School of Social Sciences

Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship

Master Thesis

Innovate, Educate to Entrepreneurship: Experiential Curriculum, Multiple Intelligences Cultivation and Business Literacy in the American Farm School of Thessaloniki.

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Patras, Greece, June 2025

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"Acknowledgments and Dedication"

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervising professor, Dr. Theodoros Katerinakis, Adjunct Lecturer at the Hellenic Open University, for guiding me and for his continuous support through all stages of this Thesis. His expertise, patience and encouragement has formed not only the direction but also the depth of this Thesis.

I would also like to thank the President of the American Farm School Institution Dr. Jeff Landsdale for providing an inspiring educational setting and for allowing access to the students and faculty members who shared their time, perspectives and experiences making this research meaningful.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my family Dimitris, Giannis and Thanos for their support and patience during the writing of this Thesis.

This Thesis is dedicated to those who believe in the power of experiential education and human potential at all ages.

Abstract

This thesis explores how students at the American Farm School experience its unique educational model, inspired by the vision of its founder, Dr. John Henry House, with a particular emphasis on experiential learning, entrepreneurship, creativity, and the holistic development of their skills. Through qualitative research and the analysis of two focus group discussions, the study captures student experiences and perspectives that shed light on the school's educational impact.

The findings highlight the ongoing evolution of Dr. House's pedagogical approach, which fosters multiple intelligences, innovation, sustainability, and the strengthening of students' personal and social identities. Special attention is given to the integration of business literacy within vocational education and its alignment with the principles of educating global citizens for the 21st century.

However, the study also raises concerns regarding the program's workload and the need for a better balance between academic and extracurricular activities offered by the American Farm School. The thesis concludes with suggestions for improving the curriculum and proposes the expansion of the research at the doctoral level, aiming to further deepen both theoretical and empirical understanding of experiential education.

Keywords

American Farm School, business literacy, diverse learning, innovation, entrepreneurship education, experiential curriculum, focus group, multiple intelligence cultivation, vocational training

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα διπλωματική εργασία εξετάζει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι μαθητές της Αμερικανικής Γεωργικής Σχολής βιώνουν το εκπαιδευτικό της μοντέλο, σύμφωνα με το όραμα του ιδρυτή της Dr. John Henry House, με έμφαση στη βιωματική μάθηση, την επιχειρηματικότητα, τη δημιουργικότητα και την ολιστική ανάπτυξη των δεξιοτήτων τους. Μέσω της ποιοτικής μεθόδου (qualitative) έρευνας και της ανάλυσης δύο ομάδων εστίασης (focus group), καταγράφηκαν εμπειρίες και απόψεις που φωτίζουν το εκπαιδευτικό αντίκτυπο του σχολείου.

Τα ευρήματα ανέδειξαν την ανάπτυξη και τη συνέχιση του παιδαγωγικού σχεδιασμού του Dr. John Henry House, που προωθεί τις πολλαπλές νοημοσύνες, την καινοτομία, τη βιωσιμότητα και την ενίσχυση της προσωπικής και κοινωνικής ταυτότητας των μαθητών. Ιδιαίτερη έμφαση δόθηκε στην ενσωμάτωση του επιχειρηματικού εγγραμματισμού στην επαγγελματική εκπαίδευση και στις συνδέσεις με τις αρχές της εκπαίδευσης για τους παγκόσμιους πολίτες του 21^{ου} αιώνα.

Ωστόσο διαπιστώθηκαν και προβληματισμοί σχετικά με τον φόρτο του προγράμματος και τις ανάγκες για καλύτερη ισορροπία μεταξύ ακαδημαϊκών και εξωσχολικών δραστηριοτήτων που παρέχονται από την Αμερικανική Γεωργική Σχολή. Η εργασία καταλήγει σε προτάσεις για βελτίωση του προγράμματος και εισηγείται την επέκταση της έρευνας σε διδακτορικό επίπεδο με στόχο την ενίσχυση θεωρητικών και εμπειρικών γνώσεων γύρω από το βιωματικό σχολείο.

Λέξεις – Κλειδιά

Αμερικανική Γεωργική Σχολή, επιχειρηματικός εγγραματισμός, διαφοροποιημένη μάθηση, καινοτομία στην εκπαίδευση, εκπαίδευση στην επιχειρηματικότητα, βιωματικό πρόγραμμα σπουδών, ομάδα εστίασης, καλλιέργεια πολλαπλής νοημοσύνης, επαγγελματική κατάρτιση

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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

AFS	American Farm School
Ai	Artificial Intelligence
ASPAITE	School of Pedagogical and Technological Education
HOU	Hellenic Open University
EU	European Union
IEP	Institute of Educational Policy
IME	Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship
MI	Multiple Intelligence
n.d.	No Date
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBL	Project – Based Learning
R&D	Research and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
USA	United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WEBEX	Web-based Video Conferencing Platform

1. Introduction

Embedding innovation and entrepreneurship in education is an urgent need in preparing students for the demands of a rapidly changing economy, especially in the agricultural sector which faces sustainability, climate change and market globalization challenges. It is of essence to educate students with skills capable to identify opportunities, take risks and develop agricultural enterprises that contribute to the local and national economy and/or to the global landscape. Innovation and entrepreneurship are both necessary to promote adaptability, creativity and economic growth.

1.1 Background and Context

Innovation in Education is the development and/or creation of new ideas, methods, practices, tools, technologies or services in the field of education by improving the learning quality and teach students how to learn and succeed. Innovation in education is the emphasis on the skills: problem solving, active learning, creativity encouragement, individualized learning paths, real-world relevance, cultivation of soft skills.

Entrepreneurship in Education focuses on cultivating and developing entrepreneurial skills and mindsets in students, teachers and stakeholders, including inspiration, motivation and encouragement to the students to create new ventures and for the institution to create new educational programs according to the market needs. (OECD)

Educational Institutions provide to students the skills and knowledge to innovate and create entrepreneurships, by offering Innovative Teaching Methods such as flexibility and adaptability, collaborative learning, student – centric focus while teaching them how to solve real – world problems. These institutions develop student's leadership potential, by creating startup hubs like the Innovation and Impact HUB of the American Farm School (American Farm School n.d.).

This research intends to contribute to the field of innovation and entrepreneurship in agricultural education. This Thesis will provide information about how the educational models focused on innovation and entrepreneurship could increase the development in Greece. Also, the findings could help policy makers and other agricultural institutions to

imitate American Farm School's model, of how they could contribute to the local economies.

1.2 Problem Statement

All of education systems, especially in Greece, until now that the Minister of Education, religious Affairs and Sports, Sofia Zacharaki, announced at the Council of Education Ministers in Brussels that the cultivation of skills through our education system is essential for a competitive, resilient Europe ready to face multiple challenges and that "The Greek Government believes in and invests significant resources in upgrading public education so that it becomes resilient and adaptable to challenges and risks. We are utilizing modern pedagogical methods, strengthening our digital infrastructure through the Digital School initiative, and providing targeted training for our educators"(Greek Ministry of Education) rely on teacher-based teaching methods that do not help students to develop their entrepreneurial education and overlook the hands-on learning, the various learning styles of the students and the applications to the real – life situations, despite the increasing international interest in entrepreneurial education.

The lack of emphasis on experiential learning, multiple intelligences development and student-centered pedagogy limits the ability of schools to reach all students. Many students that have talents in non traditional areas remain under stimulated, in environments that prioritize linguistic or logical skills.(Gardner, 2016).

The interest in reforming education to meet all the above challenges is increasing, but how innovative approaches can be implemented to the Greek Schools remains limited.

This study explores how entrepreneurship in education through experiential curriculum can engage students, foster diverse intelligences and provide the business literacy that is needed.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

As a unique case study, the American Farm School and Perrotis College in Thessaloniki, a nonprofit educational Institution, will be analyzing the theoretical approaches, the practices

and the educational programs of the Institution, which contribute to the innovational entrepreneurship of the graduate students and community development.

This Thesis aims to examine the role of innovation and entrepreneurship in education of American Farm School and Perrotis College, by accessing the impact of the Institution in the Greek economic development and sustainability. It will identify the best practices that are used in agricultural education which develops innovation and entrepreneurship. Also it will evaluate all the challenges and opportunities in the Greek agricultural economy.

Questions that could be answered are:

- Which are the educational practices that American Farm School and Perrotis College use to promote innovation and entrepreneurial skills to the students?
- How do teachers support pedagogical strategies and entrepreneurial learning at the same time?
- How does the Innovative Courses of American Farm School differ from the Traditional Models and hard learning?
- Can the educational model used from American Farm School and Perrotis College to be scaled and/or adapted from other Institutions?
- Which challenges and opportunities, does American Farm School and Perrotis College face?

1.4 Significance of Study

This study is significant because it will provide insights of how to bridge the gap between theory and practice of innovation in education and economic growth to a local agricultural economy, mainly by capturing the vision of Dr. John Henry House , “to embody in the School a system of education which would train the whole man, - the mind and hand as well as the soul… My idea, then, is that education is best worked out in a school situated on a farm in which the students have to part, and developed in connection with all the activities connected with a community.” (House, n.d.) and emphasize to the importance of sustainable agricultural education that American Farm School provides for the last 121 years.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This Thesis focuses on business literacy, diverse learning, innovation, and entrepreneurship in education, experiential curriculum, multiple intelligence cultivation and vocational training. The primary setting for this research is the American Farm School of Thessaloniki, with a specific focus on the "Study U.S.A." program, which offers a dynamic student-centered educational program and the faculty of almost all Educational Levels of the American Farm School.

This research is qualitative and draws its data from Focus group discussions conducted with the above participants.

Despite the contributors, the research might face several limitations such as limited academic timeframe because of all the National Holidays in Greece and the end of the academic year which didn't leave much time to the stakeholders to participate to the Focus Groups on time. As a case study focusing on the American Farm School and Perrotis College and its impact to the Greek Agricultural Economy it will not be expanded.

The insights gathered from the focus groups are based on participants experiences and might be influenced by the group dynamics or personal interpretations. The language used to the Focus groups is Greek and the translation to English might not accurately capture everything that was said.

2. Literature Review

Entrepreneurship teaching has emerged as an urgent pedagogical approach in response to the exigencies of an innovation-led world economy. It integrates not just business-related skills but also creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and initiative, abilities that are the foundation of a lifetime of learning and flexibility (European Commission, 2014).

Entrepreneurship education is commonly defined as a process where students acquire a collection of skills, attitudes and values to identify opportunities and turn them into value-creating activities (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). The European Commission (2015), defines entrepreneurship education as a skill that favors personal development, active citizenship, social integration, and employability, while at the same time Fayolle and Redford (2014) distinguish entrepreneurial education between learning about entrepreneurship (theoretical knowledge) and learning by entrepreneurship (experiential learning).

Creativity is considered as a core component of entrepreneurship and according to Robinson (2011), "It is often said that education and training are the keys to the future. They are, but a key can be turned in two directions. Turn it one way and you lock resources away, even from those they belong to. Turn it the other way and you release resources and give people back to themselves. To realize our true creative potential, in our organizations, in our schools and in our communities, we need to think differently about ourselves and to act differently towards each other. We must learn to be creative.", and cultivate creativity in all education systems.

While international literature emphasizes on entrepreneurship, creativity and multiple intelligences, Greek theorists also contribute to the field. Among them, Vasilios Fthenakis supports modern, inclusive and student - centered pedagogies that align with global frameworks but respond to local necessities. He strongly promotes creativity and interdisciplinary learning from an early stage, maintaining that students should be considered as co – constructors of knowledge rather than passive receivers. His theory aligns with Howard Gardners multiple intelligences theory (Gardner,2016). Fthenakis supports that the school curricula has to be receptive to many learner profiles and enable everyone to express themselves through numerous modalities, such as language, nature and technology. Furthermore, Fthenakis philosophy is in line with entrepreneurial education models where students are confronted with problem solving, team learning and producing real products or services.

2.1 Entrepreneurship Education: Concepts and Frameworks

According to the European Commission (2015), the goal of the entrepreneurship education is to "foster entrepreneurial mindsets, skills and competences from an early age and throughout all levels of education". Such competencies are considered of great importance not only for individual development but also for the cultivation of active and responsible citizenship.

Entrepreneurship is a valuable skill for European Union citizens and benefits both their personal and professional development. Education in entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in Europe's competitiveness and the continuous growth of the European economy.

Promoting entrepreneurship in education as a key competence encourages EU citizens to develop an entrepreneurial mindset, create innovative solutions to societal challenges, and design products with added socio-economic value. (European Commission, 2022).

2.2 Experiential Learning Theories and Applications

There are many interpretations of what experiential learning is. According to the American tradition, Experiential Pedagogy was developed within the framework of John Dewey's Progressive Education, which emphasized the significance of subjective experience and social interaction in the learning process. In the German-speaking world, Experiential Pedagogy evolved within the framework of the "Work School" (Arbeitsschule) of Kerschensteiner and Guiding, which highlighted action both within the school and in society as a means of fostering motivation and the educational importance of hands-on, manual activities, an approach also reflected in the ideas of the Soviet educator A. Makarenko. Meanwhile, in other parts of Europe, experiential pedagogy was shaped by the child-centered school models of Key, Montessori, and Decroly, who emphasized the importance of students' interests and the necessity of involving them in the planning of educational activities.

The support for Experiential Pedagogy from psychological schools and neuroscience is evident in several theoretical frameworks: Lewin's Social Field Theory, which introduced Group Dynamics; Piaget's Cognitive Psychology, which asserts that the mind transforms rather than merely records experiences; and Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, which highlights the role of the group in shaping individual understanding (Kolb et al., 2000; Dedoulis, 2003). Neuroscientific findings further support experiential learning by demonstrating that the accumulation of experiences, their reflective processing, the formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and their experimental testing activate corresponding regions of the cerebral cortex, a finding that suggests experiential learning emerges from the very structure of the brain (Zull, 2002, p. 18).

Support for Experiential Pedagogy also comes from the epistemology of Critical Rationalism (Popper), which emphasizes the need for exploratory confirmation or refutation of our assumptions and perceptions of reality (Chrysafidis, 2006, p. 124). At the same time, Critical Theory (Habermas) underlines the necessity of revealing the consequences of actions and institutions in the pursuit of individual emancipation and the reconstruction of society (Matsaggouras, 2004, p. 222).

The overarching aims of Experiential Pedagogy concerning the purpose of schooling are to enable students, both individually and collectively, to manage learning situations, personal challenges, and social contexts with autonomy, creativity, and effectiveness. At the same time, its socio-political dimension aspires to establish a dialectical relationship between personal self-determination and social responsibility, as well as between social continuity and social transformation. (Matsagouras, 2015).

2.3 Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences in Education

Howard Gardner emphasizes to the importance of learning that is not only active but also meaningful by pointing out that rote learning breeds superficial understanding that is quickly forgotten. Genuine learning ensues when students interact directly with the material—through experiences, questioning, experimenting, and utilizing the information in ways that

have a personal impact and are potentially transformative. A case in point: a student who conducts historical interviews or scientific experiments is bound to remember the knowledge better than one who just memorizes facts for a test.

This approach is consistent with the theory of Multiple Intelligences, which was formulated in the field of psychology to bring to the fore the wide array of intellectual competencies individuals may have. People learn and demonstrate their comprehension in different ways some for language, others for logic, spatial orientation, movement, or social interactions. Consequently, an educational model targeting only the linguistic and logical learners (the so-called "law professor" mind) proves to be biased as it leaves out students who are talented otherwise.

Education must honor and respect these diverse intelligences by providing several teaching and assessment techniques. The use of technology and interactive methods is instrumental in this transformation as it provides a wide array of resources to cater to a variety of learning styles and enables students to exhibit their understanding using the mode of learning that best suits them. For instance, students would have the option to create visual projects, use verbal methods, or delve into digital simulations instead of being confined to textbooks or traditional tests.

