. In Germany, the age group which informed the highest change in satisfaction with the different spheres of life was in the age group of 14-15. Alike in general results, the lowest experienced change was among the students in the age group 16-18. The financial situation was experienced especially low among the older students while the younger age groups stated that the influence of the results was experienced positively. It can be stated that in Germany the financial situation plays a big role in well-being in life among students age 16 to 18. Graphic 7 shows the experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life by age groups in Germany.

CHANGE IN SATISFACTION WITH DIFFERENT SPHERES OF
LIFE BY AGE GROUPS IN GERMANY

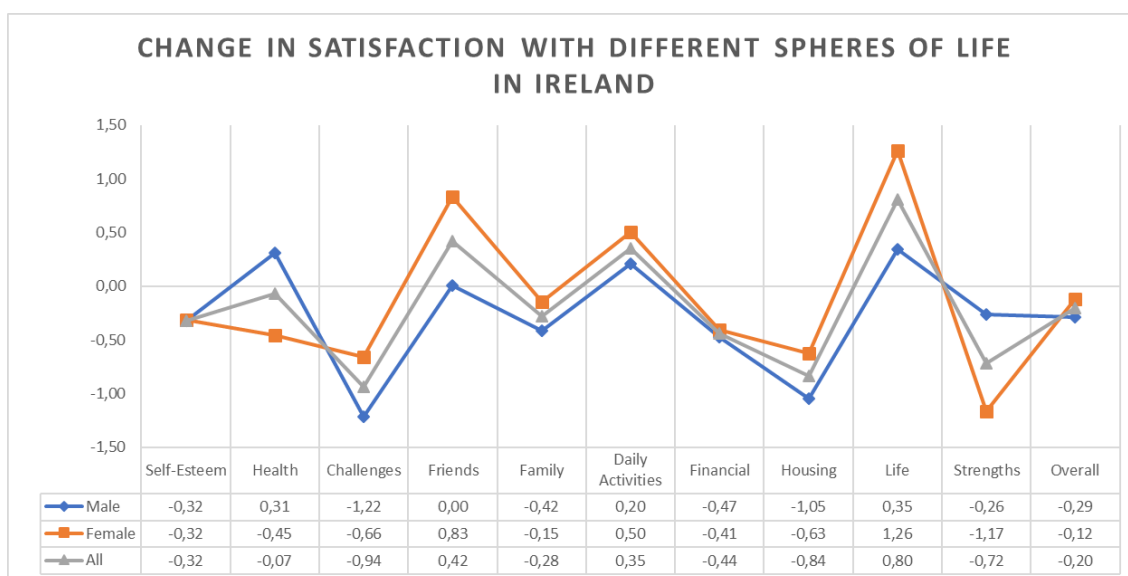|	Self-Esteem	Health	Challenges	Friends	Family	Daily Activities	Financial	Housing	Life	Strengths	Overall
Age group 12-13	-0,48	-0,90	0,24	0,60	1,30	0,40	-0,12	0,70	1,43	0,53	0,37
Age group 14-15	0,18	0,28	0,59	0,82	-0,04	1,11	0,40	0,54	0,74	0,43	0,51
Age group 16-18	-1,05	-0,16	-0,12	-0,73	-1,55	-0,46	-1,96	-1,55	0,14	-0,97	-0,84

GRAPHIC 7. Germany's results of the experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life by age groups.

As conclusion, it can be stated that in Germany the 'Express Yourself!' project made the most positive influence among girls at the age of 14 to 15. While the lowest influence was with boys ages of 16 to 18. During the 'Express Yourself!' project boys experienced a positive change in the spheres of life as a whole and self-esteem. Girls experienced a positive change in the spheres of managing daily activities and status of health.

5.3.2 Ireland

Like in Germany, the overall results of the 'Express Yourself!' project in Ireland indicated a negative influences on the students' well-being. The change was experienced negative among all genders. Positive change during the course was experienced only among spheres of life in general, trusted friends and managing the daily activities. All of these spheres were also experienced positively in general results of the study. The lowest change was experienced in the spheres of overcome the challenges, housing and strength in life. As compared to the general results of the project, the sphere of overcome the challenges in life got

the lowest change in both. It can be stated that in Ireland the success of the 'Express Yourself!' project was slightly worse than the overall results stated. The sphere of self-esteem, which was a central topic during the project, experienced negative change among all genders. On the other hand, the sphere of trusted friends was among the most positive experienced changes. This advocate on behalf of the success of the project. The trend line between Germany and Ireland are very similar. This might suggest that the same kind of concept or structure in training modules might work in both countries. Graphic 8 shows Ireland's experienced change is satisfaction with different spheres in life by gender

CHANGE IN SATISFACTION WITH DIFFERENT SPHERES OF LIFE IN IRELAND

	Self-Esteem	Health	Challenges	Friends	Family	Daily Activities	Financial	Housing	Life	Strengths	Overall
Male	-0,32	0,31	-1,22	0,00	-0,42	0,20	-0,47	-1,05	0,35	-0,26	-0,29
Female	-0,32	-0,45	-0,66	0,83	-0,15	0,50	-0,41	-0,63	1,26	-1,17	-0,12
All	-0,32	-0,07	-0,94	0,42	-0,28	0,35	-0,44	-0,84	0,80	-0,72	-0,20

GRAPHIC 8. Ireland's results of the experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres in life by gender.

