



Introduction

This is the *management summary* of a quantitative study of IMC Weekendschool alumni that was conducted in 2015-2016 by the Universiteit van Amsterdam, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and IMC Weekendschool. The study consisted of two phases: a preliminary qualitative study and a quantitative study. This summary is based on a Master's thesis on the quantitative part of the study (De Groot, 2016).

The aim of this study was to identify the long-term effects of the Weekendschool. The aims of the Weekendschool education should be palpable in the lives of the alumni, which makes them the best source of information for measuring the effects of the Weekendschool. In order to gather as much information as possible and to ensure that our influence on the survey was kept to a minimum, we first engaged in an open discussion with alumni in 33 interviews plus two practice interviews. These interviews that were principally designed for the preparation of the quantitative part of the study (i.e., the survey), also provided some interesting insights. Noteworthy is the finding that the Weekendschool intervention reportedly has more effect on pupils who experience more problems during their primary education. This shows that the intervention has more effect for the intended target group.

The best way to study what effects the Weekendschool has had on alumni is by conducting interviews and surveys. In theory, studies that aim to determine the effects of a particular intervention should be experimental in nature: they should include a control group, and the effects should be measured before and after the intervention (pre- and post-measurement). In the case of the IMC Weekendschool, this was not possible because there was no pre-measurement available. Even more importantly, it was impossible for us to assemble a control group in an ethically acceptable manner. For this reason, the most appropriate method of identifying the effects of the Weekendschool was a descriptive study based on interviews and surveys. This method also has an advantage in that a survey can directly ask about alumni's experiences of IMC Weekendschool. In an experimental study this would be impossible because one cannot ask a control group something about what it has not experienced.

The most important input for the questions in the questionnaire was the 33 interviews. Other preparatory sources that were used included: earlier studies on the Weekendschool; (other) information from the *impact map*, a map illustrating the impact of the Weekendschool on all stakeholders including guest teachers, partners and sponsors; workshops with employees; and discussions with IMC Alumni, the department within IMC Weekendschool that coordinates alumni relations. The result was a comprehensive questionnaire that could be completed by respondents within approximately a half hour. Respondents were able to take the survey online on their own preferred device via the *Qualtrics Survey platform*, which is used by universities around the world. Roughly speaking, the questionnaire included four types of questions: biographical questions about the respondent's life and lifestyle (23); control questions to verify that respondents actually read the questions (22); questions about the actual effects of the Weekendschool (133), and seven questions in which respondents were asked to give their view on the Weekendschool. Apart from the biographical questions, all questions were answered on a five-point scale: 1. not at all applicable, 2. somewhat applicable, 3. average applicable, 4. very applicable, and 5. completely applicable.

The following Weekendschool concepts formed the basis of the questions in the questionnaire: Making choices; Motivation; Future perspectives; Social Connectedness; Self-confidence; Social skills; Content (of the subjects); and Results (applying the knowledge obtained at the Weekendschool in one's own life). In addition, these concepts were cross referenced with a generally accepted theory: the theory of social emotional learning (SEL) (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Greenberg, Haynes, et al., 1997; Shriver, Schwab-Stone, & DeFalco, 1999; Zins, & Elias, 2006). In addition to being a theory, SEL is also a teaching practice that was originally used within mainstream education but can also be applied elsewhere. The SEL model distinguishes the following concepts:

- Skills (self-management, problem-solving, decision-making, communication);
- Attitudes (towards oneself, towards others, and towards one's work);
- Knowledge (understanding of physical well-being, relationships, school and opportunities within society to become involved in).

Crossing these SEL concepts with those of the Weekendschool results in a matrix in which each cell is a specific manifestation of a possible Weekendschool effect. On a theoretical level, this exercise can be seen as a cross-validation of the Weekendschool concepts. But more importantly, using this approach was beneficial from a practical point of view, as we were able to remove redundant questions from overcrowded cells of the matrix and fill in cells that were found empty. This exercise even generated a number of additional questions that had not been identified in the preparatory phase.

After analysing all our survey questions, three questions proved to be unsuitable because they had been formulated ambiguously. In addition, we were unable to use the eight questions on work/completed education and the one question about parenthood because only 10 respondents had completed their studies (as their main activity) and only two respondents had a child. As a result, a total of 13 questions were dropped from the survey.

Prior to sending out the survey, the email addresses of all the alumni were checked. We were able to track down the email addresses of 968 (53%) of the total 1,823 alumni. The questionnaire was completed by 194 alumni (20% of the sample, or 11% of the population).