In addition, the speaker points out that today's education system is under fire for laying emphasis on the extensiveness rather than the depth of the material. When students have to cover a great number of subjects, their knowledge of each is rather superficial, which is graphically compared to "a mile wide and an inch deep." Howard Gardner suggests that the approach should flip, teachers have to concentrate on fewer subjects, delving into each of them in a way that matches every student's learning style. The ultimate objective is to make sure that not only children are taught, but they are also able to fully grasp the subject matter. Howard Gardner believes in a major change in education, calling schools to concentrate on fewer things but in a much deeper way. Students shouldn't focus on the mere memorization of science facts but rather ought to be taught how to think scientifically – that is, they have to make up hypotheses, test them, analyze results, and, through practical experience, they have to revise their understanding of the topic. This kind of deep, inquiry-based learning not only helps students to identify the nature of opinions and evidence-based claims but also equips them with skills that they will use to college and workforce.

Assessment obviously also requires a different approach. Sports and arts seem to have a clear indication of learning, while school assessments often seem ambiguous and do not

show any key progress; these characteristics underline the main differences between the two fields. The commentator puts the point that students are to be informed from the very beginning about the nature of performances and projects they are to be accountable for. Receiving frequent correct feedback, eventually, they will develop the ability of self-assessment, which is just as professionals do in the real world, aside from just the initial stages of their journey. Four major conditions for lasting educational reform are laid down by the speaker in his address of a far-reaching vision. In the first place, there must be visible examples of a number of schools where deep student-focused learning is a success. Second and thirdly, not only must teachers be convinced and supported throughout the process of change, but also the assessments have to be compatible with the new methodologies, standardized tests cannot cover the whole area of meaningful learning. Finally, besides all of the above, political will is a must-have if a particular type of education is to be in the first place, and fear-driven resistance to change should be cleared off. Otherwise, innovation and real reform will not be able to give ground.

Education, in the end, should cover way beyond just content; it should enable students to critically think, find solutions, and be responsible for their own learning which is a skill necessary for life after school. (Gardner,2016)

2.4 Business Literacy and Vocational Education

In contemporary educational dissertation, business literacy is increasingly acknowledged as an essential dimension of secondary and vocational education, particularly in equipping students for both employment and entrepreneurial projects within a rapidly changing global economy. Primarily, business literacy involves a comprehensive understanding of financial management, marketing principles, budgeting, innovation, and ethical decision-making. When effectively integrated into vocational training, it improves students' capacity to navigate real-world economic and organizational challenges while cultivating entrepreneurial skills.

Vocational institutions, particularly those situated within agricultural and technical domains, such as the American Farm School (AFS), gain substantial benefit from inserting

business literacy into experiential pedagogies. At AFS, students actively engage in the operation of student-led enterprises, conduct market analysis, develop and refine products, and employ sustainability-focused initiatives. These experiential learning opportunities provide substantial contexts for applying theoretical concepts, offering early exposure to essential functions such as financial planning, customer relations, and team leadership. Such practices are aligned with the development of core 21st-century skills and entrepreneurial approaches (Rotherham & Willingham, 2010)

Furthermore, the assimilation of business literacy within vocational education serves to challenge and transform occurring societal perceptions regarding manual labor and agricultural careers. By engaging students in innovation-driven projects, such as the development of inclusive microgreens kits or participation in zero-energy initiative vocational training becomes a means for social impact and sustainable development. These experiences redefine the identity of vocational students, positioning them not merely as practitioners but as agents of change, capable of leadership and innovation.

Business literacy also plays an important role in promoting educational equity. It enables students from diverse and often underrepresented backgrounds, many of whom may not pursue conventional academic routes, to establish meaningful careers or entrepreneurial ventures through informed and strategic decision-making. When vocational education is supported by mentorship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and access to real-world markets, it can serve as a transformative platform for social mobility and lifelong learning.

In sum, the incorporation of business literacy into vocational education, as embodied by the AFS model, shows a forward-looking approach that aligns with contemporary educational needs. It prepares learners for adaptive, responsible, and economically engaged participation in society while fostering ethical awareness, innovation, and resilience in the face of future challenges.

2.5 Experiential Learning and Multiple Intelligences in Entrepreneurship Education

2.5.1 Experiential Learning

According to Kolb Experiential Learning Theory, developed by David A. Kolb(2021), a very well-known and famous theory that describes how people learn from experience. Since learning is the primary process that is used to survive through life, people can use this process for all kinds of learning, growth, and transformation. Learning occurs in all settings and throughout one's life. The experiential learning process helps to improve performance, learning and development.

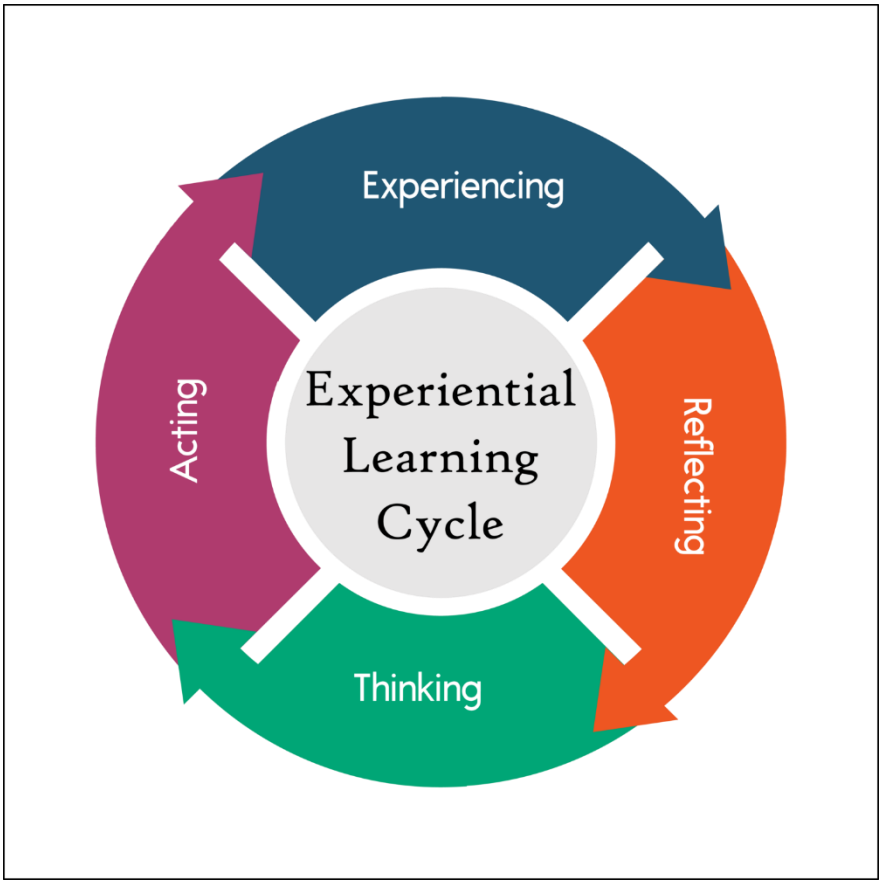

Figure 1 - The Experiential Learning Cycle as described by Kolb. [1]

David Kolb described the optimal learning process in a four-stage Experiential Learning Cycle:

[1] The Experiential Learning Cycle as described by Kolb. Adapted from *What is experiential learning?*, by A. Y. Kolb, 2021, *Institute for Experiential Learning* (https://experientiallearninginstitute.org/resources/what-is-experiential-learning/). © 2021 by Institute for Experiential Learning.

Experiencing – Reflecting – Thinking – Acting.

Experiencing (Concrete Experience): Learning begins when a learner uses senses and perception to experience what is happening now.

Reflecting (Reflective Observation): After the experience, a learner reflects on what happened and connects feelings to ideas about the experience.

Thinking (Abstract Conceptualization): The student reflects to arrive at conclusions and form theories, concepts, or general principles that can be tested

Acting (Active Experimentation): The student tests the theory and applies what was learned to get feedback and plan the next experience.

2.5.2 Multiple Intelligence

According to McLeod (2025), there can be practical applications in the classroom of Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Teachers are drawn to employing MI since it recognizes students learn differently and encourages flexible, interactive teaching. For example, a study by Mindy Kornhaber (2001) suggests that when teachers apply MI practices, they make their teaching more diverse – offering more collaborative learning, student projects, and student assignments. In this sense, MI can be an applied framework to connect classroom strategies beyond the common lecture or readings from textbooks.
As for the curriculum design, teachers apply Multiple Intelligences (MI) within curriculums by structuring lessons or activity stations based on each intelligence. For instance, the same topic of plant biology might be covered in musical activities (i.e., composing songs in relation to plant parts), visual-spatial tasks (i.e., drawing or modeling plant structures), and physical experience (i.e., viewing specimens alive). Howard Gardner (2013) points out that showing things in a number of different ways can help engage students possessing different strengths, with multi-modal instruction playing a significant role. As he summarizes, "Anything you are deeply familiar with you can describe and convey in several ways," which encourages teachers to develop lessons that utilize a range of cognitive strengths.
Below are some practical tips on how to structure MI-based lessons:

Identify Core Objectives. Make specific the significant knowledge or skill you want students to gain. Think about how each intelligence could allow students to explore or demonstrate mastery of these objectives.

Map Activities to Intelligences. Design a variety of lesson components—music, art, group discussion, hands-on activity, reflective writing, to cater to different intelligences. For instance, incorporate a music component (songwriting), a visual-spatial component (mind-mapping), and a logical component (categorizing, sequencing, problem-solving).

Offer Choice and Flexibility. Let students have the option of how they will contribute or represent their learning, either through art, writing, role-play, or technology. Offering multiple pathways can lead to greater motivation and support for learners with differing strengths.

Encourage Collaboration and Reflection. Divide students for some activities so they can take advantage of each other's strengths. Ask them to think through what the most comfortable or challenging activity was and why.

Vary Assessment Modes. Instead of one test or one essay, employ portfolios, performances, presentations, or creative products. Rubrics may incorporate MI by assessing both content knowledge and the multiple skills demonstrated in each mode.

By using these MI inspired tactics regularly in instruction, educators can build a stimulating, welcoming environment where students discover and develop assets they would not otherwise know they had.

Multiple Intelligences vs. Learning Styles. Many references stress that MI is often incorrectly called "learning styles," but it is different. Learning styles are sensory modes (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic), whereas MI addresses cognitive processing in various areas. Highly visual-spatial assistant learner is still able to gain advantage through linguistic or musical activities but still. Gardner himself cautioned against identifying MI with learning styles, since such classification may lead to oversimplification or oversimplistic representation that could under-place a student's capability in other aspects.

Learning Implications. The most basic educational implications of multiple intelligence theory can be summarized by individuation and pluralization.

Individuation contends that since all individuals differ from each other there is no logical reason to teach and examine students alike. Individualized learning has traditionally been for the rich and others who could afford to pay tutors to provide for individual student's

needs. Technology now allows more people to gain access to different teachings and tests according to individual needs.

Pluralization, the idea that subjects and skills need to be learned more than one time, involves using an individual's various intelligences. Presenting numerous activities and learning approaches allows all students to be reached and pushes them to be able to think about the subject matters in various ways, enhancing their knowledge of the subject (Gardner, 2011b). The theory of multiple intelligences is also misunderstood to be the same as learning styles. Learning styles, Gardner claims, are the way in which an individual feels most comfortable in addressing a range of activities and materials.

Figure 2 - Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.[2]

Multiple intelligences theory confirms that all eight intelligences are possessed by everyone with varying levels of ability and the learning style of an individual has nothing to do with

[2] Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Adapted from *Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences*, by S. McLeod, 2025, *Simply Psychology* (https://www.simplypsychology.org/multiple-intelligences.html). © 2025 by Simply Psychology.

areas in which they are most intelligent. For example, linguistic intelligence may not necessarily mean that one would like to learn in the best way possible through reading and writing. Classifying students according to learning styles or intelligence may be limiting their capacity to learn. Students learn more and become more engaged when offered varying ways of communicating what they can do and know, which also allows teachers to assess student learning more effectively (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

3. Methodology

According to Matsagouras, (2009) in the scientific field, the term *methodology* refers to the philosophical assumptions and the universal procedures followed by scientific disciplines in processing their subject (Lalande, 1955, Vol. 4, p. 933; Holzner, 1972, Vol. 2, p. 359). Within the framework of individual scientific disciplines, structured methodological orientations have been developed that correspond both to the nature of the object under investigation and to the epistemological assumptions of the researcher using them. Such orientations include, for example, positive, interpretive, phenomenological, and macro sociological approaches.

The term *methodology* is used in scientific literature to declare an established process of systematic inquiry, as well as the critical study of the methods used by specific scientific fields. Finally, the term sometimes is used informally as a plural of the word method, to indicate the whole methods and techniques applied in a particular area of activity (Holzner, 1979, Vol. 2, p. 539; Lampiri - Dimaki, 1990, p. 30).

3.1 Qualitative Research Methods

After discussing with the supervisor professor, an extensive review of the relevant bibliography, examining the available data collection methods, this research method used the qualitative approach so that it can provide an insight of how innovation and entrepreneurship in education can make an impact on Greece's economy. Focus groups were selected as the most appropriate method for drawing conclusions. Focus groups participated in a discussion, where the participants shared their ideas, experiences and attitudes about American Farm School. This allowed the researcher to observe and present their experiences with a different material from other methods that cannot be expressed with numbers.

The selected Focus groups were a sample of the stakeholders of the educational process such as Current Students of High School, Teachers and/or Instructors and Principals and/or Vice Principals of Middle, High School, ISAEK and Perrotis College – School Units of American Farm School.

The focus group design included similar participants, students - teachers not more than 13 in each group. Each session lasted not more than 2 hours and the whole procedure was recorded.

According to Williams & Katz (2001) focus group methods have become a popular tool in social sciences and education (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1998), because they help gather detailed, real-world insights. Focus groups are now a well-established approach, but their success really depends on how researchers apply them thoughtfully and creatively within their specific fields. They warn against using them just as a quick, market-driven exercise and instead encourage a reflective approach that questions traditional ways of producing knowledge. The main aim of focus groups is to create a safe space where participants feel comfortable sharing their ideas, experiences, and opinions. This lively environment encourages participants to influence each other, while researchers switch roles as moderators, listeners, observers, or analysts. Unlike numbers-based methods that often turn people's voices into stats, qualitative approaches like focus groups keep individual perspectives front and center, adding valuable depth to educational research (Krueger & Casey, 2000). A key strength of focus groups is the way group interactions generate cooperation, and spontaneity. These lively exchanges help participants build on each other's ideas, connect personal stories to bigger issues, and develop the discussion naturally. Often, these interactions lead to insights that might not come up in one-on-one interviews or surveys. (Schratz, 1993, Hoepfl, 1997, Berg 1995). Focus groups also give participants a feeling of ability, by recognizing their expertise, encouraging collaboration, and offering a platform for open expression (James, Rienzo, & Frazee, 1997). However, focus groups are not a one-size-fits-all solution: they don't automatically produce statistically valid results, resolve conflicts, or change attitudes. Researchers therefore need to be clear about what they hope to achieve and understand the strengths and limits of this method. In education, focus groups have been used successfully to:

- Develop tools that put students at the center of learning.
- Measure students attitudes and knowledge.
- Improve educational marketing efforts.
- Complement data gathered from surveys.

To get the most out of them, teachers and researchers should think about using focus groups not just as a supplementary way to gather information but as a main method for exploring

perceptions and forming new ideas. They're especially useful for engaging different groups in schools—students, parents, teachers, and administrators—and revealing perspectives that might otherwise be missed.

3.1.1 Organizing Data Collection with Focus Groups

This research is conducted so that information can gathered about how to bridge the gap between theory and practice of innovation in education and economic growth to an agricultural economy, mainly by capturing the vision of Dr. John Henry House and emphasizing the importance of sustainable agricultural education.

The researcher decided to conduct this research to enrich her innovation culture towards her teaching in the AFS. During the research, the researcher is also the coordinator and the secretary.

Organizing the Data Collection with Focus Groups is a critical part of qualitative research. As part of this research, two focus groups interviews will be conducted. Participant selection was guided by a symbolic criterion: the number of individuals in each group reflects the historical figures associated with the founding of the school and the family of Dr. John Henry House (Marder, 2004).