When the result of Ireland was analyzed according to the age groups, the data shows that in Ireland there are only two age groups; age group 12-13 and age group 14-15. Students in both of the age groups stated that the influence of training modules was experienced as negative toward the well-being. The trend line is slightly retailing the general results where the younger students experienced the sessions more positively than older students. In both age groups, the sphere of financial situation and family were experiencing the lowest impact. Alike in general results, the spheres of daily activities and life as a whole experienced the highest change. Graphic 9 shows Ireland's results of experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres in life by age group.
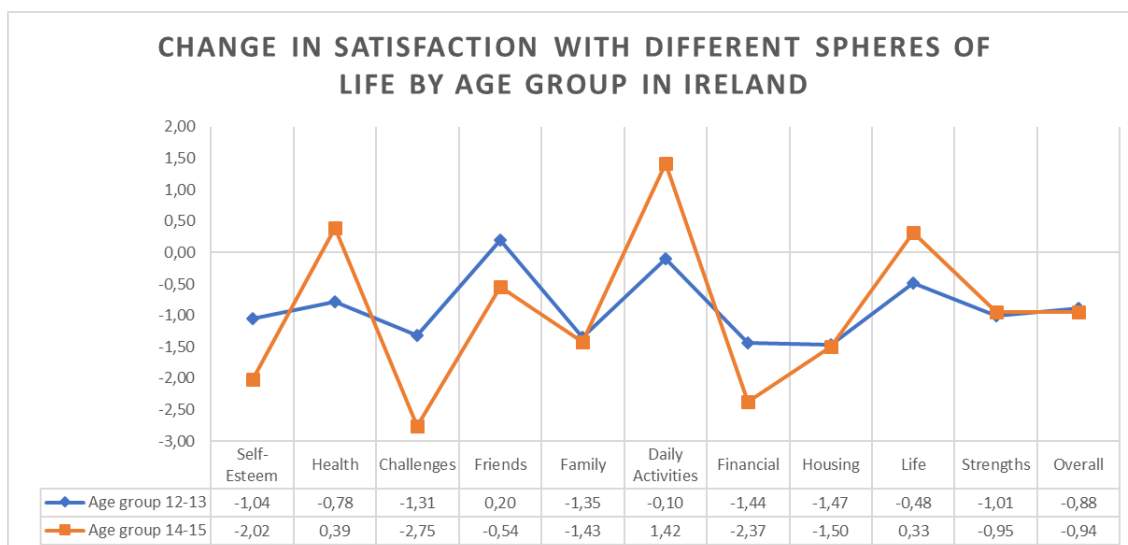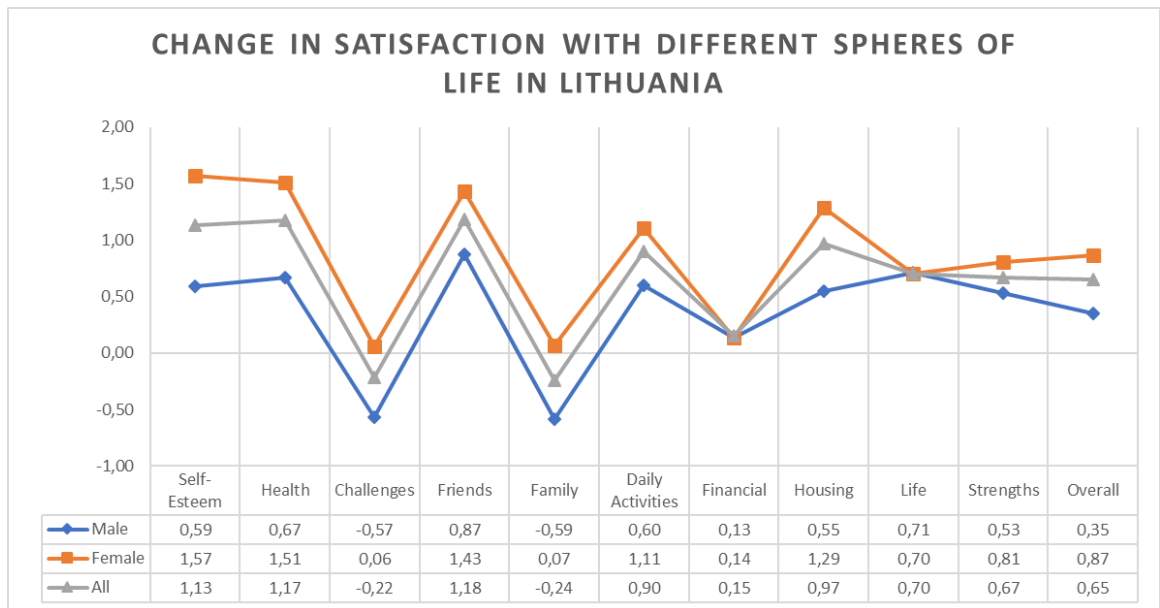
GRAPHIC 9. Ireland's results of the experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life by age groups.