Results

All the respondents were included in the analysis, as the responses to the control questions demonstrated that everyone had filled out the questionnaire seriously, and an analysis of the response patterns suggested that there was no trace of socially desirable responding. Of the 120 questions on all the possible influences that the Weekendschool could have, respondents said they experienced an above-average influence (>3) on 105 questions, and a below-average influence (<3) on 15 questions.

	relative to (3) neutral	significance level		
		5%	1%	1% ^{oo}
lower (<3)	15	9	7	4
average (3)		14	21	37
higher (>3)	105	97	92	79

Table 1: Number of questions relative to the neutral category (higher/lower/average) per significance level

Table 1 shows the number of questions whose responses were significantly higher or lower than 3 for different significance levels. The average for all questions was $m=3.43$, while the average of the 79 questions whose responses were significantly higher than average was $m=3.65$ (at significance level $p<0.001$). Below in Table 2, the 10 highest scoring questions are shown, i.e. those aspects of the Weekendschool that the alumni experienced as having the most influence. Table 2 also shows the four lowest scoring items.

In order to assess the psychometric quality of the questionnaire, we constructed scales for each of the SEL concepts as well as the Weekendschool concepts with the 10 items that contributed the most to the questionnaire's reliability. An exception to this was the scale for future perspectives, which had seven questions. All scales had a high level of reliability (*Cronbach's alpha*=0.87–0.93). The average item score of the concepts was between $m=3.39$ and $m=3.67$. This means that for all the SEL concepts and for all the concepts used by the Weekendschool, alumni experienced an average to strong influence of the Weekendschool.

Aspects of the Weekendschool that alumni experienced as having the most influence	Avg.
At the Weekendschool, I encountered new and interesting topics.	4.52
Through the Weekendschool, I met interesting people.	4.22
At the Weekendschool, I learned that I can ask anything.	4.13
At the Weekendschool, I expanded my general knowledge.	4.11
Because of the Weekendschool, I now believe it's important to enjoy the things that I do.	3.98
I often talked to my parents about what I experienced at the Weekendschool.	3.98
Through the Weekendschool, I realised that it's possible to deal with adults in a fun way.	3.96
I learned at the Weekendschool that it's OK to make mistakes.	3.96
The Weekendschool improved the way I work together with others.	3.94
Thanks to the Weekendschool, I increased my knowledge of the world.	3.92
The Weekendschool taught me to persevere to the end once I have started something.	3.91
As a result of the Weekendschool, I want to find out more about my interests.	3.88
As a result of the Weekendschool, I feel it's important to use my qualities.	3.86
I learned at the Weekendschool to give my opinion when the situation calls for it.	3.86
Thanks to the Weekendschool, I know more about my future perspectives.	3.86
Aspects of the Weekendschool that alumni experienced as having the least influence	
As a result of the Weekendschool, I have (or have had) fewer problems at home.	2.07
At the Weekendschool I got to know partners of the weekendschool with whom I still have contact every once in a while.	2.32
I got to know Weekendschool (guest) teachers with whom I still have contact.	2.36
As a result of the Weekendschool, I want to lead a healthy life.	2.63

Table 2: Highest and lowest scoring items ($N=194$); all items shown are significant $p<.001$

In order to assess the dimensionality of the questionnaire, a factor analysis was conducted. This revealed one major factor—which explains almost half (48%) of the variance—that overshadowed all the other factors. This factor can only be interpreted as ‘the general Weekendschool experience’. The

alumni were unanimous (or, to put it another way, very homogeneous) in their perception of the Weekendschool. Given the heterogeneity of the group, the homogeneity of the Weekendschool experience is striking. We can only conclude that the Weekendschool experience among alumni is very strong and very unanimous.

From a technical point of view, the commonality of the Weekendschool experience means that, on the basis of perceptions, it was not possible to distinguish between different respondent groups. It was also pointless to compare different sub-populations with each other because we cannot expect to find any differences between them. In order to verify this assumption, we conducted comparisons between two sub-populations: men and women were compared, and active alumni were compared with those alumni who no longer maintained any contact with the Weekendschool. As expected, both comparisons did not exhibit any significant differences in degree between the different groups in terms of their Weekendschool experience.

Discussion

The 20% response rate can be considered high to very high compared to other studies with the same medium, especially considering the background and age of the population. The fact that active alumni and alumni who have not maintained contact with the IMC Alumni network did not differ in the degree of their experience is an important finding, because this tells us that the questionnaire is not biased and also that the active alumni's responses to the questionnaire were unbiased. This result also demonstrates that the sample is most likely representative and that the results can be generalised to the entire population.

The findings show that Weekendschool alumni were influenced by their Weekendschool education in numerous areas. The alumni are largely positive about their time at the Weekendschool: they indicated that they would not have wanted to miss out on going to the Weekendschool ($m=4.41$). They also look back positively on their time at the Weekendschool ($m=4.54$). Alumni appreciated the way in which the Weekendschool transfers knowledge via guest teachers from the working world: the respondents thought the new knowledge was interesting ($m=4.52$), they learned more about their own interests ($m=3.74$) and they enjoyed attending the Weekendschool ($m=4.37$). As a result of the Weekendschool, alumni experience broader future perspectives ($m=3.86$) and more personal influence on being actively involved in society ($m=3.67$). The respondents indicated that, as a result of the Weekendschool, they learned that you should always ask questions when necessary ($m=4.13$), that it's OK to make mistakes ($m=3.96$), and to pursue one's own interests ($m=3.88$) and abilities ($m=3.86$).

