

Policy paper

Innovation in Education: The School Students' Perspective

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1 Introduction

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

9 The OBESSU Conference "School Methods 2020"¹ was focused on how to promote the implementation
10 of innovative teaching methods at schools, analysing the existing experiences and the benefits that they
11 can bring at national and European level, from the students' perspective. During the Conference, school
12 student activists discussed the "Europe 2020 Strategy"² and the Strategic Framework "Education &
13 Training 2020"³, having the chance to share with their peers best practices of their own countries on the
14 specific topics of the project. "How to improve pedagogical methods in order to fulfil the new needs of
15 school students?" was the guiding question for the event and the fundament for this policy paper.

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17 Innovation through Learner Centred Methods

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

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

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

³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework_en

- 34 both receive proper guidance and find a balance between study and leisure time;
- 35 2. Students should get an equal share in defining their education - in terms of goals and
- 36 assessment - through dialogue with teachers before and during the learning process;
- 37 3. Education should be self-directed instead of teacher-directed. Therefore the role of the teacher
- 38 should change: teachers should provide pedagogical frameworks, accompany students in their
- 39 learning process and feedback it together, rather than dominate courses and judge learning;
- 40 4. Schools should facilitate interdisciplinary learning, for example by allowing students to combine
- 41 subjects in project work;
- 42 5. Students should be able to take the role of the "educator" in peer-to-peer learning with adequate
- 43 preparation and guidance;
- 44 6. Provision of different learning methods for the same subject need to be in place to cater
- 45 different learning profiles;
- 46 7. Innovative teaching methods should give students the opportunity to take responsibility over
- 47 their own learning process: when and how they want to, rather than teachers putting unwanted
- 48 responsibility on the shoulders of school students to fulfil preset assignments independently.
- 49

50 **Innovation and Digitalisation**

51 In the 21st century, digitalisation is both a challenge and an opportunity. Many initiatives at European

52 level have been undertaken in order to support this digitalisation process: in the framework of the "New

53 Skills Agenda for Europe"⁴, OBESSU welcomes the official launch of the *Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition*,

54 and especially its specific focus to "*modernise education and training to provide all students and*

55 *teachers with the opportunity to use digital tools and materials in their teaching and learning activities*

56 *and to develop and upgrade their digital skills*"⁵. Nevertheless OBESSU is concerned about the

57 functionalist approach to education, which is also reflected in the digitalisation debate: education is a

58 value *per se* and does not just serve labour markets. We thus believe that digital learning should

59 therefore be part of a more holistic approach to education. We demand the following:

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

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>

⁵ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-4081_en.htm

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

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

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106 **Innovation and Practical learning**

107 Practical learning in formal education is commonly discussed in the framework of VET, such as for
108 example in the Copenhagen Declaration⁶, the Bruges Communiqué⁷ and the Riga Conclusions⁸.
109 However, we believe that practical learning needs to be included in all sectors of education. Contrary to
110 the dominant approach which sees practical elements in VET as serving labour market demands, we
111 conceptualise practical learning as a key aspect of all education, to allow people develop hands-on
112 skills and develop their professional interests further. Furthermore, combining theoretical and academic
113 work with practical experience will help students fully learn and understand.

114 OBESSU demands:

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

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen-declaration_en.pdf

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

- 119 2. Schools should provide official internship schemes that allow each student to have a suitable
120 work experience outside of the formal school context;
121 3. Curricula to include creative arts and craft subjects which allow practical, project-based and
122 experiential learning;
123 4. Student-led community projects should be guaranteed financial and non-financial support by
124 the school to foster project-management skills and community spirit.