As a summary, it can be stated that in Ireland the 'Express Yourself!' training module was the most successful among girls ages 12 to 13. While the lowest influence was among boys ages 14 to 15. But one has to notice that in Ireland there are data only in these age groups. Therefore, there are no data on how the 'Express Yourself!' training module influenced the well-being of the older students in Ireland.

5.3.3 Lithuania

The experienced change among students in Lithuania was positive. Only the sphere of overcome the challenges in life and family were experienced as negative after the training modules. This is in line with the general results of the study. The highest positive influence of the training modules was experienced among the spheres of self-esteem, friends, housing and managing the daily activities. This mostly followed the trend line of general results. Unlike the students in Germany and Ireland, the financial situation experienced a positive influence during the project. Female students stated positive experiences in all of the spheres after the training modules. This was not only an exception to the

general results of the study, but also to the results in Germany and Ireland. In general, it can be stated that the 'Express Yourself!' training module was a success in Lithuania as all genders reported positive change after the project. The highest experienced change was in the spheres of self-esteem and friends, which were at the core of the project. This highlights the success in Lithuania. Graphic 10 shows Lithuania's results in experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life.

CHANGE IN SATISFACTION WITH DIFFERENT SPHERES OF LIFE IN LITHUANIA

	Self-Esteem	Health	Challenges	Friends	Family	Daily Activities	Financial	Housing	Life	Strengths	Overall
Male	0,59	0,67	-0,57	0,87	-0,59	0,60	0,13	0,55	0,71	0,53	0,35
Female	1,57	1,51	0,06	1,43	0,07	1,11	0,14	1,29	0,70	0,81	0,87
All	1,13	1,17	-0,22	1,18	-0,24	0,90	0,15	0,97	0,70	0,67	0,65

GRAPHIC 10. Lithuania's results of experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres in life by gender.

When the data was analyzed by the age groups it can be stated that the results in Lithuania follow mostly the same trend line as the general results. The project was most effective among students in the age groups of 14-15 and 12-13. The lowest experienced change was in the spheres of overcome the challenges in life and family. The sphere of the family experienced a positive change in the age group of 12 to 13. This might indicate that in Lithuania the family plays a bigger and important role in the well-being of younger students than older ones. The financial situation plays a big role in the age group 16-18. This indicates that in Lithuania the financial situation is more important to the older students than younger. Graphic 11 shows Lithuania's experienced change in satisfaction with spheres in life by age groups.
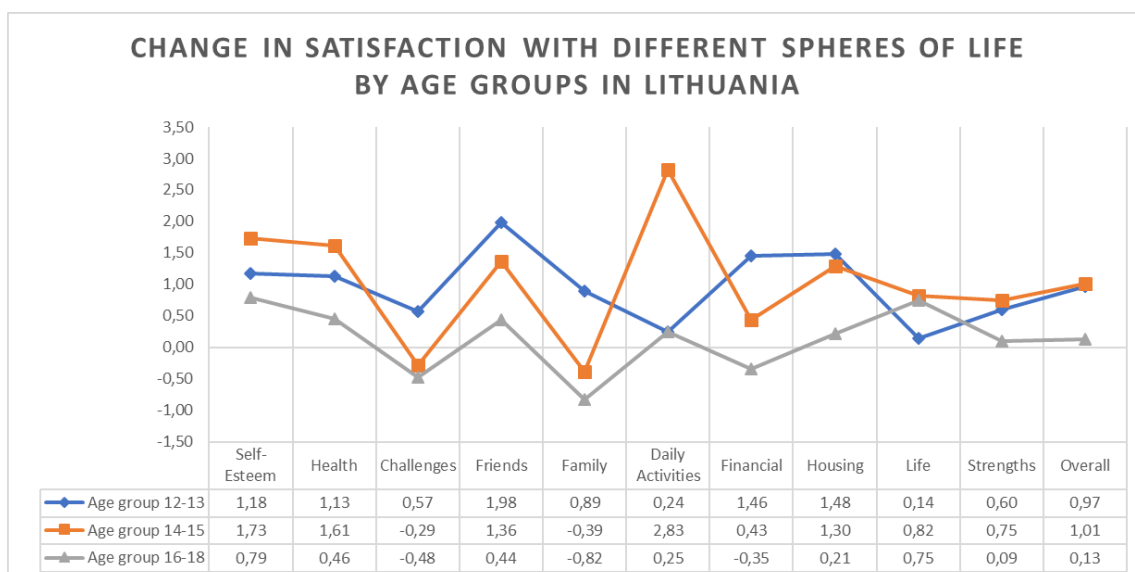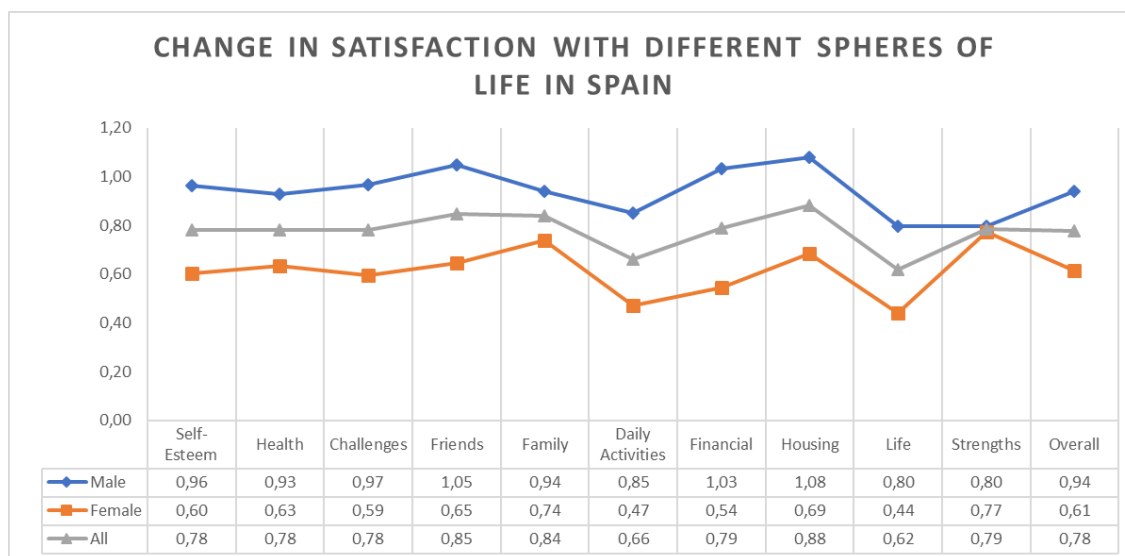
GRAPHIC 11. Lithuania's results of experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres in life by age groups.