The goal of the Weekendschool is to have students learn to make autonomous, motivated and conscious choices—and not necessarily to have them know at a young age what study or vocation they want to pursue. This goal is reflected in the results of this study: alumni indicate that it was not so much what they wanted to study or what profession they wanted to follow that they learned at the Weekendschool ($m=3.14$) as how they could achieve something ($m=3.84$), how to make a plan ($m=3.75$), and to persevere ($m=3.91$). They learned to base their choice of profession on their own preferences: on what they find interesting ($m=3.66$) and what they want ($m=3.74$). Moreover, alumni felt that the Weekendschool helped them in making their career choices ($m=3.57$).

Weekendschool alumni indicated that, as a result of the Weekendschool, they had a favourable view of education in general ($m=3.68$). By giving children a peek into the future and by showing them what their possibilities are, they prove to be more motivated to finish high school ($m=3.52$) and they want to continue to learn thereafter ($m=3.77$).

Interestingly, alumni say that at the Weekendschool they saw how it was possible to interact with adults in a fun way ($m=3.96$). This is consistent with other research studies that show that children in extracurricular activities benefit from the positive interaction they have with adults (e.g. Catalano,

Berglund, Tyan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Huang, Kim, Cho, Marschall, & Pérez, 2011; Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, & Lord, 2005). However, the alumni also indicated that they maintained very little contact with valued contacts they made during their time at the Weekendschool ($m=2.36$). This suggests the need for the IMC Alumni department to step up its activities. If Weekendschool alumni were given more opportunities to stay in touch with their former guest teachers, the positive effects of the Weekendschool could be even stronger.

One snap finding of this study is that alumni indicated a willingness to contribute to society as a result of the Weekendschool. This is not just a matter of words; they actually act on this. The alumni express their social engagement by working as volunteers (53%) and taking care of family and friends (96%). The alumni attribute their social engagement to the Weekendschool, which demonstrates that the Weekendschool's aim to form its students into caring and active citizens is achieved.

Conclusions

Given that the Weekendschool produces many different and divergent effects and given also the need to minimise bias by limiting the number of topics, a relatively long questionnaire was necessary for this exploratory research study.

The findings of this study are interesting for several reasons. What stands out the most is the general consensus among the alumni. No matter how active they remained after finishing the Weekendschool and no matter which Weekendschool site they attended, the alumni's answers were homogeneous. This proves that the Weekendschool has succeeded in establishing a strong concept, replicable across its different sites, that produces the same—positive—effects in all students regardless of which Weekendschool site they attended.

The second finding that is noteworthy is that alumni were influenced in practice by all the theoretically formulated Weekendschool concepts (especially self-confidence, future perspectives, motivation and perseverance). This is an important result because it is a quantitative validation that the Weekendschool does achieve the goals that it propagates. Participation in the Weekendschool is not automatically assessed as positive (e.g. as a fun pastime) but as something formative and life-defining. Despite the open approach of this study and the many kinds of questions included in the questionnaire (e.g. also about anti-social behaviour and substance abuse), alumni scored questions related to the intention behind the Weekendschool concept unanimously high.

Third, the results demonstrate that the Weekendschool not only achieves all its self-formulated objectives but also promotes all the concepts formulated by theorists of *social emotional learning*. This opens up the possibility of a broader positioning and embedding of the Weekendschool, as the Weekendschool's approach has significant effects on concepts that are widely accepted internationally.

Of all the *stakeholders* of IMC Weekendschool, the students and alumni are the most important: the school revolves around them, and it is because of them that the Weekendschool exists. It is therefore gratifying to see that our open and informed research has verified that alumni have a very positive assessment of the Weekendschool and that the Weekendschool has had the effects that it seeks to have on them. These positive results are of the utmost importance for all the *stakeholders* of the Weekendschool: for the employees, who observe that their hard work has borne fruit; for the parents, who see that their support has paid off in the form of a tangibly better position for their child; for the financiers, for whom the worth of their investment is reflected in motivated citizens; and for the management and the board who see the Weekendschool's objectives validated.

This study into the long-term effects of the Weekendschool can be considered completed. It would only be interesting to replicate this study once a larger number of alumni are active in the labour market—something that will have to wait for several more years. This research suggests that the Weekendschool

can embed itself more firmly in the ongoing discussions on education by examining *social emotional learning* in more depth—by determining more precisely how the more concrete Weekendschool concepts relate to the more abstract SEL concepts and by making comparisons with existing SEL practices. This requires a review of the literature as well as a comparison with SEL practices. For now, the results of this research will serve as a basis for the IMC Weekendschool *impact map*. In addition, a shorter version of the questionnaire will be prepared that in time can be used for further research on Weekendschool alumni and alumni of IMC Basis.

Literature

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