The first group, titled "The House Family," consists of seven students—the same number as Dr. House's children—who are currently enrolled in the Study USA program and have received scholarships this academic year.

The House Family
1. Routh House
2. Gladis House
3. Ethel House
4. Greys House
5. Charlie House
6. Florance House
7. Jack House

Table 1 - Graduate students

Figure 3- House Family[3]

[4]

[3] http://archives.afs.edu.gr/handle/5000/498

The second focus group, titled "The First Board of Trustees," is composed also of seven members, mirroring the original Board of Trustees who established the American Farm School, using New York as the geographic criterion of names distribution and Connecticut who share borders with New York, (Marder, 2004). This group includes directors and/or educators representing most of the educational levels within AFS.

The First Board of Trustees
1.Charles Cathbert Hall,Borough of Manhattan, City of New York.
2. Josiah Strong, Greenwich, Connecticut
3. Leander Chamberlain, Borough of Manhattan, City of New York
4. William Isham Jr., Borough of Manhattan, City of New York
5. George Payson, Borough of Manhattan, City of New York
6. Lucious Beers, Town of SouthHampton, Suffolk Co,. N, Y.
7. Eli Partridge, Borough of the Bronx, City of New York

Table 2 – Faculty members

Prior communication was carried out via telephone and email to coordinate the online meetings. Participation is voluntary and motivated by a shared interest in contributing to academic research and expanding personal knowledge on how, even 121 years after its founding, the American Farm School remains under the same values.

Preparing the group *"The House Family,"* the researcher requested and received permission to conduct the study. She then approached the coordinator of the Study USA program, who took on the responsibility of contacting the participating students and informing them about the research process.

Also, preparing the group "*The First Board of Trustees*", the researcher called and emailed each one of the participants, requested and received permission to conduct the study and informed them about the research process.

Even though the first thought was to meet to the Library of the American Farm School because of the academic year was ending and the students were going back to their homes, and all the faculty members were very busy, the researcher suggested the meeting to be conducted virtual with the Webex or Google platform. Because of the cyber-attack to the Hellenic Open University and the release of personal information to the web, the researcher didn't use her academic mail to participate to the Webex meeting with the Group "The House Family" and with Google with the Group "The First Board of Trustees", out of concern of revealing the participants personal data.

Because of all the above the researcher created a Webex group named "The House Family" and invited all the members to participate by proposing four available dates. The participants chose and the date for the discussion was set for the 26th of May 2025 at 10 a.m. Also, the group "The First Board of Trustees", was invited to participate on a Google meeting on the 19th of June 2025.

For all participants from both of the Focus groups, the researcher prepared Letters of Appreciation with Standout Quality as Recommendation.

3.1.2 The Questioning Sequence

The Questioning Sequence refers to the order in which the researcher presents questions to gather information.

- **Warm-Up Questions** break the ice and introduce participants to the topic under discussion.
- **Transitional Questions** serve as a bridge to the key questions and encourage participants to express their views.
- **Key Questions** guide the research, formulated indirectly, addressing the core research questions.
- **Probing Questions** are optional. They are used to clarify or deepen in understanding of important issues, and potentially to bring the discussion back on track if needed.

- **Closing Questions** help summarize the discussion and encourage the formulation of suggestions by the participants.

Research Protocol

- The researcher is also the coordinator.
- Both Focus Groups are conducted in virtual environments, specifically the Focus group "House Family" in chat groups of the Webex and the Focus group "The First Boar" in Google Video meeting platform.
- The meeting place is based on the ease of access of the participants.
- The participants consent to audio recording, collection and processing of the data by the researcher.
- The collected data will be categorized, analyzed and processed, leading to conclusions.

3.2 Lesson Plans as Educational Methodology in Practice

Lesson plans are a type of personal notes that teachers keep in order to conduct effective teaching sessions. They contain information about the scientific content of the lesson (the core concepts), the didactic transformation of this content, the teaching methodology to be followed (teaching methods and students ideas), the educational materials to be used (student worksheets, informal learning sources), and the necessary infrastructure required to carry out the lesson (materials, devices, instruments, maps, videos, educational software, etc.). The plan also includes the strategy for the lesson (student evaluation sheets). Furthermore, teachers may record any observations regarding different aspects of the lesson (e.g., what worked well and what did not).

Lesson planning requires preparation, organization, study, and skill in educational design. Especially during the early years of a teacher's career, it demands time and effort to develop them thoroughly. However, lesson plans allow teachers to feel both psychologically and professionally secure, confident in their ability to handle the challenges of the teaching

profession and to educate their students effectively. (Regional Directorate of Education of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, n.d.)

3.2.1 The Lesson Plan of an Entrepreneurial Course

EPPAIK - Teaching Practicum (PAD)

TEACHING STRUCTURE FORM

Supervisor
(Name – Signature): __KATERINAKIS THEODOROS_____

Last Name: BERMPERAKI First Name: _____PARASKEVI_____

School: A.S.PAI.T.E. Program: EPPAIK 20…–… / Department: _____

Type of Teaching:

1η Microteaching
2η Microteaching
1η Preliminary Teaching
2η Preliminary Teaching
Final Thesis Teaching

Date: __19/7/2025__
Supervisor's Name: _KATERINAKIS THEODOROS__

COURSE INFORMATION[1]

1. Subject[2]: _ Entrepreneurship / Business Studies_
2. Unit Title[3]: _ Market Research and Product Development_
3. Grade/Class[4]: _ Upper Secondary / Vocational School (Ages 15–18)_
4. Concept(s) of the Unit[5]: _ Market needs and consumer behavior, Data collection and interpretation, Product viability and innovation, Decision-making based on evidence_
5. Teaching Objectives[6]: By the end of this lesson/unit, students will be able to: Understand the importance and basic methods of market research, Design and conduct a simple survey or interview, Analyze customer feedback to evaluate product potential, Apply findings to improve or validate a new product idea, Communicate research results in a clear, persuasive presentation,

Teaching Methods[7]

Didactic Method:
(In the space below, narrate your teaching process, following the steps of the chosen method. Avoid using only key terms.)

This lesson is designed to be hands-on and question-driven, encouraging students to explore a real-world issue and come to their own conclusions by actively participating. It kicks off with a relatable situation: the idea of launching a new product at the school restaurant. The teacher introduces the challenge and leads a class-wide discussion about what information is needed before starting a new product. Students are encouraged to think about their own shopping habits and why understanding what customers want is important. Then, students team up in small groups to create a quick survey or interview plan. The teacher helps guide them on how to write questions that are clear, unbiased, and focused. The goal is to determine who they're targeting and gather meaningful insights. Students then go off to do their research during free moments or structured class times, collecting data by talking to their classmates. The teacher offers support along the way, helping troubleshoot problems and emphasizing respectful and responsible communication. Back in class, groups analyze and discuss their data using visuals like charts and graphs. With the teacher's help, they look for patterns, surprising results, and ways to improve their ideas. Finally, each group shares a short report recommending whether or not to go ahead with the product, backing up their ideas with data and thinking about how they might improve the product concept. The lesson wraps up with a quick individual reflection, where students think about what they learned, how well they worked as a team, and why research matters in making business choices. Overall, this approach encourages active learning, real-world connections, teamwork, and critical thinking, with the teacher playing a supportive role during the whole process.

Assesment[8]

(List all assessment techniques used throughout the teaching process – from beginning to end. Include all techniques used for diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluation.)

Assessment Type	Techniques	Purpose
Diagnostic	Brainstorming, oral Q&A	Mesure prior knowledge
Formative	Teacher observation, equal feedback, written reflections, progress worksheets	Support learning & adjust teaching
Summative	Final group presentations, evaluation, self-assessment	Holistic evaluation of outcomes

Skills Development[9]

Cognitive[10]:

- Understanding concepts of market research, target audience, and consumer behavior
- Designing survey questions and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data

Social/Communicative[11]:

- Collaborating in small groups to plan, conduct, and analyze research
- Interviewing or surveying peers respectfully and clearly
- Presenting findings and product recommendations confidently
- Practicing active listening during team discussions and peer feedback

Metacognitive[12]:

- Reflecting on the effectiveness of the research process (What worked? What didn't?")
- Evaluating their own and their team's decision-making process
- Monitoring group progress and adapting strategies when necessary.
- Identifying strengths and challenges in their learning and project work

Bibliography – Resources[13]:

- Katerinakis, T. (2019). A practical guide [University notes for HOU, Thematic Unit KAO 51]. Hellenic Open University
- Spinelli, S. Jr., & Adams, R. (2015). New venture creation: Entrepreneurship for the 21st century. McGraw-Hill Education.

4. The American Farm School in Thessaloniki Context

According to American Farm School's Archives the School was established by Dr. John Henry House and his wife, in 1904, on the suburbs of Thessaloniki. The first students were boys orphaned in one of the many uprisings marking the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in Europe.

Modest donations of funds and equipment from a royal circle of supporters in the United States helped the Institution to survive through the early years, as it bore witness to two Balkan Wars, World War I and the massive resettlement in Greece of refuges from Asia.

The 1930s, a period of expanding academic facilities and bringing the latest agricultural innovations to Greece, gave way to World War II and Occupation; to the ensuing civil war; and to postwar efforts to reconstruct Greek agriculture and agricultural education. During the second half of the 20th century the School was led by Bruce M. Lansdale, an American teacher, engineer and philhellene who shared with his wife, Tad, a remarkable ability to communicate with and inspire people in all walks of life. Milestones of the time included coeducation; short courses and technical advice for farmers in the region, incorporation of information technology across the campus and educational farm, and "training of trainers" programs for international groups.

Faced with growing demand for higher education, the American Farm School established the Perrotis College of Agriculture, Environment and Life Sciences in 1996, through a gift from Mrs. Aliki Perroti. In 2011, the school began operating a Pre - K and Kindergarten, emphasizing environmental education through experiential learning. In September 2013, the Elementary School opened, followed by the Haseotes Middle School in September 2019

The American Farm School remains an autonomous, non - profit educational institution that continues to meet the challenges of the 21st century, while maintaining its commitment to the very same roots on which it was founded - experiential learning. Its mission is to educate students through an academic curriculum for agriculture, environmental stewardship, and responsible citizenship.

4.1 Implementation and Experiential Curriculum

According the American Farm School's Archives (1930), the General Education Program shows that it included General Provisions, where in Paragraph one says that "The School follows a practical form of instruction, offering hands-on training in the following two groups of enterprises:

Agricultural Enterprises
Crop production
Dairy farming and related businesses
Poultry
Pigs
Sheep
Gardens
Fruit trees and orchards
Vineyards
Sericulture (silk farming)
Beekeeping

Table 3 – Group 1

Mechanical and Technical Enterprises
Machinery repair
Blacksmithing
Plumbing
Carpentry and painting
Construction
Operation of electric power installation
Water supply facilities
Sewage and hygiene infrastructure
Drafting and diagram construction
Road construction

Table 4 – Group 2

In Paragraph 2, we can see that the duration of studies shall be four academic years, each consisting of 32 full weeks, running approximately from September 15th to June 10th. In Paragraph 3, says that in each grade, 22 hours per week are allocated to practical instruction (formation), delivered during morning or afternoon sessions of 4 hours each, six days per week. Additionally, 18 hours per week are allocated to theoretical instruction (lectures), conducted during morning or afternoon sessions, five days per week. In Paragraph 4, describes the School which operates as a boarding school. All students shall reside at the School, as this is necessary to adequately follow the educational program. In Paragraph 5 we can see that the Language of instruction shall be Greek. English shall also be taught

across all four grades, and last in Paragraph 6 it talks about the Student Enrollment, where each year, the number of students admitted depends on the amount of funding secured by the Board (trustees). The maximum number of students per year shall not exceed 50.

4.2 Cultivating Multiple Intelligences

This integration of theory and vocational training reflects the American Farm School's basic philosophy: education must be lived and experienced in order to be meaningful. By integrating vocational training with academic learning, and offering a residential environment that encourages discipline and cooperation, the program was designed to foster both mind and hand. This approach forshadoed much of the features of current experiential education, such as project-based learning, competency development, and full student development. The American Farm School's emphasize on small groups, individualized teaching, and diverse enterprise experience will sound familiar to present-day calls for education systems that prepare students for employment as well as for entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable livelihood in rich and complex real-world contexts.

4.3 Enhancing Business Literacy

Accoridng to American Farm School Archives (1956-1957), the Agricultural Practical Instruction was that rhe students of the 2nd and 4th classes attend the practical instruction in the agricultural and livestock departments. The 4th class students attend practical instruction each day, except Sundays from May to 12 AM, while the second class attends from 1:00 to 5:00 PM. Its class is divided into 4 equal groups which are about 12 to 14, and rotate every two days in the four agricultural departments. Such an arrangement gives small groups for proper instruction and also gives a chance to the student to observe all the departments simultaneously and be instructed. And all the seasonal agricultural activities while in operation. The students have to complete 160 instructional hours throughout the school year in each of the four departments under strict instruction and supervision and are graded for knowledge, skill and conduct. The supervisors, one in each department, are the

key men for the proper execution of the curriculum demanded of them by the director of institution. In order to be able to cope with the varied program and agricultural production, the supervisors are assisted by skilled technicians, from 2:00 to 5:00 depending on the nature of instruction and size of enterprise.

The Departments were:

- First, farm crops and farm machinery.
- Second, dairy cattle and dairy industry.
- Third, garden or heart and vineyard.
- Fourth minor livestock.

The Methods followed of practical instruction, were that the instructional material and activities in each department are spread out throughout the school year in the form of jobs or projects. In each project, each student is required to acquire a required amount of knowledge and skills. For the former, the instructors describe the importance of the project and stress the points of the student is to remember with repeated checks for the latter in order to acquire proper and lasting skill. The projects are so planned that the student performs with the guidance at the start of the supervisor or with one of his assistants. Mostly the pragmatic job involving agricultural or livestock production.

This project-based of the American Farm School, systematic approach to agricultural education not only developed technical competencies but also instilled critical capabilities that were appropriate to modern business literacy. Through planning, working under deadlines, rotating shift-changes through departments, and observing actual production operations, students were instructed in responsibility, adaptability, and attention to detail. These experiences provided a firm foundation for entrepreneurial orientations, requiring students to understand efficiency, the use of resources, and economic value in their production. The hands-on training of the American Farm School was not only developing skilled agricultural workers but also preparing individuals for the demands of modern business environments, particularly in the context of rural economy and sustainable development.

5. The Faculty Members Speak with Student Dialectics

The American Farm School faculty focus group was an exploratory discussion based on pedagogical intentionality where teachers described not only their practice but also the values and philosophies informing their pedagogy. The discussion was marked by an unshakeable commitment to dialogical learning, a pedagogical vision wherein students are not passive receivers of information but active collaborators and co-builders of meaning.

Based on the philosophy of Dr. John Henry House, who once asserted that "the teacher should be outside with the students," faculty members demanded relational closeness, trust, and casual learning settings. In contrast to being developed by authoritarian pedagogy as Josiah, a member of The First Board of Trustees noticed, their practice was developed by exploratory collaboration, where teachers are facilitators and companions along a shared journey of learning.

Teachers described how learning is rendered meaningful when students enjoy authentic choices and agency. Whether they were in entrepreneurship clubs, agricultural labs, or interdisciplinary projects, students are challenged to take the initiative, map their own journeys, and become authors of their own choices. Professors do not only deliver content; they co-create contexts for inquiry, reflection, and action. This approach honors these heterogeneities of student backgrounds, personalities, and intelligences, allowing students to discover their strengths through experiential learning (Kolb, 2021), and self-expression.

A large part of the discussion centered on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which has been deliberately integrated into curricula and extracurricular systems. Intelligence, as professors know, is not fixed or one-dimensional; teachers vary instruction to accommodate a variety of learning styles—musical as Lucius and ukulele paradigm, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, or logical-mathematical—so that everyone has channels to excel. Faculty reflections made sure that this is not a theoretical but operationalized model in practice, from classroom differentiation to the creation of experiential learning modules.

