Policy paper
Innovation in Education: The School Students’ Perspective
Adopted by the GA of OBESSU, 5th – 6th August 2017 - Berlin

Introduction
Innovative teaching methods and innovative pedagogical approaches in schools are key elements to boost the quality of education. Unfortunately, whereas in other sectors innovation is a constant aspect of their development, teaching methods evolve too slowly: pedagogical approaches in European schools nowadays are still mainly the same as years ago, and there is reluctance towards pedagogical innovation. New teaching methods would foster school students’ motivation, raise attention to diversity and help students to get the best out of their individual skills. Furthermore it could have a positive effect on the reduction of early school leaving.

The OBESSU Conference “School Methods 2020” was focused on how to promote the implementation of innovative teaching methods at schools, analysing the existing experiences and the benefits that they can bring at national and European level, from the students’ perspective. During the Conference, school student activists discussed the “Europe 2020 Strategy” and the Strategic Framework “Education & Training 2020”, having the chance to share with their peers best practices of their own countries on the specific topics of the project. “How to improve pedagogical methods in order to fulfil the new needs of school students?” was the guiding question for the event and the fundament for this policy paper.

Innovation through Learner Centred Methods
First of all, we believe that education should be learner-centred. All school methods and pedagogical approaches should have the clear aim of fostering education beneficial for the individual learners. This is achieved not by guessing what might be beneficial for school students, but by involving them as much as possible throughout the process of shaping and delivering their education. Learner-centred education does not serve the needs of school students as potential work force, but their needs as learners with individual interests, talents, capacities and weaknesses. The concept of learner-centred education is based on OBESSU’s core values: education should provide all school students with equal opportunities to develop their talents and personalities. The latest recommendations by the European Commission aimed at improving quality education through a learner-centred approach are a step into the right directions, yet fall short in promoting real learner participation. Considering the current situation in European schools and the results achieved so far, OBESSU demands the following to achieve a learner-centred education:

1. Flexible school days where learners have time for learning and doing assignments, as well as for social activities in the school, to be shaped in cooperation with school students. Additionally, if study and homework time are included in the school day, school students will

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1 The Conference “School Methods 2020” was organised by OBESSU, in collaboration with ESCU, in the framework of the ERASMUS+ Programme Youth, KA3 Support for Policy reforms - Structured Dialogue: meetings between young people and decision-makers in the field of youth (2016-2-EE01-KA347-017410). The Conference took place in Tallinn, Estonia, from the 31st of October to the 6th of November 2016.

2 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy_en

both receive proper guidance and find a balance between study and leisure time;
2. Students should get an equal share in defining their education - in terms of goals and
assessment - through dialogue with teachers before and during the learning process;
3. Education should be self-directed instead of teacher-directed. Therefore the role of the teacher
should change: teachers should provide pedagogical frameworks, accompany students in their
learning process and feedback it together, rather than dominate courses and judge learning;
4. Schools should facilitate interdisciplinary learning, for example by allowing students to combine
subjects in project work;
5. Students should be able to take the role of the “educator” in peer-to-peer learning with adequate
preparation and guidance;
6. Provision of different learning methods for the same subject need to be in place to cater
different learning profiles;
7. Innovative teaching methods should give students the opportunity to take responsibility over
their own learning process: when and how they want to, rather than teachers putting unwanted
responsibility on the shoulders of school students to fulfil preset assignments independently.

Innovation and Digitalisation
In the 21st century, digitalisation is both a challenge and an opportunity. Many initiatives at European
level have been undertaken in order to support this digitalisation process: in the framework of the “New
Skills Agenda for Europe⁴”, OBESSU welcomes the official launch of the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition,
and especially its specific focus to “modernise education and training to provide all students and
teachers with the opportunity to use digital tools and materials in their teaching and learning activities
and to develop and upgrade their digital skills⁵”. Nevertheless OBESSU is concerned about the
functionalist approach to education, which is also reflected in the digitalisation debate: education is a
value per se and does not just serve labour markets. We thus believe that digital learning should
therefore be part of a more holistic approach to education. We demand the following:

1. Access for all students to basic modern technology in schools such as computers, projectors,
internet, tablets, etc. Furthermore access to more interactive and updated teaching materials
with an added value for teaching such as e-books, specific applications and software, etc.;
2. Teachers properly trained in use of technology, but also in critical thinking towards the use of
technology. They have to be able to assess the added value of technology in specific cases and
be able to discuss this in the classroom;
3. Governments to provide funding and information to teachers and students to use quality
technology in the teaching process;
4. Access to online learning platforms to assemble materials, grades, information and other aids
to make learning more flexible and mobile. However these platforms should not give schools
the opportunity to intervene in the leisure time of students;
5. That the use of technology serves the purpose of making education more innovative, attractive,
efficient and interactive. It is important however to keep a balance between online and offline
teaching. Online teaching can be used when giving added value.

Innovation for inclusion

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⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223
Investing in innovation at school means also fostering social inclusion and equity; it means working for overcoming the main barriers that impede a full active participation and inclusion of students in the education system. One of these barriers is outdated and excluding teaching methods. OBESSU believes that many steps still have to be taken to reach an inclusive and fair education. Many groups of students have long been excluded from education and society in various ways. These include students with all kinds of disabilities or mental health issues; students belonging to LGBTQI communities; students with migrant, refugee or minority ethnic background and more. As the current teaching methods are often shaped in a way that only suits a handful of students, a variety of new, non-formal methods can be more inclusive and beneficial to a wider spectrum of students, who at this point are being excluded. For these reasons OBESSU claims for:

1. Making use of the educational expertise of youth organisations, civil society and school students themselves to bring youth-led learning into schools and make it possible for every student to feel comfortable and discover their identity;
2. Giving marginalized youth opportunities for workshops and other educational activities in schools. When tackling sensitive issues around sexuality, gender, religion, cultural background, disabilities etc., people who have themselves experienced exclusion on the basis of these social categories need to be involved;
3. More flexible learning methods, materials and devices that can be adapted to certain needs of students. Students with learning problems such as language barriers should be able to follow the teaching whilst also receiving additional support material to improve their skills at the same time;
4. More attention to be given to migrant and minority ethnic students, their language and cultural background, when preparing materials and methods. Innovative school methods are methods that can make use of diversity in the classroom instead of being limited by them;
5. Schools to ensure that the materials, devices and other practicalities that form part of innovative, modern education methods are free of any cost in order to guarantee access for all students.

Innovation and Practical learning

Practical learning in formal education is commonly discussed in the framework of VET, such as for example in the Copenhagen Declaration\(^6\), the Bruges Communiqué\(^7\) and the Riga Conclusions\(^8\). However, we believe that practical learning needs to be included in all sectors of education. Contrary to the dominant approach which sees practical elements in VET as serving labour market demands, we conceptualise practical learning as a key aspect of all education, to allow people develop hands-on skills and develop their professional interests further. Furthermore, combining theoretical and academic work with practical experience will help students fully learn and understand.

OBESSU demands:

1. Practical learning should be part of formal education both inside classrooms and outside. This entails making experiments during lessons, projects across subjects or trips to museums and other educational centres;

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2. Schools should provide official internship schemes that allow each student to have a suitable work experience outside of the formal school context;

3. Curricula to include creative arts and craft subjects which allow practical, project-based and experiential learning;

4. Student-led community projects should be guaranteed financial and non-financial support by the school to foster project-management skills and community spirit.