As a summary, it can be stated that in Lithuania the 'Express Yourself!' project was most successful among girls age 14 to 15. While boys age 16 to 18 experienced the lowest influence. During the 'Express Yourself!' project boys experienced a positive change in the spheres of trusted friends and life as whole. Girls experienced a positive change in the spheres of self-esteem and status of health.

5.3.4 Spain

The 'Express Yourself!' project was very successful in Spain. All the spheres were experiencing a positive impact. The experienced change in the arithmetic average followed the same trend line in all genders. This indicates that in Spain the exercises and the structure of the training modules were well received and suitable for all. The male gender experienced a change slightly more positive than the female gender. Opposite to the general results of the study and results from other countries, in Spain the lowest experienced change was in the spheres of managing the daily activities and life as a whole. These spheres were

experiencing the highest influence in other countries. The reason for this can't be explained from the 3x10D self-survey data. The highest experienced change was in the spheres of housing, friends and family. This was opposite to the general results and results of other countries. Graphic 12 shows Spain's experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life.

CHANGE IN SATISFACTION WITH DIFFERENT SPHERES OF LIFE IN SPAIN

	Self-Esteem	Health	Challenges	Friends	Family	Daily Activities	Financial	Housing	Life	Strengths	Overall
Male	0,96	0,93	0,97	1,05	0,94	0,85	1,03	1,08	0,80	0,80	0,94
Female	0,60	0,63	0,59	0,65	0,74	0,47	0,54	0,69	0,44	0,77	0,61
All	0,78	0,78	0,78	0,85	0,84	0,66	0,79	0,88	0,62	0,79	0,78

GRAPHIC 12. Spain's results of experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life by gender.

The trend line of experienced change in the age groups followed the same pattern as in general results. In Spain the 'Express Yourself!' training modules was most successful among younger students. The age groups of 12-13 and 14-15 experienced a positive change in every sphere. The sphere of friends got the highest experienced change in both age groups. This highlights the success of the project as friendships were established, nurtured and strengthened. On the other hand, the older age group got especially low results. It was the only negative change in that particular age group. Like in other countries, this might indicates that older students could benefit from different kinds of exercises. The older age group got more positive results than younger students in the spheres of managing daily activities and housing. This might indicate that older students in Spain have more possibility to affect housing. Graphic 13 shows Spain's experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres in life by age group.
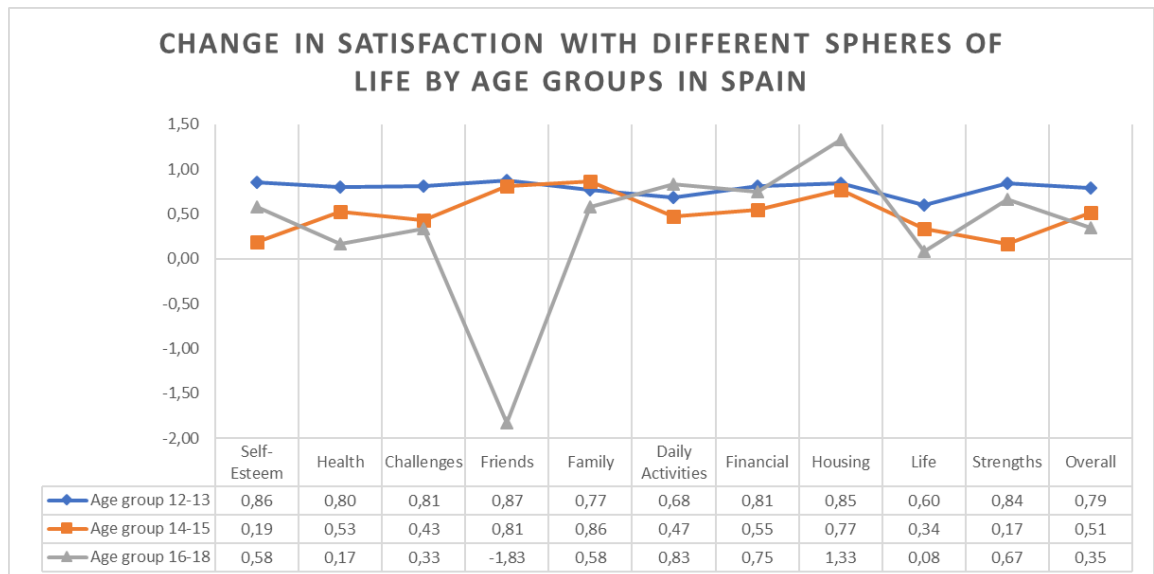
GRAPHIC 13. Spain's results of experienced change in satisfaction with different spheres of life by age groups.