Discussion also uncovered tensions between institutional needs and creative freedom. Although faculty acknowledged the limits of standardized curricula, time pressures, and measures of performance, they still attempted to insert imagination and flexibility into even the most structured environments as Eli noted and emphasized, a member of The First Board of Trustees. They delineated strategies such as short team-based exercises, open-ended

questions, and student-led projects as ways of sustaining surprise, risk-taking, and keeping students involved.

Above all, faculty voices presented an educational ethos that echoes Socratic dialectic continual loops of question, listen, and shared discovery. Teachers spoke of students who will not thrive in conventional classrooms but thrive in afternoon clubs or project work. Their anecdotes evoked the necessity to create secure, low-risk settings in which students can speak openly, take risks at error-making, and grow with confidence.

Lastly, the dialogue portrayed professors as affective educators who view pedagogy not as transmission but as transformation. With their own reflections, they reinforced a model of teaching that was flexible, adaptive, and humane, founded on empathy, improvisation, and collaborative authorship. In alignment with the students' voice, professors placed the American Farm School not just as an educational institution, but as a living community like Ruthsupported to be like home, where learning is relational, holistic, and future-focused.

5.1 Explaining Responses of Faculty Members

This focus group discussion explored how creativity is encouraged throughout the American Farm School's educational curriculum. Teachers underscored experiential learning, farm practice, afternoon clubs, and entrepreneurial projects as they cultivate students' imagination, independence, and self-confidence. Constrictive curricula and adult education constraints are challenges, but American Farm School's emotionally supportive environment, multiple learning modalities, and student-initiated focus, offer rich soil for creativity. Teachers also discussed innovation, AI application, and the need for balanced system of tests that reward creativity of ideas rather than competition-based outcomes.

Creativity as an Educational Value. The discussion began with a reference to the topic of this year’s National exams in Language and Literature, which focused on creativity as a fundamental human capacity. Participants noted that the topic was explored through three texts: the first defined creativity as a process based on originality and effectiveness, the second emphasized scientific findings that show how creative thinking emerges in infancy and is critical to language development, while also highlighting how factors like poverty

and lack of support negatively influence early cognitive growth and the third text described the intellectual stagnation and absence of inspiration in the modern workplace, reflecting a desire for a more creative and meaningful life.

Charles initiated the discussion by connecting the exam topic to the students of the American Farm School, expressing the belief that no other comment could better reflect how clearly these students understand and live creativity through their daily educational experience, also Charles explained that beyond the theoretical aspect of learning, experiential learning was prominent at the School, particularly through projects and hands-on activities on the farm.

Experiential Learning. Josiah added that students participate in afternoon clubs, which include a wide variety such as theater, creative writing, sports, cooking, ceramics, and more. These options allow each student to discover their own form of creativity, where they feel most comfortable expressing themselves, and at the same time to develop talents they may not have known they possessed. This combination of afternoon clubs and experiential, practical education is believed to nurture creativity significantly.

Leander brought up the “Creative Activities Zone” course available in the first year of vocational upper secondary school (A’ EPAL), explaining that students can produce surprisingly creative work. It was also noted that the entrepreneurship course is particularly impactful because every year, students are challenged to establish a company based on an innovative idea, and this project often receives awards. The group agreed to discuss this further in the research.

Josiah noted that creativity has fewer opportunities to flourish due to the rigid curriculum and the practical orientation of technical education. Teachers attempt to integrate creativity into lessons through projects, but success depends heavily on each student's personal interests and talents. Participation is not mandatory, and thus it varies. Nevertheless, in adult education programs offered through the School’s Lifelong Learning Center, William added that there are more opportunities for creative engagement. Courses like ceramics and gardening are among the most popular, and even attract adults from outside the local area who seek a break from their everyday routines and want to use their hands creatively.

Eli emphasized that beyond formal programs, the general environment of the School contributes to creativity. Students feel emotionally secure, are respected, and thus are more willing to express their thoughts and creativity freely and more confident, even outside structured educational activities.

Eli also noted that the same limited creative space also exists at the College level (post-secondary), where students are older and sometimes more difficult to inspire. Although some take initiative, the small student population makes widespread creative engagement more challenging. The staff expressed openness to any ideas that might enhance creative inspiration.

Creativity in Curriculum. Charles shared that for several years now, a course in Creative Writing has been part of the second-year high school curriculum. Students meet weekly and, by the end of their third year, is required to submit an essay. This process allows them to explore personal topics such as love, family, trauma, or mental health through storytelling. The teacher highlighted that this course gives students a voice and creates emotional connection without breaching their privacy.

When asked about the role of imagination in learning, most of the educators responded that it is best encouraged in practical or lab-based classes. The theoretical curriculum tends to be rigid due to the demands of national exams. Nevertheless, in laboratory projects or afternoon workshops, students are offered greater flexibility to express creativity and imagination.

Finally, it was mentioned by William that in technical education, students often lack access to courses like philosophy or literature that could foster or divergent thinking. In order to balance this, American Farm School brings in external speakers, often entrepreneurs, who share their stories of creativity and innovation in business. These talks aim to inspire students to consider their own potential for innovation.

Cultural & Club Activities. The discussion concluded with reference to a successful creative project in the primary school involving a short film “Zomb-e”, which had won a national award. While not all participants were familiar with the example, it served to highlight the powerful role that engagement in artistic or cinematic projects can have in fostering divergent thinking and creativity among students. Charles replied that while they were not personally aware of the “Zomb-e” film, in the secondary education program there is a film club run by Leander, in which participants frequently win awards.

Then, Leander explained that students who are often shy during the morning academic schedule, begin to express themselves more freely in these clubs. The environment, free from strict roles and based on democratic discussion where student’s voices are heard, empowers them to express thoughts and ideas in new ways.

When asked whether creativity is inherent or cultivated, Lucius shared that although a student may have a natural musical talent, such as ukulele playing, it is during relaxed, low-stress moments in an encouraging environment that their creativity truly "unlocks."

Strategies for Fostering Creativity. The First Board, were asked about practical strategies to foster creative expression beyond clubs, Charles highlighted the use of experiential classroom methods: short, hands-on group tasks of five to ten minutes, laboratory-style learning where students improvise, and class performances (drama, music, poetry). Even under a nationally-exam-driven curriculum, structured opportunities were created for students to explore imagination beyond formal lectures.

William also noted that in technical-vocational secondary and post-secondary programs, afternoon or evening clubs were attempted. However, participation varied: some students lacked time, others lacked interest, highlighting how adult learners express creativity in different contexts and times.

For regular school hours, morning academic lessons such as Composition or English classes also prompt imaginative engagement: students write and present original texts, demonstrating visual-verbal creativity.

Another example described by Eli involved secondary students developing new food products during practical training, often yielding surprisingly creative ideas, such as edible spoons or innovative chocolate creations, which excited participants and evaluators alike.

The coordinator shared a primary-school STEM activity where a student created a pencil from twigs and graphite, a spontaneous act of creativity that earned recognition.

American Farm Schools Environment and Infrastructure. Finally, Eli underscored that the School's emphasis on experiential learning spreads through all levels: vocational students take part in fieldwork such as vineyard cultivation, winemaking, tree-pruning, agricultural machinery repair, and applied maths tasks like measuring real-world objects. In literary or history lessons, they stage mock Socratic courts or dramatizations. These activities are seen as both stress-relieving and a gateway to creative release through practical engagement.

Students Iniative. When participants were asked from the coordinator whether students had ever taken initiative in experiential projects, several educators recalled meaningful instances. Josiah recounted that, during a course focused on Greek cultural activities, a group of students approached them expressing a strong desire to stage a performance based on material they had read independently. This initiative was supported, and it was

emphasized that, quite often, students take the lead in writing scripts for school performances. Many school celebrations, they noted, had been based entirely on student-written material.

George stressed that in project-based learning, students are often given optional assignments and a degree of autonomy in choosing their topic. For instance, in a course on web design, students are not told exactly what website to build. Instead, they are allowed to choose their own themes and simply present their ideas for approval. The emphasis was on letting students pursue their interests within a guided framework.

Regarding students' role in shaping project topics, the group agreed that students often propose their own ideas. Sometimes these ideas are so promising that educators adapt their plans around them. Charles recalled that the class had once designed a business plan and proceeded to implement it collaboratively with a company.

Evaluation & Competitions. When asked about how project outcomes are evaluated and whether experiential learning can realistically be integrated into general education, responses varied. Charles noted that especially in the upper grades, students are given clear instructions and quality criteria from the start, particularly when projects are submitted to national competitions. These competitions, they argued, play a vital role in enhancing students' creative expression, since they encourage original ideas and require work that meets specific, often demanding standards.

However, George offered a more critical view, expressing concern that the focus on winning competitions can sometimes restrict genuine creativity. They noted a growing trend where projects are initiated with the primary aim of qualifying for competitions, rather than exploring creative freedom for its own sake. This dynamic was seen not only in secondary education but also in higher education, where academic publishing and conference participation sometimes prioritize output over depth or innovation.

The conversation then shifted to whether experiential learning could be widely adopted across the education system. Participants agreed that although it is possible, it requires a strong underlying structure. Infrastructure, such as available materials and spaces for experimentation, plays a key role. At the American Farm School, they noted, the existing facilities and support systems made this type of learning more feasible. Leander described a comic-making assignment where students were encouraged to creatively present historical content using digital tools. Other students chose to write essays or poems, demonstrating that multiple modalities were not only supported but encouraged.

George mentioned how, even in the 1950s and 60s, textbooks contained instructions for hands-on learning, suggesting that experiential education is not new, but has long been part of pedagogy. What has changed is the institutional and infrastructural support. The school's environment now allows teachers and students alike to revisit those experiential elements with more tools and greater flexibility.

Multiple Intelligences & Differentiated Learning. The discussion then addressed Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. The participants acknowledged that students learn and express themselves in vastly different ways. Some may struggle with verbal or linguistic tasks but thrive in music or spatial reasoning. One example that resonated was that of a student who found their voice through playing the ukulele in class, a moment which led to a broader reflection on differentiated learning strategies(Betts, 2019).

All teachers affirmed that they attempt to support all types of intelligence in the classroom, ranging from musical and kinesthetic to logical-mathematical or interpersonal. Real-life business visits, guest speakers, and field activities were cited as ways to connect learning with different cognitive domains. In particular, the school's boarding environment was seen as a space where students developed not only academic skills but also social and emotional intelligence by living, working, and problem-solving together.

Lastly, educators discussed the challenges they faced in higher education settings. Working with adult students, many of whom had come from traditional educational backgrounds, it was often harder to shift their learning mindset. Unlike younger students who had grown up in a more holistic educational environment like the American Farm School, adult learners were often less familiar with alternative or experiential learning methods. Nonetheless, teachers persisted in offering varied instructional formats, aiming to awaken untapped potential through exposure to new approaches.

Participants were asked what changes in the school environment would strengthen children's creative development. Eli reflected on their own school experience, suggesting that extracurricular outlets like music or arts provide essential emotional release for adolescents. George added that a relaxed, humorous classroom atmosphere, paired with occasional authoritative structure, allows intellectual freedom and broader thematic exploration beyond traditional curriculum.

Entrepreneurial Learning. Moving on to entrepreneurial projects, the group noted that student participation in business-oriented activities is fundamental to practical training. Through teamwork, brainstorming, production, marketing, sales, and profit management,

learners develop leadership, cooperation, and innovative thinking. Charles recalled guiding students in product development and retail in the school's store, with responsibility for pricing and promotion. Another example came from Josiah where students teamed up to conceive, develop, and present an original business idea during school hours. At the high school level, students managed greenhouse cultivation, planting, tending, harvesting, packaging, and selling produce, mirroring real-world entrepreneurial cycles. In another case, a classroom ran a mock enterprise, assigning roles such as manager and salesperson, which allowed observation of creativity in branding, marketing planning, and team organization.

Evaluation of projects was based on predefined criteria aligned with course objectives or competition standards, such as the products meeting quality benchmarks for national contests. Although competitions provided structure and motivation, George cautioned that over-emphasis on winning could diminish genuine imaginative exploration.

Another memorable initiative by Leander involved poultry farming: students cared for chicks twice daily, ensured their welfare, and marketed them locally. A related project had students cultivating herbs and potatoes, packaging them with decorative labelling, and offering them for sale—projects that linked agriculture with design and entrepreneurship, fostering student pride and community engagement.

Teacher – Students Relations. The coordinator highlighted an archival quote from Dr. John Henry House where: *"An essential part of education is that the teacher should be outside with the students. That is where one can win their hearts and truly get to know them. Perhaps this is the most important thing of all, the opportunity to connect naturally, to teach them that I am not above them and that I, too, can learn, that we all work together...",* emphasizing that teachers who learn alongside students in natural settings win their respect and inspire authentic connection. Participants affirmed that informal, teacher-student dynamics, bounded by clear limits, are vital for creating trust and receptiveness.

Regarding collaboration, educators stressed its cultivation through cooperative modeling by staff, short-term project teams, group presentations, and peer teaching arrangements. George described having a student assist in teaching, to foster mutual empathy, while Charles implemented peer-review sessions, where groups exchange and correct each other's work, enhancing accountability and engagement.

Overall, participants concluded that experiential, entrepreneurial, and collaborative learning, supported by flexible environments, real-world relevance, and teacher-student

partnership, is fundamental for nurturing creativity and a range of diverse intelligences in students.

When asked about the challenges that arise in group work and role distribution, Eli acknowledged that even adults often struggle with such matters, highlighting the importance of role models and conflict mediation. The coordinator noded that in their school, sixth-grade students act as peer mediators, helping younger students resolve minor conflicts without having to involve teachers constantly. Charles confirmed that a similar system existed at their school and emphasized its effectiveness.

On the topic of group composition, the educators explained that there is no rigid structure; group formation depends on class dynamics and specific objectives. Sometimes, they deliberately assign a strong student to each group to support its development, suggesting that group structure can be flexible and shaped by the educators themselves.

Definition of Innovation. When defining innovation, participants agreed it is not limited to creating a new product. Eli added that it can also mean introducing a new service, modifying an existing process, or even applying a different approach to an existing task. They emphasized that innovation could lead to improvements such as reduced energy consumption or more efficient procedures. Charles highlighted how innovation is fostered at their school during final-year thesis projects, where students explore and apply innovative solutions, often connected with entrepreneurship.

The group also discussed the constraints of the existing curriculum and assessment system. Leander expressed frustration that if entrepreneurial learning is not explicitly included in the official curriculum, it is difficult to incorporate it into formal assessment. While there is room for creativity, institutional limitations often hinder full integration.

Artificial Intelligence. The conversation then shifted to artificial intelligence. Charles admitted using AI tools daily to correct assignments quickly and efficiently but clarified that students must still conduct their own research and critically engage with their work. They stressed the importance of transparency, explaining to students that AI tools can be used for idea generation or structure guidance, but the final product must reflect personal effort. The teacher added that they had ways of identifying AI-generated content and expected students to take responsibility for their work.

Eli recognized the potential of AI to support research and organization, particularly when students are asked to write essays or analyze texts. However, they also warned that students must develop critical thinking and evaluative skills to discern fact from AI-generated fiction.

Humorously, also noted that some students believe anything written by ChatGPT must be true simply because it "came from the box."

The group agreed that while AI can be a powerful educational ally, it also presents challenges, especially for teachers unfamiliar with new technologies. Eli suggested creating structured guidelines for AI use in schoolwork and mentioned existing detection tools already in use.

When asked whether they used Bloom's taxonomy to define educational objectives, several participants said they had encountered it in teacher training and found it helpful for setting learning outcomes using specific verbs.

Closing Reflections. Toward the end of the discussion, participants were asked to offer a word they would use to say goodbye to graduating students. Suggestions included phrases like "turn your dreams into reality" and "continue with strength and good health." When reflecting on their own contributions as teachers, participants chose words such as "presence," "support," and "responsibility."

Finally, when asked what word they would associate with innovation, they offered terms like "evolution," "exploration," and "bright future." In the context of artificial intelligence and the school's agricultural curriculum, the group emphasized terms like "proper use," "rational application," and "utility," particularly regarding AI's potential role in modern agriculture.

