

Measuring the Impact of Social Innovation Education on Student's Engagement

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Abstract : Social Innovation Education (SIE) is a new educational approach that aims to empower students to take action for a more democratic and sustainable society. Conceptually and pedagogically wise, it is situated at the intersection of Enterprise Education and Citizenship Education as it aspires to i) combine action with activism, ii) personal development with collective efficacy, iii) entrepreneurial mindsets with democratic values and iv) individual competences with collective competences. This paper abstract presents the work of the NEMESIS project, funded by H2020, that aims to design, test and validate the first consolidated approach for embedding Social Innovation Education in schools of primary and secondary education. During the academic year 2018-2019, eight schools from five European countries experimented with different approaches and methodologies to incorporate SIE in their settings. This paper reports briefly on these attempts and discusses the wider educational philosophy underlying these interventions with a particular focus on analyzing the learning outcomes and impact on students. That said, this paper doesn't only report on the theoretical and practical underpinnings of SIE, but most importantly, it provides evidence on the impact of SIE on students. In terms of methodology, the study took place from September 2018 to July 2019 in eight schools from Greece, Spain, Portugal, France, and the UK involving directly 56 teachers, 1030 students and 69 community stakeholders. Focus groups, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations as well as students' written narratives were used to extract data on the impact of SIE on students. The overall design of the evaluation activities was informed by a realist approach, which enabled us to go beyond "what happened" and towards understanding "why it happened". Research findings suggested that SIE can benefit students in terms of their emotional, cognitive, behavioral and agentic engagement. Specifically, the emotional engagement of students was increased because through SIE interventions; students voice was heard, valued, and acted upon. This made students feel important to their school, increasing their sense of belonging, confidence and level of autonomy. As regards cognitive engagement, both students and teachers reported positive outcomes as SIE enabled students to take ownership of their ideas to drive their projects forward and thus felt more motivated to perform in class because it felt personal, important and relevant to them. In terms of behavioral engagement, the inclusive environment and the collective relationships that were reinforced through the SIE interventions had a direct positive impact on behaviors among peers. Finally, with regard to agentic engagement, it has been observed that students became very proactive which was connected to the strong sense of ownership and enthusiasm developed during collective efforts to deliver real-life social innovations. Concluding, from a practical and policy point of view these research findings could encourage the inclusion of SIE in schools, while from a research point of view, they could contribute to the scientific discourse providing evidence and clarity on the emergent field of SIE.

Keywords : education, engagement, social innovation, students

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