As summary, it can be said that the 'Express Yourself!' project was experienced as the most successful among boys at the age of 12 to 13. The lowest experienced change was among girls at the age of 16 to 18. During the 'Express Yourself!' project boys experienced a positive change in the spheres of housing and trusted friends. Girls experienced a positive change in the spheres of developing strength on life and family.

5.4 Effects of the 'Express Yourself!' project from students' point of view

The last 3x10D self-evaluating survey included also three self-evaluation questions for students. The purpose of these questions was to have more information for the researches and to include extra data in the study. In the questions students evaluated if they knew their classmate better after the 'Express Yourself!' training modules, did they gain more confidence and how did the course influence their motivations toward school. The survey was filled out like the 3x10D self-evaluation survey. The response rate for these self-evaluation questions were 100%. Table 1 shows the cross-analysis of 3x10D answers and three self-evaluation questions.

Students self-evaluation questions	Results of 3x10D spheres
Knowing classmate better • Follows the trend line of general results; positive in total, Germany got the lowest result while Lithuania and Spain the highest • Even distribution of genders, the most positive genders were all opposite in every country	Sphere of friends • Trend line between friends and knowing classmate better follows the same trend line than general results, Germany got the lowest results while Lithuania and Spain got the highest • Gender distribution alike in Germany but opposite in other countries
Having more confidence • Follows the trend line of general results; positive in total, Germany got the lowest result and Lithuania and Spain the highest • Even distribution of genders, the most positive genders were all opposite in every country	Self-esteem • Gender distribution is opposite in every country
Motivation toward school • Positive influence in Ireland, Lithuania and Spain • The distribution between genders were alike.	No sphere to compare

TABLE 1. Cross-analysis of self-evaluation questions and 3x10D answers.

If the results of the first question are cross-tabled with the sphere of friends, it can be stated that it follows the same trend line; most positive results were experienced in Lithuania and Spain while the lowest results in Germany. When the results were analyzed with gender/country perspective, it shows that the most positive experienced gender is opposite in every country. This might indicate that the improvement of friendship was experienced with persons who are not their classmates. To the research team, this is a positive note as the students have taken the lessons learned outside the classroom.

The first self-evaluation question can be cross-analyzed with the sphere of friends in the 3x10D survey. The questioner of 3x10D survey can be found in appendix 1 in this thesis. The cross-tabling follows the results of the general study. If the data was analyzed by gender/country point of view, Germany was the only country that followed the trend line.

In the second question, the students evaluated if they gained more confidence during the 'Express Yourself!' project. The collected data was cross-analyzed with the sphere of self-esteem. The cross-analyze done from a gender point of

view showed that the results were opposite in every country. This might indicate that the students didn't fully combine the terms confidence and 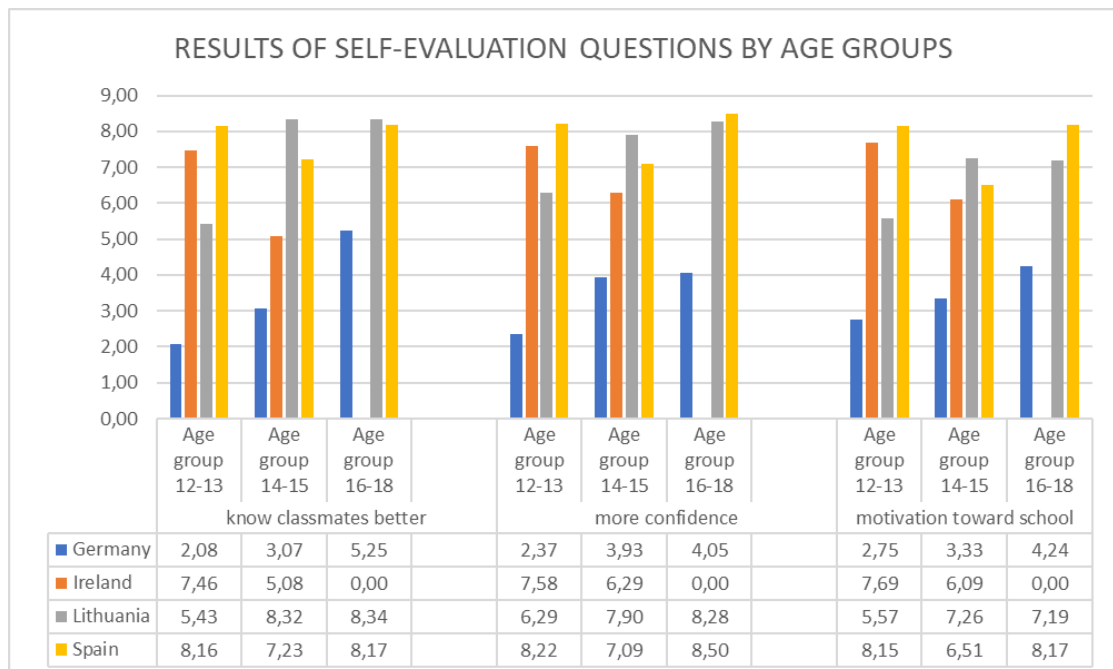self-esteem. It might be that confidence is a wider concept for students. The on-going stage of puberty might also influence experienced confidence. In general, the results of the additional question followed the trend line of general questions.