The session concluded with the coordinator thanking the participants and promising to share the transcript and research findings with them once finalized. The atmosphere was described as honest, enthusiastic, and filled with shared values that have characterized the American Farm School since its foundation, a place that all participants seemed to hold dear, regardless of how long they had been part of it.

Conclusions.

The focus group discussion with the American Farm School faculty highlights the top priority of creativity as a pedagogical philosophy that spreads through formal as well as informal education. Experiential learning, hands-on learning, and farm practice provide fertile ground for imagination, initiative, and student voice.

Despite the challenges involved in rigid technical curricula and adult education limitations, American Farm School fosters an emotionally safe and positive atmosphere through which students can feel respected and permitted to express themselves freely. Creative writing, and

business enterprises serve vehicle functions for student voice and self-actualization, as well as they extend along with Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences.

Artificial Intelligence was not perceived as a threat but rather as a tool to aid in idea generation, provided it is used critically and ethically. The faculty also emphasized the importance of maintaining student's responsibility for their work.

Although competitions might motivate students and give shape, instructors also warned that overemphasizing rewards would choke genuine creativity. Widespread adoption of experiential learning across the education system, they argued, would have to be institutionally and structurally supported.

Overall, the School's flexible, cooperative, and student-focused pedagogy, enriched by deep teacher-student relationships, illuminates key to the nurturing of creativity, innovation, and diverse intellectual abilities in students of any age. Teachers are not mere teachers but learning companions, exemplifying curiosity, cooperation, and openness to innovation.

Finally, the American Farm School environment, rich in potential for self-reflection, interdependence, and action, claims its rightful place as a model of how learning environments can release the full creative and intellectual potential of every student.

5.2 Explaining Responses of Graduating Students

The coordinator welcomed the first participants, noting that a few students were still missing and suggesting they wait a little longer. She explained that although she had initially intended for the session to take place in the Library of the School, it was now being held via Webex, and that the discussion would last approximately 120 minutes. She expressed confidence that everything planned could still be covered and suggested they wait a few more minutes for the two remaining girls to join so that nothing would need to be repeated. The researcher explained that the purpose of the session was simply to gather the students' thoughts about their experience at school, emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers and that all input was valuable for her thesis, which focused on experiential learning, entrepreneurship, and the development of multiple intelligences. Shortly after, all seven student participants had joined the call.

The researcher officially opened the session by welcoming the students and expressing gratitude for their participation. She repeated the importance of the discussion for her thesis, which explored how entrepreneurial thinking could be cultivated through hands-on learning and how this is related to the philosophy of Dr. John Henry House. She explained that the conversation would be held in a safe, open environment where all opinions were welcome. Participants were informed that the session followed the code of ethics of the Hellenic Open University and that all responses would remain anonymous and confidential. She asked for verbal confirmation of their willingness to participate, and several voices responded positively, which helped her feel at ease.

A Room with a View. Although she regretted not being able to hold the session in the Library, overlooking Mount Olympus, a place Dr. House believed to be vital to the educational experience, she proceeded with the opening question: what the surroundings meant to them. Greys was the first to respond, saying that when she was stressed, the view helped her relax and think more clearly. Ethel agreed, adding that the environment helped her calm down and provided a sense of escape.

The researcher then asked how each student had chosen to attend the school. Routh shared that she had joined in second grade because her parents valued American Farm School with a connection to nature and practical, outdoor learning. Greys, who joined in High School, said she had been drawn to the school's hands-on learning, particularly in the vocational track, where classroom knowledge was applied in real-world contexts, something that had helped her gain clarity and simplicity in her thinking.

Ruth, who had joined in her second year of high school, explained that she had initially discovered the school through the Study USA program. What attracted her most was the variety of clubs, activities, and the way students of all ages interacted. She said it was the promise of rich experiences that convinced her to enroll. Florance added that she had also been inspired to join by seeing other girls like Ruth participate enthusiastically.

The discussion then shifted toward the significance of starting the day in such a natural environment. He went on to say that walking across campus in the early morning, witnessing the sunrise over Mount Olympus, was a meaningful and beautiful experience. Greys added that the setting felt more like a summer camp than a traditional school, thanks to the lush greenery and supportive community.

Experiential Learning. When asked whether experiential learning had changed the way they viewed their education, Ethel, a student in the general education track, noted that while

they didn't have as many hands-on hours as vocational students, they still had weekly practical sessions in the fields and labs. She emphasized how these experiences fostered connection, not only with the material but also with each other. She shared that she and Greys had recently interned on a project related to the monitoring of the West Nile Virus, where they learned how to collaborate with specialists in unfamiliar scientific fields, an experience she found invaluable.

Florance, from the vocational track, described their educational visits to farms, greenhouses and nurseries, real businesses where they learned about the development and evolution of agricultural enterprises. Ethel emphasized that the school helped break gender stereotypes in agriculture, noting proudly that she had driven a tractor, something she had never imagined doing, but felt empowered to try.

Charlie, a general education student, explained how his internship had dispelled the stereotype that agriculture was a "lesser" profession. He noted that his peers in vocational programs had deep knowledge of farming and environmental practices, and he wished that students in general education had more opportunities to explore such areas as well.

When the students were asked what innovation means to them, Ethel responded that she immediately thought of the school itself. She described it as a place where learning happened through real-world experiences and visits to functioning businesses, an environment that felt both modern and meaningful. Gladis added that, to her, innovation meant progress and not being constrained by outdated rules or expectations. She felt that American Farm Scholl encouraged students to pursue their dreams and overcome barriers. Charlie jokingly remarked that they didn't have students from the whole world, but Florance responded seriously that there were indeed international students at the school.

Creativity & Multiple Intelligences. The session concluded with a reflection from the coordinator, who emphasized that the school promoted creativity and innovation, closely aligned with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. She explained the various types of intelligence — musical, spatial, linguistic, logical — and highlighted that each had value. She also described how some students learned best through action (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence), while others exhibited strong interpersonal or intrapersonal intelligence. She closed with a reference to naturalistic intelligence, which allowed students to connect learning with the natural world. Jack responded with a quiet "Yes," in agreement.

The researcher then posed a new question to the group, asking which type of intelligence each student believed best described them, and encouraged everyone to share their thoughts.

She offered to repeat the types of intelligence in case anyone needed a reminder. Charlie asked her to go over them again, and Gladis added that she needed just the names. The researcher proceeded to list them clearly: musical, spatial, linguistic, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. She explained that she would call on them one by one, based on the order in which she saw them on her screen, as everyone seemed eager to respond. She invited Jack to begin.

Jack responded a bit hesitantly, saying he didn't remember the exact name of the type he had in mind. He admitted that he had lost track halfway through the list, but the coordinator encouraged him to simply describe what he meant. Jack explained that he learned better through doing rather than reading. The coordinator identified this as bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, and Jack agreed, saying that he had never liked sitting in a classroom for hours and had gained much more from real-life experience, such as during his internship.

Charlie spoke next, saying that his learning style depended on whether or not he was interested in a subject. If he wanted to learn something, he could do so easily just by reading a book; if not, it took much longer. The coordinator interpreted this as suggesting a tendency toward linguistic intelligence, which Charlie acknowledged as accurate.

Greys was the next to share, stating that logical-mathematical intelligence best suited her. She explained that she was naturally inclined toward science-related subjects and found them easier to understand than theoretical ones. Even in essay writing, she tended to rely on logic and structure to make sense of her ideas.

Florance noted that her learning also varied, it depended on whether she was moving or reading. She believed her strengths lay somewhere between bodily-kinesthetic and linguistic intelligence. Ethel followed, confidently identifying linguistic intelligence as her strength, saying she could easily grasp concepts from reading or listening and express herself clearly.

When it was Routh's turn, she initially aligned herself with logical-mathematical intelligence, like Greys. She explained that she had always been drawn to structured and strategic subjects like math rather than creative or theoretical fields like Ancient Greek. Jack agreed with her comment. However, Routh added that musical intelligence might also apply to her. Having studied music from a young age, she felt it had shaped her thinking process. She mentioned that she played the piano and pointed out that the instrument was actually in the room with her during the call, although hidden behind her chair. The coordinator asked if she was a percussionist and how far she had progressed. Routh replied that she had reached the level of harmony in theory before pausing her studies for a while, but had recently

resumed practicing on her own. The coordinator encouraged her to continue, expressing a sense that music was something Routh was truly good at.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation. The conversation then shifted to how well the school prepared them for real-world challenges, particularly through its production and sale of agricultural products like milk, eggs, and wine. Greys responded first, recalling her participation in the entrepreneurship club with Routh the previous year. They had developed an innovative product for a competition, aiming to solve a real-world problem. She mentioned that their teachers, including the economics teacher, guided them through topics like production costs, pricing, and marketing strategies. The experience, she said, gave her a deeper understanding of how businesses operate and the obstacles they face.

Florance added that even students outside the entrepreneurship club received hands-on experience. In the vocational track, particularly in the second and third years of high school, they worked on large-scale projects. She described one such project involving turkeys, where students were responsible for every step, from purchasing and raising the animals to processing and selling them. They even managed the financial aspects, keeping track of income and expenses.

Ethel brought up the professional orientation workshops they attended in their second year. She felt they had been helpful, though limited in number. Because they occurred around Easter, many students missed sessions due to holiday lessons, making it difficult for her to fully evaluate their impact.

Florance went on to mention the STAR program as another valuable initiative. She explained that it had helped them learn how to approach interviews and develop the soft skills needed for university applications.

The Value of an Idea. At that point, the coordinator asked what gave an idea value. Gladis replied that, based on everything they had discussed and her own experience in the entrepreneurship club with Greys, what gave an idea value was the collaborative effort to turn it into something real. She recalled her involvement as a vice president of the student company during her second year. The team had to hold meetings, share ideas, support each other, and work toward a product they believed could succeed in the market. She described it as a simulation of the professional world, where students developed the skills they would need later in life.

Learning to Sell Through Real-Life Experiences. Gladis added that in the vocational school, students sold products they had made themselves, like vegetables, flowers, and

more. She noted that selling wasn't always easy, joking that it could be challenging to sell a cucumber to a teacher, which made the group laugh. But, she emphasized, those real-life interactions taught them how to present and promote products, whether simple or impressive.

Jack shared a similar experience, recalling the time he had been tasked with selling pomegranate juice at the school's administrative offices. The juice wasn't selling, not because it was bad, but because it was too cold to drink at that moment. He explained that they had to come up with alternative strategies to make the sale, and that was when he realized that selling was more difficult than it appeared. Yet, with teamwork, they could adapt and find solutions.

Charlie, who had remained quiet until then, contributed an insightful comment. She said she enjoyed the selling aspect of the practical sessions and used the pomegranate juice example as well. She added that the experience of working in groups depended heavily on the dynamics within the team. If one was paired with a confident and outgoing partner, the whole team benefited. Even if she didn't personally like a teammate, she still learned how to collaborate effectively, a lesson she felt she wouldn't have encountered elsewhere.

The coordinator agreed, saying that this reflected real workplace dynamics collaboration that would often be necessary, regardless of personal preferences.

The focus then returned to innovation. The coordinator asked what, in their view, made an idea innovative. Routh replied that innovation depended on how an idea was implemented and who was involved in that process. She said that their school had taught them not to remain in the realm of theory, but to put their ideas into practice.

She shared a specific example from a previous entrepreneurship project with Greys. Their team had developed a home-growing microgreens kit designed to be inclusive for people with visual impairments. The kit included Braille instructions and MP3 audio guides. Routh explained that while most innovations for the visually impaired focused on technological aids, such as sound signals at traffic lights, their group wanted to offer something that reconnected users with nature and brought joy into their daily lives. She added that their idea was supported by previous microgreens projects done in the vocational track, which allowed for collaboration across school departments. The value of the project, she felt, lay in its combination of social impact and teamwork.

As the 40-minute session neared its end, the coordinator remarked that the students' experiences had already given them a strong taste of the real world, developing ideas, selling

products, and working with others despite their differences. A message appeared on the screen indicating that the call would end shortly. The coordinator suggested taking a short break and promised to call them back right after. The students agreed with nods and laughter, ready to continue sharing the rich learning experiences they had lived through.

Overcoming technical issues in Virual Collaboration. After a brief break, the participants gradually rejoined the call. Some were still adjusting to minor connection issues common in virtual meetings. The researcher and coordinator asked if everyone had received the new invitation link. Routh responded affirmatively, thanking her and explaining that she initially joined using the old link before the new one arrived. Ethel also mentioned that she had clicked the first link she had. Jack admitted with slight confusion that he had done the same. The coordinator noted that only a few students were visible on her screen and assumed that many had initially entered the previous meeting room. She suggested waiting a bit longer for everyone to settle in. Gladis, sounding concerned, added that she hadn't received the invitation at first. Eventually, all participants joined, and the familiar grid of faces filled the screen, gradually lifting the group's energy.

Global Stage Achievements. Once the group had settled, the coordinator shared exciting news: the High school students team had qualified for the Global Finals of a major competition. Not only had they placed first in Greece, but they had also received awards for Best Team and Best Portfolio. She announced that the finals would take place in Singapore from September 25 to October 5, during the city's Grand Prix. The group reacted with enthusiasm. The coordinator explained that the event was the world's largest tech competition, requiring students to go beyond building a mini Formula 1 car, they had worked on mechanical design, marketing, entrepreneurship, and sponsor outreach. She also highlighted that the team's sustainability plan, which aimed for a zero-energy footprint, had played a critical role in their success. She then asked whether the students felt that this experience was connected to their learning at school and their preparation for the real world. Ethel, who had participated in the competition for two consecutive years, responded first. She explained that their work had involved collaboration with teachers from various departments, particularly those with knowledge of agriculture and mechanics, to select the best materials for the car. It needed to be both fast and lightweight while remaining eco-friendly. Beyond the technical work, she added that the team had organized environmental activities such as tree planting at the school, cleaning the bleachers, and a beach cleanup near Krini, Thessaloniki. According to her, the school had strongly supported their efforts

to reduce environmental impact, making it more than just a competition, it had become a way of life.

Teaching Students Leadership. The coordinator introduced another question, asking how the students had experienced entrepreneurial risk and autonomy within the STEM curriculum. Jack asked for clarification. The coordinator rephrased, asking whether students were given a structured framework in entrepreneurship projects or if they had the freedom to make their own decisions.

Routh recalled her experience with the student business club, explaining that although two teachers supervised the club, they remained in the background. Students were the ones who made all major decisions—from designing the logo and choosing the product to naming the company. The teachers only communicated directly with the student president or director, allowing the rest of the team to navigate the process independently.

Charlie confirmed that the students were given room to experiment and that the teachers were available when needed, but their approach encouraged students to think critically and collaborate without constant oversight.

Greys added that, even in the absence of a strict framework, there was a shared understanding that any initiative should respect the environment. Whether through the entrepreneurship club or volunteer work, eco-consciousness was always a part of their efforts. She emphasized that this value reflected the school's broader philosophy of connecting with nature and contributing positively.

As the discussion came to a close, the coordinator posed a reflective question: "If you had to describe the school in three words, what would you choose?"

Routh answered thoughtfully, using "Beautiful," "Supportive," and "Like home." There was a brief silence as the others nodded in agreement, visibly resonating with the sentiment. This moment marked a turning point, revealing how deeply the students connected with their school experience, not just through academics, but through community and shared growth.

Ethel was the first to elaborate, stating that the first word that came to her mind was "innovation." She added that the school was supportive and also helped students broaden their horizons, even though she struggled to capture that in a single word.

Greys echoed these thoughts, explaining that what stood out to her was the diversity of the student body, students from across Greece, each bringing different life experiences. This diversity, she said, created a unique richness within the school community.

Gladis, more reserved, offered a single word: "Wisdom."

Routh, who had been reflecting quietly, shared something deeply personal. She explained that her three chosen words were: "My home." Having lived in the dormitory for three years, she described how the school had truly become her home.

More than an Agricultural School. The coordinator followed up by asking whether the students viewed their school as merely an agricultural institution or something more.

Florance answered with a smile, saying it was much more, particularly for boarding students. She described how, in the first year, students tended to stick to their own groups and differences, but gradually, they became like family. She gave the example of Gladis, with whom she lived just a room apart. Over time, students became part of each other's routines and daily lives. She linked the experience to a summer camp, only that lasted three years. Florance said that through this small, self-contained society, students learned to navigate a variety of personalities and challenges independently, especially those who were far from home. In return, they found lasting friendships and shared memories tied to the school.

Following up, Jack agreed and described how he used to respond to first-year students who complained about the dormitories. He would tell them that day students missed out on half the experience. Living on campus, he explained, meant learning to coexist with strangers, which was a major risk and required patience. Yet it was an ongoing process that didn't truly end until students left school.

The coordinator then asked a final comparison question, if they had the choice between their current high school and any other in Greece, which one would they choose and why?

Routh answered immediately, stating she would definitely choose the American Farm School. She explained that it wasn't just a school, it was a family. Though she had been at the school since elementary years, she admitted that she hadn't felt that connection at first. Older students used to say that the school felt like home, and she initially didn't understand. In fact, she disliked her first year of high school. But now, as she recently discussed with Greys, this final year had been her best yet. She described the warmth of her teachers, the strength of her friendships, and the variety of people she had met. She felt surrounded by people she could speak to and connect with—everywhere she turned. The sense of belonging, she concluded, made it feel like a family. While academic learning was part of the experience, much of the true growth happened beyond the classroom.

When asked whether this was important, Ethel responded affirmatively. She described the school as a network of people, not just among students, but also including teachers and even

non-teaching staff. She emphasized that students could rely on people in the school and turn to them for help. According to her, that level of approachability and support was something truly unique about their school.

Defining Vocational Education and Career Preparation. The conversation then shifted again, as the coordinator asked what vocational education or career preparation meant to them.

Greys responded first, saying that, to her, it was about developing soft skills, particularly communication and social interaction. She shared that she had arrived at the school as a shy student, having been with the same classmates since preschool. The school environment, however, encouraged her to open up and work collaboratively, even when opinions differed. With the support of teachers and participation in various projects, she felt she had experienced significant personal growth.

Ethel agreed, saying that through their involvement in clubs and school activities, students developed essential soft skills, often without even realizing it. She emphasized that such skills were not only crucial for future careers, but also for everyday life. In her view, the true importance of these skills became apparent as students prepared to transition into the wider world.

Charlie noted that soft skills were extremely important, and that as vocational high school students, they had felt that even more deeply. She said the school had only three majors, but they were highly specialized. She described how, in food technology or animal production, students learned advanced practices such as artificial insemination in livestock—something she called “wild, but real.” She added that, by the time they graduated, they would have far more practical experience than someone who had finished a general high school.

Building Communication and Emotional Intelligence. The coordinator then asked for input from Greys and Gladis. Gladis shared that, as a dorm resident, one of the most important skills she had learned was communication—something as simple as saying “good morning” had become meaningful. She explained that learning to express herself, especially when facing a problem, had been one of the most valuable lessons, and that teachers had supported them in developing that skill.

Routh spoke about how vocational education could be particularly helpful for students who did not intend to follow an academic path. She emphasized that the school prepared them not only to join the workforce but to innovate, even without further academic specialization.

Florance, who had been prompted by the moderator to share his thoughts, spoke about how even day students benefited from clubs and extracurricular activities. He recalled working on entrepreneurship projects with students from other grades, which taught him how to collaborate with different personalities, a crucial skill in the workplace.

Balancing Academic Demands and Life Lessons. When asked what vocational education meant to him, Jack said that he initially felt lost among all the answers but then acknowledged that preparation mattered for everything. He reflected on how having experience in both general and vocational high school helped him realize that vocational studies gave him a strong foundation. He also mentioned the life lessons learned in the dorms, how to live with others and maintain relationships despite differences.

Suggestions for Improving the School Program As the conversation shifted to changes they might make to the school's program, Jack immediately mentioned the schedule. He noted that their day started at 8:20 and often ended at 3:45, which was exhausting. Florance added that, due to the Study USA program, they had to make up practical hours, sometimes staying until 6 or 7 p.m. He found it mentally exhausting, especially having five consecutive hours with the same teacher. Greys commented that she wasn't sure what she would change, but admitted that finishing the day earlier would be helpful. Routh said that, as a student from a distant region who only went home during long holidays, she wished they had more free time or outings to balance things out. Ethel noted that she once stayed at school until 6 p.m. daily, but it had been her choice due to involvement in many clubs. She wasn't sure she would change anything.

Jack echoed these thoughts, observing that second year in particular was intense, with more subjects and pressure. He suggested the long schedule was worth rethinking, even if solutions weren't obvious. Charlie briefly commented that the previous points were very insightful. Gladis said she would also like the school day to end earlier so that students could rest and prepare for the next day. Routh agreed.

Greys reflected on how exhausting the first year had been due to long afternoons filled with extracurricular activities, which left little time for study or rest. However, she acknowledged that these programs strengthened the school's academic profile. She expressed a desire for more focused practical sessions in labs and workshops, though she understood that scheduling constraints made it difficult, especially for day students. She concluded that finishing school earlier would be beneficial, especially since many students attended private tutoring in the evenings and struggled to concentrate due to fatigue.

After these reflections, the coordinator transitioned to a final topic. She thanked everyone for their thoughtful input and introduced a new theme: why the students wanted to continue their studies in the United States, what American universities meant to them, and what the U.S. symbolized more broadly. As the session timer appeared, warning that the meeting would soon close, the coordinator asked whether the group preferred to continue or take a short break and resume later. Charlie suggested continuing, while Gladis proposed ending the session and reconnecting next time. The coordinator promised to send a new invitation to prevent confusion and allow for a smooth reconnection. With brief agreement from the group, the session ended with thanks and a five-minute pause.

Motivations for Studying Abroad. After the break, the students rejoined, though the coordinator sensed some fatigue. She reassured them that only two questions remained and then introduced the first was: "Why do you want to study in America?"

Ethel responded first. She said that studying in the U.S. had been a dream since childhood, and as she grew older, she realized it was not only a dream but a real opportunity. She admired the exceptional quality of education, adding that students could benefit both professionally and personally, gaining self-awareness in the process. She also valued the international environment, which exposed students to diverse cultures and perspectives. Furthermore, she highlighted the structure of internships in the U.S., as well as the supportive relationship between students and professors, as factors that would help her grow.

The coordinator thanked her, then invited Greys to speak. Greys explained that she appreciated the openness of the American educational system. She admitted that she was not yet entirely certain about her specialization, so the ability to explore different courses was especially important to her. She also valued the sense of community and pointed out that the strong network of alumni in American universities could support students in their future careers. This, she said, was a major reason for her decision to study there.

Jack nodded in agreement, expressing that he shared many of the reasons already mentioned by his peers. He said that studying in the United States had been a dream since he was young, perhaps not since his earliest years, but certainly from a young age. He also admitted that he wished to eventually live in America, even though he wasn't sure yet how that would unfold. He explained that while he respected Greek universities, he felt that the educational standards in the U.S. were quite different and significantly higher. He emphasized that this had been a long-term goal for him, and he felt truly happy to have reached it.

Florance echoed the others' views. He said that he was drawn to the idea of moving far from home in order to open up new possibilities. For him, the excitement of meeting new people and experiencing new things was compelling, even if it came with a degree of uncertainty. He highlighted how different the American education system was in terms of its structure, course options, and opportunities, and said that this had played an important role in his decision.

The coordinator then turned to Gladis, asking for her thoughts. Gladis responded with a smile and explained that she had been exposed to English from a very early age. Because both of her parents worked, they hadn't enrolled her in a traditional daycare, but she had attended an English language school instead. That early exposure, she said, had planted the idea of studying abroad in her mind. She never wanted to limit herself to just staying in Greece. She noted that the American-style education offered at the school had given her the opportunity to dream bigger. She also mentioned her older brother and cousins, who had gone through the Greek university system, and how observing their experiences convinced her to seek something different. She clarified that her intention was not to criticize Greek universities, but she believed that American ones typically offered better facilities, more accessible professors, and strong campus communities, something she had already tasted through life in the dorms and hoped to continue experiencing abroad.

Charlie was the next to speak. She said that her reasons combined many of those already mentioned. She valued the strong sense of community they had at their school and expressed a desire to find that again at university. What excited her most, she added, was the opportunity to meet people from all over the world, not just from the U.S. She explained that her interest in business and economics also played a key role, as the universities she had chosen to apply to had excellent business programs.

Advice to Future Students of the American Farm School. The coordinator then posed a new question, asking what advice they would give to a new student entering the American Farm School.

Jack was the first to respond. He admitted that it was difficult to condense everything into just a few words, but said that patience was essential. He explained that it took time to adjust to the new environment and to the reality that students would be spending several years together. Academically, he said, the school required effort and dedication. But for those willing to seek them out, there were endless opportunities that would not disappoint. He advised new students to stay focused if they already knew what they wanted to pursue.

Florance supported this message, urging future students to embrace their three years at the school fully. He said that both the highs and the lows shaped an unforgettable experience and were worth living through.

Routh acknowledged that she hadn't always felt comfortable, especially at the beginning of her time at the school. However, over time, the people she met made the place feel special. Her advice to new students was to take advantage of every opportunity, whether academic, extracurricular, or social,because missing out could lead to regret later on.

Gladis, reflecting on her own background in the public-school system, emphasized how much she appreciated the supportive and vibrant community she had found at the American Farm School. She spoke about the passion and respect the teachers showed toward students, which created a welcoming environment where everyone felt included and valued. For her, this was a kind of community that extended well beyond graduation.

Ethel offered a simple but powerful message to conclude, she encouraged new students to say yes to new experiences, to step outside of their comfort zones, and to absorb as much as possible during these formative years.

Closing Reflections. As the discussion came to an end, the coordinator warmly thanked all participants for their honesty and courage in sharing their personal stories. She wished them great success in their academic journeys and reminded them that their participation in the discussion would be formally recognized.

The group parted ways with smiles, each carrying a sense of pride, hope, and memory from this meaningful chapter in their lives.

5.3 Interpretation and Course Impact on Skills

The data collected from the focus group "House Family" revealed rich insights given by the students concerning their experiences and perceptions of American Farm School's educational model.

Primarily, most of the students described that the school's natural setting as essential for their sentimental well – being and academic focus. The unhindered morning view of Mount Olympus and the green campus were mentioned multiple times as calming and inspirational, as they brought to the student's images from their childhood experiences in summer camps,

suggesting that the school's natural setting is deeply connected with their learning and emotional development.

Furthermore, experiential learning stood – up as the foundation of their educational journey. Students summing from general and also from vocational tracks described experiential learning in fields, labs, real agricultural business as valuable in bridging classroom learning with professional environments.

Additionally, a recurring subject of discussion was the strong emphasis of entrepreneurship. Students are given the chance to participate in student-run business clubs, develop products, run market research, manage budgets and collaborate with peers across disciplines. The activities mentioned above fostered real world business responsibilities, critical thinking and leadership skills. One worth mentioning example, was a microgreens kit designed for people visually impaired, featuring Braille and MP3 instructions. The project illustrated both innovation and social responsibility and highlighted the school's success is combining vocational training with inclusive design. For many students the concept of innovation was interpreted as a way to brake stereotypes such as gender (e.g. female students driving tractors) or social (e.g. agriculture is lesser profession). Some students also linked innovation to sustainability, bringing as an example their participation in eco – conscious projects such as zero – energy competitions and community clean – up efforts (Fthenakis, 2013).

The discussion was also addressed with great emphasis in Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Participants associated themselves with a great range of intelligences such as logical, linguistic according to their preferred learning styles and extracurricular engagements. They also expressed a strong sense of personal development and self – awareness that were fostered through the school's supportive system.

Also, communication, teamwork, adaptability, emotional intelligence and other soft skills were mentioned as important takeaways. The life in dormitories was described as an experience with transformative qualities, as students learn to coexist, compromise and build long term inner bonds that are difficult to break.

The vocational high school track was praised for its depth and realism. Students recalled experiences in animal husbandry, food technology and agricultural business often getting involved in projects with real economic stakes. They also highlighted the confidence gained from performing complex, technical tasks and interacting with professionals in the field. However, some concerns were expressed about the demanding schedule, long school days

combined with extracurriculars and missed practical sessions due to external programs like "study U.S.A.", posed challenges (Betts, 2021). Students suggested that schedule restructuring is essential in order to maintain the balance between academic rigor and student well-being. Despite this criticism though all students agreed that the American Farm School successfully prepares students for real world careers and higher education, especially in international contexts.

The participants expressed also a great will to continue with their higher education in the USA. They were attracted by the flexibility of the American University system, the diversity of the student population and the close professor – student's relationships, the open curriculum and the structured internship opportunities were particularly mentioned, especially by students who had not yet finished their career paths. Moreover, many participants noted that the AFS has given them all necessary academic and social knowledge for this transition. The sense of community at the school parallels what they hope to find in U.S. educational institutions.

Summing up, students described the school in terms such as "innovative", "supportive", "family" and home (Fthenakis, 2017). They pointed out the deep inner bords formed between them through the years of shared living and learning. For students to come, their common advice was to embrace new experiences, remain patient through challenges and seize every opportunity offered. Graduates expressed gratitude for the holistic education they received that went way beyond classroom, including moral values, development of leadership and cultural understanding. Despite occasional fatigue caused by the heavy schedule or structural constraints, their overall experience was overwhelmingly positive.

6. Discussion

The aim of this research is to investigate the ways in which students at the American Farm School (AFS) engage with its educational model, and particularly its emphasis on creativity, experiential learning, entrepreneurship, and personal development. Insights coming from two focus groups the "House Family" and "The First Board," offered a thorough view of how the AFS context shapes student identities, competencies, and aspirations. The themes that came up align with contemporary educational frameworks centered on holistic development (House, n.d.), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2016), and global citizenship (OECD, n.d.).

6.1 The Learning Environment and Experiential Education, and Student Development

The participants in both focus groups highlighted the significance of the school's natural surroundings for their emotional well-being and academic engagement. The open campus layout, green landscape, and views of Mount Olympus were depicted as sources of tranquility and inspiration. These observations reinforce existing research on biophilic design and nature-embedded learning environments, which suggest that being close to nature reduces stress and enhances emotional equilibrium, as Greys and Ethel have said. The natural setting was designed to function as more than mere scenery. It serves as a symbolic reference point that allows students to connect past experiences (such as participation in summer camps) with their present academic and personal development. This strengthens the value of place-based education in fostering self-awareness and resilience.

Experiential learning emerged as a central advantage of the AFS curriculum. Both groups expressed appreciation for the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application, whether through agricultural fieldwork, laboratory experiments, production units, or engagement in entrepreneurial projects. These hands-on experiences enhanced conceptual understanding and instilled a sense of responsibility.

The First Board group emphasized the way that experiential learning simulated professional contexts. Participants described organizing team meetings, developing products, and marketing them in real markets. Such attempts not only embodied principles of

entrepreneurship but also cultivated essential skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and leadership. These findings certify the school's effectiveness in connecting vocational training with entrepreneurial knowledge, in line with global educational priorities for the 21st century (European Commission, 2012).

The influence of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences was evident in students' self-descriptions and their articulation of learning preferences. Both groups highlighted diverse intellectual strengths, ranging from logical and linguistic to interpersonal and intrapersonal and certified that the school actively encourages the development of these individual traits. AFS appears to cultivate a reflective learning culture in which students become increasingly aware of their personal learning styles and are given opportunities to act on this awareness. Through participation in student clubs, project-based learning, and targeted academic support, the school reinforces a differentiated and student focused educational model (Gardner, 2006).

Students also pointed out the development of soft skills, including communication, adaptability, empathy, and teamwork, as a key benefit of their AFS experience. Those living in dormitories spoke about the challenges and benefits of coinhabiting, particularly in relation to conflict resolution, emotional support, and personal growth. These reflections indicate that when residential life is embedded within a supportive institutional culture, it becomes a vital context for cultivating emotional intelligence and social maturity. The First Board group pointed out that even seemingly minor daily interactions (e.g., exchanging greetings) held meaningful significance, resulting in the development of a culture of respect and care.