The third question was about how the 'Express Yourself!' training modules influenced the motivation toward school. There are no spheres in the 3x10D self-evaluation survey where these answers could be cross-analyzed. Gender distribution was even and the results followed the trend line of general results. In Germany, the 3x10D result stated that the financial situation was an important sphere which was experienced negative change during the project. Compared to the third self-evaluation questions, this might lead to dropouts or slowing down the studies. Graphic 13 shows the results of end questions by country and gender point of view.

RESULTS OF SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONS

■ Germany   ■ Ireland   ■ Lithuania   ■ Spain

	know classmates better			more confidence			motivation toward school		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
■ Germany	2,36	4,79	3,57	2,53	4,24	3,38	2,22	3,98	3,10
■ Ireland	7,28	6,00	6,64	7,43	6,18	6,81	7,58	5,91	6,75
■ Lithuania	8,49	7,88	8,19	8,44	7,36	7,90	8,17	6,47	7,32
■ Spain	7,75	8,40	8,07	7,75	8,40	8,07	7,66	8,40	8,03
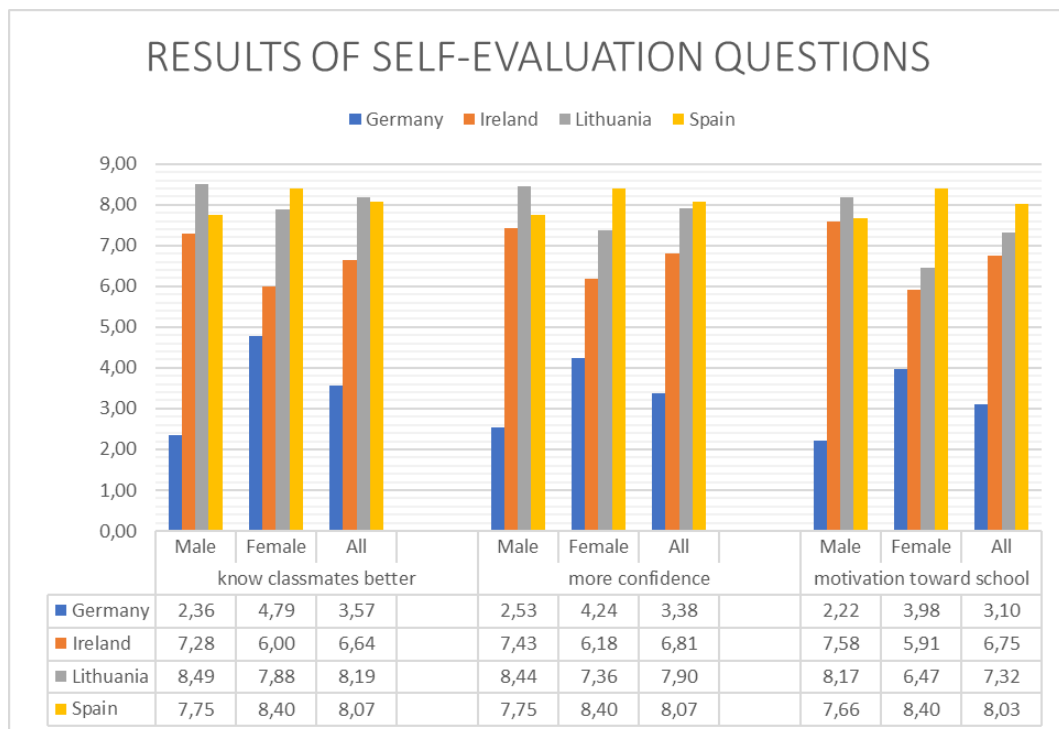
GRAPHIC 13. The results of end questions by country and gender at the average scale of 0 to 10.