6.2 Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Real-World Engagement

A persistent theme across both groups was the prioritization of entrepreneurship within the school's pedagogical approach. Students outlined their involvement in student-run enterprises, engaging with budgeting, marketing, and product development. These experiences facilitated the internalization of core values such as initiative, sustainability, and social responsibility. A noteworthy example shared by the House Family group was the development of a microgreens kit designed for individuals with visual impairment, an

initiative that combined inclusive design, technological innovation, and social impact. Similarly, members of the First Board group recited authentic challenges in marketing products like juices and vegetables, and the strategies they implemented to align with the market needs, exemplifying real-world entrepreneurial learning.

Innovation, as described by the students, extended beyond creative output to include challenging traditional norms, particularly those concerning gender roles (e.g., female students operating tractors) and societal perceptions of farming professions. Many students also connected innovation with environmental stewardship, referencing their participation in sustainable farming projects, zero-energy competitions, and community clean-up efforts.

6.3 Global Perspectives, Reflections, and Future Recommendations

One of the most striking findings was the students shared aspiration to pursue higher education in the United States. The reasons included the perceived flexibility of the American higher education system, its diverse student populations, opportunities for practical internships, and the accessibility of faculty. These preferences reflect a cultivated sense of global readiness, developed through bilingual instruction, interdisciplinary collaboration, and project-based learning at AFS. This outcome suggests that AFS not only equips students for agricultural or vocational careers but also prepares them to prosper in international academic environments.

Nonetheless, both groups identified challenges related to the demanding nature of the school's schedule. Students reported experiencing fatigue due to the long school hours, extensive extracurricular commitments, and participation in external programs such as Study USA. These insights suggest the need for a more balanced approach to academic severeness and student well-being.

Participants made several constructive proposals, including more flexible scheduling, increased focus on laboratory activities, and improved coordination of extracurricular programming. These recommendations are particularly relevant for institutions that combine vocational training with residential life, where time demands can be exceptionally intensive.

The enclosure of both the House Family and First Board groups provided additional perspectives that enriched the study's findings. Jointly, their narratives revealed the multidimensional nature of the AFS educational experience, an approach that integrates theoretical learning with practical application (Kolb,2021), nurtures creativity and character, and empowers students with the skills and mindset to pursue various paths. In conclusion, the American Farm School stands out as a paradigm of integrated and experiential education grounded in sustainability, inclusivity, and student agency. These findings contribute to broader discussions on the evolution of vocational education and indicate that institutions aiming to promote entrepreneurship, global readiness, and emotional development may benefit from adopting elements of the AFS model.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the experiences of the students at the American Farm School (AFS) through two focus group discussions, revealing that the institution provides a dynamic and integrative educational model, as stated in the document "The Ideal Education", which we inherited from Dr. John Henry House. The findings indicate that AFS effectively blends experiential learning, entrepreneurial education, sustainability, and student-focused pedagogical approaches. Group members characterized the school as an environment where learning is authentic, individualized, and grounded in real-world application.

The evidence gathered confirms that AFS promotes the development of multiple intelligence (Gardner,2016), fosters critical thinking and innovation, and supports emotional growth. Students appear to be ready for diverse post-secondary pathways, both vocational and academic, as well as for active participation in global society. This holistic framework is supported by the school's strong community ethos, commitment to inclusivity, and a natural setting that adds meaningfully to students' emotional well-being and intellectual engagement.

Nonetheless, the research identified several areas in need of consideration. Students voiced concerns regarding the intensity of their schedules, limited personal time, and the burden imposed by an excess of extracurricular commitments. Addressing these challenges, it is of importance for improving both student well-being and educational outcomes.

Recommendations

- **Extend the Study to Doctoral-Level Research**

Future research at the PhD level could incorporate longitudinal methodologies and comparative analyses with similar institutions. This would increase the theoretical grounding and empirical understanding of AFS's educational impact over time.

- **Revising the Curriculum Structure**

In response to student feedback, the school may benefit from reconsidering the daily schedule. Adjustments should aim to balance academic demand with sufficient time for rest, reflection, and hands-on learning, particularly for residential students.

- **Institutionalize Innovation Initiatives**

High-impact projects, such as the inclusive microgreens kit, should be formally inserted within the school's curriculum. Making such initiatives cross-departmental would ensure bigger student participation and sustained innovation.

- **Enhance Faculty Professional Development**

Faculty training in differentiated instruction, project-based methodologies, and social-emotional learning would further boost AFS's holistic educational model. Constant professional development is vital to ensuring instructional relevance and responsiveness.

- **Expand Alumni and International Engagement**

Building structured mentorship and networking opportunities with alumni and international collaborators could support students' global ambitions and professional paths, emphasizing AFS's outward-looking orientation.

- **Broaden the Scope of Future Research**

Successive studies should include the perspectives of parents, alumni, and school staff. A multi-stakeholder approach would enable triangulation of data and offer a more comprehensive evaluation of AFS's long-term educational impact.

- **Strengthening Mental Health Infrastructure**

The introduction of systematic, proactive mental health monitoring and support services is recommended, especially for students navigating overlapping academic and extracurricular demands.

Final Remarks

To conclude, the findings position the American Farm School as a transformative and forward-thinking educational institution. Its integrated approach to learning, grounded in sustainability and student agency, offers a replicable model for vocational and experiential education globally. By addressing the worries communicated by students and expanding its most effective practices, AFS is well positioned to further its role as a leader in inclusive and innovative education.

7.1 The Researchers Experience

Working on this thesis has been one of the most meaningful journeys of my academic and personal life. As an educator committed to student-centered and experiential learning, I entered this research with genuine curiosity about how creativity, entrepreneurship, and holistic development are experienced by students in a real educational setting. The American Farm School, with its unique blend of vocational training, innovation, and strong community spirit, offered the perfect environment to explore these themes.

Conducting the focus groups, “House Family” and “The First Board”, allowed me to hear powerful, authentic voices. I was deeply moved by how openly the participants shared their stories. They did not just talk about classes and activities, they spoke about their identities, their hopes, their frustrations, and their sense of purpose. Facilitating those conversations reminded me why qualitative research matters: it brings forward the human side of education.

At the same time, this process was not without its challenges. Organizing virtual discussions through Webex came with technical issues, unstable internet connections and the occasional participant being dropped from the call. These moments tested my patience and flexibility but also helped me grow. They taught me that behind every successful focus group is a researcher who must adapt, troubleshoot, and maintain a welcoming, respectful environment, no matter what.

Another challenge was time. Balancing the demands of writing, translating, transcribing, analyzing, and working professionally, while also managing family responsibilities, was exhausting at times. Yet, through this experience, I became more resilient and focused. I developed stronger research skills and, more importantly, a deeper understanding of how real educational experiences unfold in students lives.

What I take with me from this journey is not just a set of findings or a completed thesis, about the viaion of Dr, John Henry House, but I carry forward a renewed sense of purpose. I have seen up close how transformative education can be when it is rooted in empathy, agency, and relevance. I have grown as a listener, as a facilitator, and as a thinker. Most of all, I have become even more committed to continuing this path, possibly at the doctoral level, with a clearer vision of how research can drive meaningful change.

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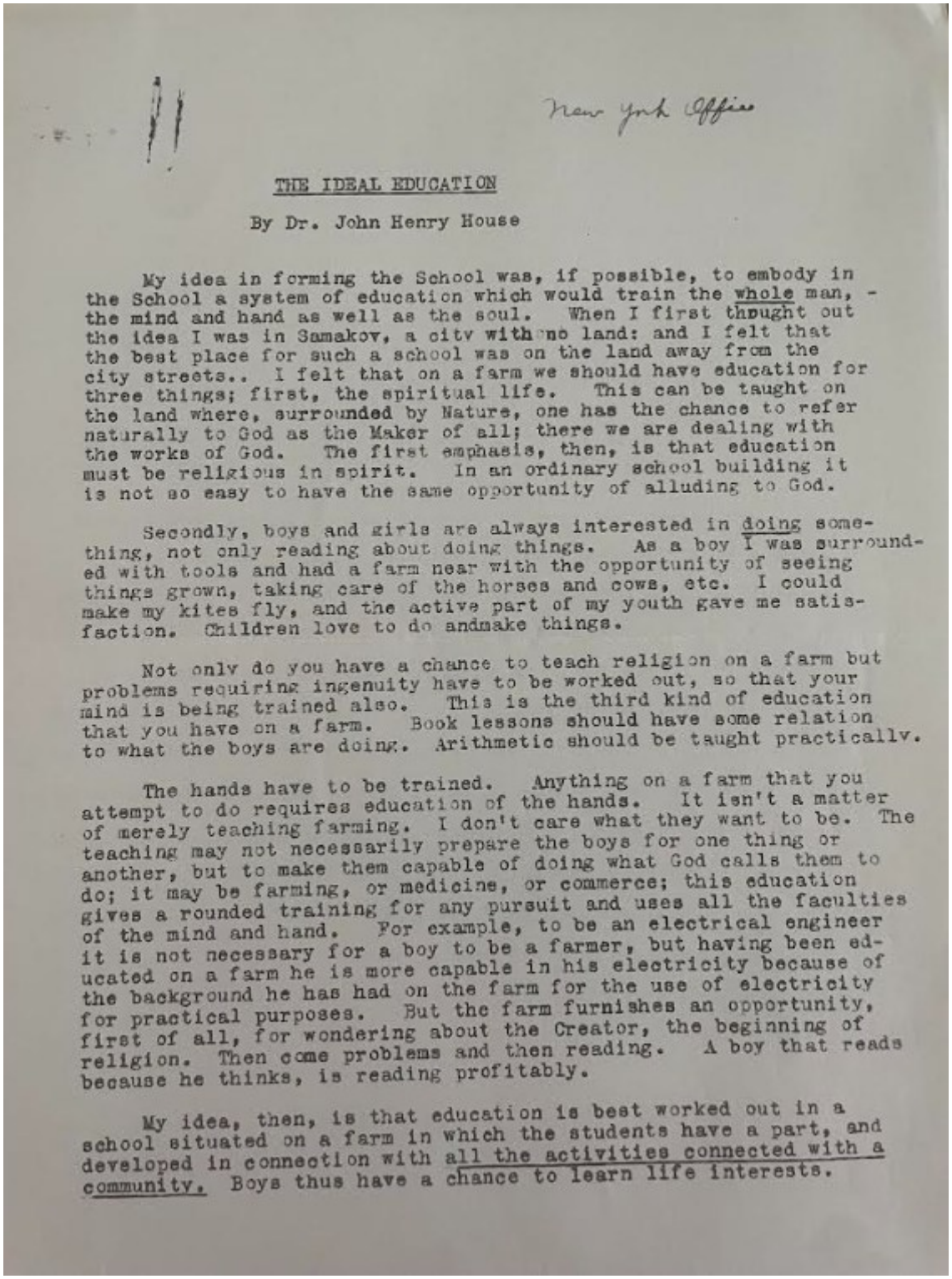
Appendix A: "The Ideal Education, By Dr. John Henry House"



New York Office

THE IDEAL EDUCATION

By Dr. John Henry House

My idea in forming the School was, if possible, to embody in the School a system of education which would train the whole man, - the mind and hand as well as the soul. When I first thought out the idea I was in Samakov, a city with no land: and I felt that the best place for such a school was on the land away from the city streets.. I felt that on a farm we should have education for three things; first, the spiritual life. This can be taught on the land where, surrounded by Nature, one has the chance to refer naturally to God as the Maker of all; there we are dealing with the works of God. The first emphasis, then, is that education must be religious in spirit. In an ordinary school building it is not so easy to have the same opportunity of alluding to God.

Secondly, boys and girls are always interested in doing something, not only reading about doing things. As a boy I was surrounded with tools and had a farm near with the opportunity of seeing things grown, taking care of the horses and cows, etc. I could make my kites fly, and the active part of my youth gave me satisfaction. Children love to do andmake things.

Not only do you have a chance to teach religion on a farm but problems requiring ingenuity have to be worked out, so that your mind is being trained also. This is the third kind of education that you have on a farm. Book lessons should have some relation to what the boys are doing. Arithmetic should be taught practically.

The hands have to be trained. Anything on a farm that you attempt to do requires education of the hands. It isn't a matter of merely teaching farming. I don't care what they want to be. The teaching may not necessarily prepare the boys for one thing or another, but to make them capable of doing what God calls them to do; it may be farming, or medicine, or commerce; this education gives a rounded training for any pursuit and uses all the faculties of the mind and hand. For example, to be an electrical engineer it is not necessary for a boy to be a farmer, but having been educated on a farm he is more capable in his electricity because of the background he has had on the farm for the use of electricity for practical purposes. But the farm furnishes an opportunity, first of all, for wondering about the Creator, the beginning of religion. Then come problems and then reading. A boy that reads because he thinks, is reading profitably.

My idea, then, is that education is best worked out in a school situated on a farm in which the students have a part, and developed in connection with all the activities connected with a community. Boys thus have a chance to learn life interests.

The Ideal Education - Page 2.

If we have farming at the School in order to train the boys it must be taught in the best possible way. If we are in the laundry, or painting shop, or repairing machinery, we are pupils together under God and we must do whatever we do in the best possible way. Simply farming isn't enough to uplift the life of a village; knowledge and training along allied lines is necessary. For example, it is quite possible to introduce electric light into quite a small villages and it is both safer and cheaper than lamps and candles. Boys should not only know how to plow and reap, but they should know proper sanitation and how to build roads.

This School was founded on these ideas. Boys should never despise work with the hands. Nothing should be done in a slovenly manner. Everything should be done in the best way that our knowledge and means allow.

A very important thing is that the teacher must be out of doors working with the students. That is where one can get hold of the hearts of students and learn to know them. Perhaps this is the most important thing, - a chance to get acquainted naturally, teaching that I am not bigger than they, and that I can learn too, that we are working together. If a teacher does this he gains the respect and friendship of the students and gets at their hearts. Laws and commands do not do much good, but when one has gotten the hearts of the boys they will do anything.

John Henry House

Appendix B: "Invitation of Focus Group The House Family"

INVITATION OF FOCUS GROUP STUDENTS

Thessaloniki 21/5/2025

INVITATION

To:
1. Routh House
2. Gladis House
3. Ethel House
4. Greys House
5. Charlie House
6. Florance House
7. Jack House

Subject: Participation in Postgraduate Research of the Hellenic Open University

Dear Students,

I am a graduate student in the postgraduate program of Hellenic Open University entitled "Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship" (I.M.E.), and I am currently working on my thesis titled:

"Innovate, Educate to Entrepreneurship: Experiential Curriculum, Multiple Intelligences Cultivation and Business Literacy in the American Farm School of Thessaloniki.", with Dr. Theodoros Katerinakis, faculty of Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA as a supervisor. (https://www.linkedin.com/in/theodore-katerinakis-870807a1/).

I am inviting you on the 26rd of May 2025 in a Webex meeting 9:00-10:30, to participate in my postgraduate research regarding the above thesis. Especially:

The study aims to explore the school's innovative educational approach in fostering entrepreneurial skills through experiential learning, the cultivation of multiple intelligences, and the integration of business literacy. This study is significant because it will provide insight of how to bridge the gap between theory and practice of innovation in education and economic growth to an agricultural economy, mainly by capturing the vision of Dr.John Henry House and emphasize to the importance of sustainable agricultural education.

The methodology that we will use is Focus Group, with two groups for conversation. The first group where you participate, is consisted of students at "Study U.S.A." program of the American Farm School, who earned scholarship the academic year 2024 -2025.

The whole process will be conducted in compliance with the HOU Code of Ethics for Research (https://elke.eap.gr/epitropi-ithikis-kai-deontologias/), protecting the anonymity and welfare of all human subjects and after receiving their explicit consent, by using a pen name. Also, participants, if they wish, will also have access to the research of the thesis. After its presentation, the resultant dissertation will be presented and in HOU committees and stored in the HOU repository "apothesis" (https://apothesis.eap.gr/).