If the cross-analyzing was done by the age groups it can be stated that in Germany the results of self-esteem and friends were opposite than in general results. In additional questions, the highest positive rate was among the students of the oldest age group. That group got the lowest results according to the 3x10D self-evaluating data. The same phenomenon was present in the results of Lithuania. The comparison results of Ireland and Spain were following the trend line of 3x10D self-evaluation survey. The difference between Germany and Lithuania might suggest that the experienced positive change in the sphere of friends was not with their classmates. Graphic 14 shows the results of end questions by country and age group point of view.

RESULTS OF SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONS BY AGE GROUPS

	Age group 12-13	Age group 14-15	Age group 16-18		Age group 12-13	Age group 14-15	Age group 16-18		Age group 12-13	Age group 14-15	Age group 16-18
	know classmates better				more confidence				motivation toward school		
■ Germany	2,08	3,07	5,25		2,37	3,93	4,05		2,75	3,33	4,24
■ Ireland	7,46	5,08	0,00		7,58	6,29	0,00		7,69	6,09	0,00
■ Lithuania	5,43	8,32	8,34		6,29	7,90	8,28		5,57	7,26	7,19
■ Spain	8,16	7,23	8,17		8,22	7,09	8,50		8,15	6,51	8,17

GRAPHIC 14. Results of the end questions by country and age groups. The used scale is 0 to 10.

As conclusion, the general result of these additional questions followed the same trend line as the general results and differences between the countries. This indicates that the results of the 3x10D were reliable. The results of the end questions indicated that the 'Express Yourself!' project had a positive influence toward knowing classmates better, having more confidence and motivation toward school in Ireland, Lithuania and Spain. The results of Germany were the lowest, almost neutral.

6 CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, it can be stated that the influence of the 'Express Yourself!' project was experienced more positive among younger students, especially among boys ages 12 to 13. The lowest change was reported among girls ages 16 to 18. This indicates that the exercises and structure of the training modules were more efficient and suitable for younger students, especially for boys. To make the concept work among older students, it might need a different kinds of exercises and approaches to well-being and inclusiveness.

The highest experienced change was in the spheres of friends, life as a whole, managing the daily activities and self-esteem. All of these spheres have a great impact on well-being in life and they are at the core of the project's goals. The lowest experienced change was in the spheres of overcome the challenges and family. Overcome the challenges might be a too broad concept for students to be fully understood and evaluate. In the future, it might be a good idea to pay attention to the clear explanation of spheres with good, age probable examples. In Finland, the 3x10D self-evaluation survey includes separate spheres for children of age groups 7-9, 10-13 and +14. The 'Express Yourself!' project team wanted to keep the spheres alike in every group to keep the sampling data comparable. The sphere of the family is something that the course has difficulties to affect. Family is a large concept and improvement that would need the participation of all family members. These common results stated that inclusive grouping is a good and effective way to promote students' inclusions, motivations towards school and students' well-being.

The study results stated that 'one size doesn't fit all'. Meaning that there are differences between target countries, genders and age groups; a good concept in Spain doesn't automatically mean success in Ireland and a student age of 18 doesn't necessarily enjoy and benefit from the same exercises than 12 years old students. The project was especially successful in Spain and Lithuania. In those

countries, the participant students were mostly from the younger age groups which made the planning of the training modules easier. The project target group might be too broad as the life, worries and worldview variates greatly among these students. When defining the structure and exercises of the sessions, one has to keep in mind the needs of students.

The result stated clear differences between genders. The big cap between genders in the sphere of friends might indicate that females experienced the exercises and the structure of the sessions uncomfortable and ineffective. And therefore they didn't feel grouping or closeness among others during the training modules. This might indicate that for males it is easier to fall in the spirit of self-expression without feeling awkward. As managing the daily activities was more positive among the male gender, this might indicate that for the female gender the concept of well-being is more a mental factor than a physical factor. Physical factors, like managing daily activities, are not that important sphere when evaluation an individual's well-being. To verify this assumption, researchers would need qualitative data on how the term well-being is understood.

The interesting point is that the project got the highest experienced change in Spain, while it was the only country where the sessions were kept by the school's teacher and the project workers only had a monitoring role. This raises the question if the best way to implement the training modules would be with someone who knows the students, their needs and personal characters. A familiar teacher can find the right exercises more efficiently, knows who most likely would not like self-expression or would like to implement it in some special way. Maybe students would also be more open-minded in familiar surroundings.

The age group 14 to 15 was the most contradictory and variable. The experienced changes among different spheres of life varied significantly, from peak to peak. This might be explained by on-going puberty. Puberty influences teenagers overall life as the physical change worries as they compare themselves to others. This might lead to a situation in school where the teenagers are not comfortable with being on the stage or acting silly in front of others. Youngsters, in their puberty storm, are often also filled with hubris toward everything and sees often

the situations or things very black and white, either they are good or bad. (Mannerheimin lastensuojeliitto, 2017.)

As a summary, it can be stated that the 'Express yourself!' project was a good and effective way to influence positive towards well-being in life and inclusion, especially among boys and younger students. The project influenced positive to the motivation toward school, gave more confidence to participant students and helped the student establish, maintain and improve the relationships with classmates. To make the concept work with the older student, it would need a new project with a different approach.

7 DISCUSSION

The well-being of youth is a current phenomenon in society. The topic might be even more important during and after the COVID19 pandemic. The 'Express Yourself!' project with the result of quantitative and qualitative studies can provide vital tools and information on how to positively influence students' well-being. In this point of view, the project with its results can be seen as a precautionary tool.

The mind of humans and the well-being of children and young adults have always been close to my heart. As a physiological point, self-esteem, self-expression, inclusion and exclusion has been an interested topic for me. Strong personal interest in the thesis's topic kept me motivated, hungry for knowledge, during the whole process. These were the key factors that made me interested in the 'Express Yourself!' project. In late spring 2019, Diaconia University of Applied Science was looking for a thesis worker for their development project Express Yourself! Inclusive Grouping in Schools. The announcement was published in Moodle where it caught my eye. I have previous experience on carry out similar studies but in different fields of business. Luckily I was chosen for the job. During next month I familiarizing and studying the terms, concepts and looking into previous studies of the research topic. For me, the collection of the theoretical background was an on-going process due to the fact that I had no previous experience in the field of social studies. The first 3x10D data was collected at the beginning of the year 2020. After the whole data was available I started to analyze the result. During the process, I presented the result numerous times to the project team and to Sakari Kainulainen who was my mentor. The process of the thesis is presented in graphic 15.
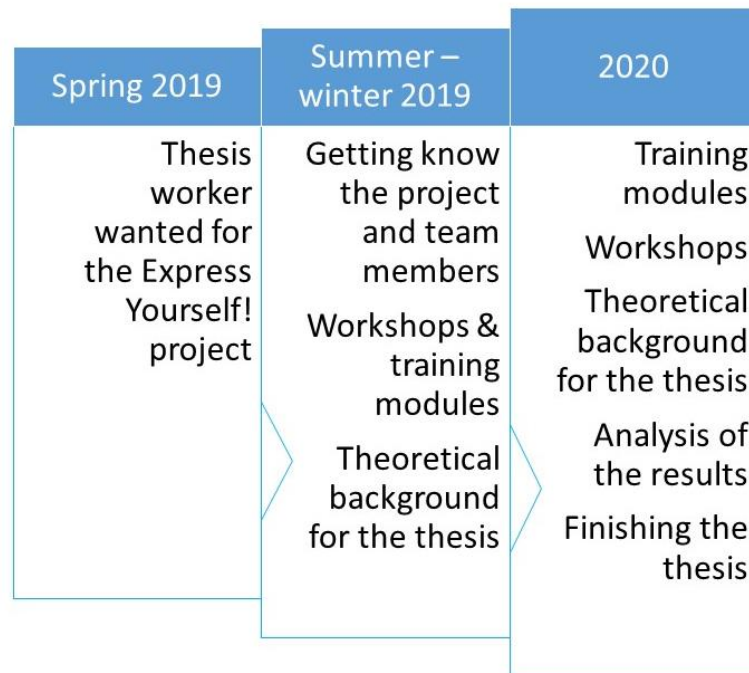
GRAPHIC 15. The thesis process.

As shown in graphic 15 the project lasted almost two years. The timeframe was quite long for the thesis and therefore I had every now and then, times when I had to wait for the other's input. As shown also from the graphic 15, during the 'Express Yourself!' project I learner important terms, concepts and gain a wide knowledge of the well-being, self-expression and self-esteem of students. I can use this information and gathered experience in the future and it also supports my social service studies. I can also spread the results and the knowledge of the 'Express Yourself!' project and its webpages among co-workers. This way others can also benefit from the results and get to know the project.

Working in the 'Express Yourself!' project deepened my view on the well-being of youth and how it can be influenced positively. Exercises were suitable for the school environment but also for summer camps and hobbies, maybe even at kids' birthday party. I enjoyed working in an international team, as it widened my understanding of how culture and social factors show a role in an individual's life. It would have been interested to see how the project would influence the well-

being of youngsters who identified them as other/don't say and how the result varies from the male and female genders.

The project strengthened my skills in project management and increased my experience in how to conduct and analyze results. The thesis work introduced me to the world of academic writing and research methods. The time spend with the 'Express Yourself!' project also strengthened my will in the future to work as a researcher. One of my key observations during the project was that despite the field of business the basics can be used everywhere. As a researcher, I just have to adapt. And adaption is an important skill for me as a future professional of social services.

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APPENDIX 1. 3x10D self-evaluation survey

EXPRESS YOURSELF - 3X10D

3X10D® is a trademark of Diaconia University of Applied Sciences.

Thinking of the present time, how satisfied are you with…

1. your state of health

Dissatisfied   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Satisfied

2. your ability to overcome life's challenges

Dissatisfied   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Satisfied

3. your housing situation

Dissatisfied   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Satisfied

4. your ability to carry out daily activities (e.g. studying, working)

Dissatisfied   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Satisfied

5. your family

Dissatisfied   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Satisfied

6. the number of trusted friends you have

Dissatisfied   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Satisfied

7. your financial situation

Dissatisfied   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Satisfied

8. your ability to develop your strengths (e.g. by means of an interesting hobby)

Dissatisfied   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Satisfied