Your success demonstrates your systematic preparation and proper guidance from American Farm School , repaid you by offering you the chance to shape your future in an international level and I strongly believe that we can have a great conversation so that we can export useful conclusions about my research.

At your disposal

Paraskevi Bermperaki

Instructor in Vocational Training
American Farm School
Msc Thesis student, Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship, Hellenic Open University

Appendix C: "Invitation of Focus Group The First Board"

INVITATION OF FOCUS GROUP FACULTY

Thessaloniki 21/5/2025

INVITATION

To:

- Charles Cathbert Hall,Borough of Manhattan, City of New York
- Josiah Strong, Greenwich, Connevticut
- Leander Chamberlain, Borough of Manhattan, City of New York
- William Isham Jr., Borough of Manhattan, City of New York
- George Payson, Borough of Manhattan, City of New York
- Lucious Beers, Town of SouthHampton, Suffolk Co,. N, Y.
- Eli Partridge, Borough of the Bronx, City of New York

Subject: Participation in Postgraduate Research of the Hellenic Open University

Dear faculty members of AFS,

I am a graduate student in the postgraduate program of Hellenic Open University entitled "Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship" (I.M.E.), and I am currently working on my thesis titled:

"Innovate, Educate to Entrepreneurship: Experiential Curriculum, Multiple Intelligences Cultivation and Business Literacy in the American Farm School of Thessaloniki.", with Dr. Theodoros Katerinakis, faculty of Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA as a supervisor. (https://www.linkedin.com/in/theodore-katerinakis-870807a1/).

I am inviting you on the 19th of June 2025 at a Webex meeting 9:00-10:30, to participate in my postgraduate research regarding the above thesis. Especially:

The study aims to explore the school's innovative educational approach in fostering entrepreneurial skills through experiential learning, the cultivation of multiple intelligences, and the integration of business literacy. This study is significant because it will provide insight of how to bridge the gap between theory and practice of innovation in education and

economic growth to an agricultural economy, mainly by capturing the vision of Dr.John Henry House and emphasize to the importance of sustainable agricultural education.

The methodology that we will use is Focus Group, with two groups for conversation. The second group where you participate, is consisted of faculty members of the American Farm School during the academic year 2024 -2025.

The whole process will be conducted in compliance with the HOU Code of Ethics for Research (https://elke.eap.gr/epitropi-ithikis-kai-deontologias/), protecting the anonymity and welfare of all human subjects and after receiving their explicit consent, by using a pen name. Also, participants, if they wish, will also have access to the research of the thesis. After its presentation, the resultant dissertation will be presented and in HOU committees and stored in the HOU repository "apothesis" (https://apothesis.eap.gr/).

At your disposal

Paraskevi Bermperaki

Instructor in Vocational Training
American Farm School
Msc Thesis student, Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship, Hellenic Open University

Appendix D: "Teacher's/Staff's Declaration of Consent"

Teacher's/Staff's Declaration of Consent

1. **Research Purpose**

   The purpose of the research is to assess how a multidimensional, experiential educational model – which focuses on agriculture - can cultivate entrepreneurial competencies and business literacy among students, with broader implications for educational innovation.

2. **Research Procedure**

   The research method will use qualitative approach so that it can provide an insight of how innovation and entrepreneurship in education can make an impact on Greece's economy. Focus groups will participate in a discussion, where the participants will share their ideas, experiences and attitudes about American Farm School. This will allow the researcher to observe and present their experiences with a different material from other methods that cannot be expressed with numbers. It will also offer valuable insights for refining, assessing, and adapting the curriculum, educational tools, and programs.

   The focus group design should include similar participants, divided by level, not more than 9 in each group. Each session should last not more than 2 hours and the whole procedure will be recorded.

3. **Expected Benefits from the Research**

   This research intends to contribute to the field of innovation and entrepreneurship in agricultural education. This dissertation will provide information about how the educational models focused on innovation and entrepreneurship could increase the agricultural development in Greece. Also, the findings could help policy makers and other agricultural institutions to imitate American Farm School's model, of how they could contribute to the local economies.

4. **Anonymity Assurance / Protection of Personal Data**

   The whole process will be conducted in compliance with the HOU Code of Ethics for Research (https://elke.eap.gr/epitropi-ithikis-kai-deontologias/), protecting the anonymity and welfare of all human subjects and after receiving their explicit consent.

   During the discussion, participants will maintain their anonymity. To facilitate information collection, they will have the option to choose a pen name.

5. **Refusal / Withdrawal**

   The participants in the research retain the right to refuse to continue and/or withdraw at any stage of the process.

   Researcher's Signature

   Date

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I hereby declare that I accept to participate in the research. However, I retain the right to withdraw from the research process at any stage of its conduct.

Participant's Signature

Date

Appendix E: "Confidentiality Clauses/Obligations of Researchers"

COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH ETHICS AND DEONTOLOGY (EHDE) - Hellenic Open University (HOU)
CONFIDENTIALITY CLAUSES / OBLIGATIONS OF RESEARCHERS FOR THE PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA & CONFIDENTIALITY – SECRECY

Beyond the commitments arising from legal provisions or codes of professional/research ethics and deontology, I, **Bermperaki Paraskevi**, undertake with this statement the explicit obligation to safeguard the confidentiality and secrecy of data, information, and any other material that is to be disclosed or come to my knowledge in any way, within the framework of my participation and exercise of duties and rights as a member of the research project **"Innovate, Educate to Entrepreneurship. Experiential Curriculum, Multiple Intelligences Cultivation and Business Literacy in the American Farm School of Thessaloniki,"** Dissertation of Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship of the Hellenic Open University (HOU) or on occasion thereof.

Specifically:
I undertake the obligation not to disclose, communicate, or make available confidential information, nor to allow or enable any third party direct or indirect access to the communication or publication of confidential information to any third party. This obligation applies subject to the enforcement of legal provisions that require disclosure of such information or when necessary for the exercise, establishment, and defense of rights before a court, supervisory, or disciplinary authority.

By the term **"CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION"**, as used in this statement, all information, data, methods, techniques, and procedures relating to organization, operation, responsibilities, duties, work, reports, questionnaires, forms, positions, findings, documents, projects, research and development planning, know-how, systems, and means that contain personal data and related information are meant.

Confidential information also means any personal data, i.e., any information that may concern a person whose identity is known or can be identified. These data may refer to researchers/employees/workers at the Hellenic Open University (HOU) or elsewhere, to

persons with whom HOU interacts or collaborates in research or otherwise, or to persons whose data are contained in files or are processed within the framework of research/development activities, research proposals, projects, tasks, experiments, methodology, reports, questionnaires, interviews, measurements, records, databases, systems, deliverables, etc. of HOU.

Confidential information may also be contained in physical carriers of sound or images, diskettes or digital computer disks, machines, originals of any kind and application, designs, definitions and explanations, items of any construction, artistic representations, documents readable by machines or humans, or may be oral statements.

The undersigned hereby commits to using the confidential information they gain knowledge of only for the purposes of the project/duty/responsibility/role/member assigned to them and/or for the purposes for which such information was communicated to them.

The undersigned must maintain the obligation of confidentiality even after the termination in any way of their role as a member of the research project “Innovate, Educate to Entrepreneurship. Experiential Curriculum, Multiple Intelligences Cultivation and Business Literacy in the American Farm School of Thessaloniki,” Dissertation of Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship of EAP.

The undersigned must clearly communicate the above-mentioned obligations to persons supporting their work and ensure that these persons comply with these obligations.

Date: 24/5/2025

Declarant:

BERMPERAKI PARASKEVI

Appendix F: "Focus Group Protocol House Family"

Opening Question

1. A Room with a View

We are now connected in this room.

In the School's Historical Archives (Folder 13, p.14), it is mentioned that Dr. House used to say:

"Part of the students' education at the School is the view of Mount Olympus through the Thermaic Gulf."

Introductory Questions

1.1 What does the surrounding view mean to each of you?

1.1.1 How did you decide to attend this school?

1.1.2 How long have you been a student here?

1.1.3 How important is it to start your day in a school surrounded by such natural beauty?

Key Question Block 1: Experiential Learning

2. The Curriculum of the AFS promotes experiential learning.

2.1 What has your experience been like?

2.1.1 Can you recall a specific moment that impressed you or changed your opinion about the school through experiential learning?

2.1.2 What do you remember from that experience?

2.1.3 What does innovation mean to you?

Key Question Block 2: Creativity & Multiple Intelligences

3. AFS fosters creativity and innovation, supported by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

This theory proposes that intelligence exists in 9 domains, located in different areas of the brain. Each domain is important, but not equally developed in every person.

Types of intelligences:

- Musical-rhythmic
- Spatial
- Linguistic
- Logical-mathematical
- Bodily-kinesthetic
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Naturalistic

3.1 Which type of intelligence do you think characterizes you and why?

Key Question Block 3: Entrepreneurship and Innovation

4. AFS produces and sells primary sector products such as milk, eggs, and wine. How do we sell them?

4.1 How well has AFS prepared you for real professional challenges? How? What does “differentiation” mean to you?

4.2 Have you ever thought of or started a business idea during your studies here?

4.2.1 If yes, tell us more about it.

4.3 What are your thoughts on innovation? What gives value to an idea?

Key Question Block 4: STEM & Global Recognition

5. OKIS Racing, a student team from AFS, qualified for the F1 in Schools World Finals in Singapore.

They won first place in Greece and awards for best team and best portfolio. The competition evaluates skills in engineering, entrepreneurship, sponsorship, and social media management, with a focus on STEM learning and environmental sustainability.

5.1 How do you think this connects to your experiential learning and professional preparation?

Key Question Block 5: Free Choice and Risk

6. One feature of the STEM program is the opportunity for free course choice, to encourage initiative and entrepreneurial risk-taking.

6.1 How do you evaluate this?

6.2 Describe the School in three words.

6.3 Is it an Agricultural School or something more?

Key Question Block 6: Comparison

7. If you compare one of the AFS high schools to another high school in Greece, which would you choose and why?

Supplementary Question:

What does professional education or preparation mean to you? Does it matter?

Ending Questions

8. If you could change one thing in the program, what would it be?

Supplementary Question:

Why do you want to continue your studies in the USA? What does it mean to study in an American university? What does 'America' mean to you?

9. If you had a new student in front of you right now, what would you tell them about the experience of studying at AFS?

Appendix G: "Focus Group Protocol The First Board of Trustees"

Introductory Context – Creativity

The 2025 National Examinations in Modern Greek Language and Literature featured three texts that examined creativity as one of the main human faculties. The first of these characterized creativity, as a process based on originality and effectiveness, and hand in hand with imagination, problem-solving, and personal expression, especially through the arts. The second, drawing on scientific research, emphasized on how creativity is expressed in infancy an plays a crucial role in language learning but can be inhibited by adverse social environments. The third bemoaned he lack of creativity in working life today, with a desire for more imaginative and significant working experiences.

Section 1: Creativity and Education

Key Questions

- How do you define creativity, and how do you cultivate it?
- What role does imagination play in children's everyday learning? How do you encourage it?
- How do you believe students participation in artistic or cinematic projects (such as the film Zomb-e) contributes to the development of divergent thinking?

Follow-up Questions

- Do you believe creativity is innate or can be developed?
- What practices do you implement in your school to encourage children's creative expression?
- What elements of a project like Zomb-e would you consider crucial for fostering divergent thinking?

Transition Questions

- How is the role of imagination manifested in your school's educational approach?
- What has been your most creative moment at the American Farm School, and what did you learn from it?

(Let's now explore how creativity takes form through experiential learning, the foundation of the School since the time of Dr. House.)

Section 2: Experiential Learning at the American Farm School

From the Historical Archives of the School, in a letter by Dr. John Henry House titled "The Ideal Education", it is stated:

"Boys and girls are always interested in doing - creating something, rather than just reading about how it is done."

On the School's website, it is noted:

"Today, the School adapts education to the needs of the 21st century while remaining faithful to its roots and its long-standing tradition of experiential learning."

Key Questions

- Could you share two examples of experiential learning practices implemented at your school?
- How much time or curricular freedom do you have to implement projects based on students' interests?
- How do students typically respond to experiential learning programs?

Follow-up Questions

- Are there cases where students took initiative in experiential projects?
- What role do students play in project design? Do they have a say in the themes?
- Is experiential learning linked to the development of skills such as creative thinking?

Transition Questions

- How do you evaluate the results of a project?
- Do you believe experiential learning can be integrated into mainstream education, or is it only feasible in specific contexts such as the American Farm School?

(Through examples, we observe that every child develops differently. How can a school nurture students' diverse intelligences, as Gardner proposes?)

Section 3: Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

The American Farm School supports creativity and innovation, aligning with Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. According to this theory, intelligence consists of nine types, each linked to different areas of the brain. While all are important, not all individuals exhibit the same level of development across each type:

- Musical-Rhythmic – sensitivity to sound and rhythm
- Spatial – perception of space and balance
- Linguistic – ease with language and meaning
- Logical-Mathematical – ability to research and experiment systematically
- Bodily-Kinesthetic – learning through movement and action

- Interpersonal – understanding others' emotions and intentions
- Intrapersonal – understanding oneself and managing emotions
- Naturalistic – connecting information to the natural world

Key Questions

- Do you observe that some children express themselves better through different modalities?
- How do you adapt your teaching accordingly?
- Through project-based learning, which types of intelligences do you see most often in your students? Could you give examples?

Follow-up Questions

- Are there students who struggle with verbal expression but excel in, for example, music? How do you support them?
- Is there room for integrating students' extracurricular interests into the educational process?

Transition Question

- What kind of changes in the school environment do you believe would foster children's creative development?

(Through project work, we witness how imagination and collaboration converge in a shared space of creativity.)

Section 4: Entrepreneurship and Experiential Learning

According to the School's curriculum:

"Student participation in entrepreneurship projects is an integral part of the practical training program. This type of experiential learning introduces students to values and experiences related to leadership, entrepreneurship, production, and product marketing through teamwork. It combines theoretical knowledge from various academic disciplines for a common purpose."

These projects involve team building, product creation, marketing, performance evaluation, financial planning, and saving profits for the benefit of the class.

Key Question

- Do you believe entrepreneurship projects cultivate skills such as innovation, leadership, and teamwork? Could you mention two projects in which students demonstrated problem-solving skills?

Follow-up Questions

- What was the final product you created, and how did you organize its sale?

- What skills did the students develop through the project?
- What kind of transformation did you observe in the value chain created by the project?

Transition Question

- If you had to choose one takeaway, what do you and your students believe you learned through these projects?

(How can we build a culture of collaboration within the educational community?)

Section 5: Collaboration and Synergy

According to Dr. House's letter 'The Ideal Education' from the School's archives:

"An essential part of education is that the teacher should be outside with the students. That is where one can win their hearts and truly get to know them. Perhaps this is the most important thing of all – the opportunity to connect naturally, to teach them that I am not above them and that I, too, can learn, that we all work together..."

The School's website also states:

"We achieve more through collaboration and synergy and promote teamwork within our community to fulfill our mission."

Key Question

- What is the role of collaborative learning (teamwork) in your school, and how do you cultivate it?

Follow-up Questions

- How do you experience interaction between students and the school community through projects?
- How do you address challenges that arise within teams (e.g., division of roles)?
- How do you define innovation? Do you teach it or connect it to entrepreneurship?
- With the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence, how do you approach this topic in class? Do you think it will influence entrepreneurship?

Transition Questions

- Can you propose an improvement to the program that would strengthen collaboration? What would that be?
- Do you use Bloom's Taxonomy to guide your instructional goals?

Final Question

- With which word would you say goodbye to your graduating students?

Author's Statement:

I hereby expressly declare that, according to the article 8 of Law 1559/1986, this dissertation is solely the product of my personal work, does not infringe any intellectual property, personality and personal data rights of third parties, does not contain works/contributions from third parties for which the permission of the authors/beneficiaries is required, is not the product of partial or total plagiarism, and that the sources used are limited to the literature references alone and meet the rules of scientific citations.