

Cultivating Students' Competences through Social Innovation Education

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Abstract : Education is not solely about preparing young people for the world of work but also about equipping them with competences that will enable them to become socially proactive, empowered, responsible, and engaged citizens who will collectively contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future. Hence, progress assessment towards competence development is an ongoing process where continuous efforts are needed. This paper abstract presents the work of the H2020 NEMESIS project that aims to investigate, experiment and co-create together with schools a model for introducing and embedding social innovation education (SIE henceforth) in European primary and secondary schools. All in all, during the 2018-2019 academic year, 8 schools from 5 European countries involving 56 teachers, 1030 students, and 80 external stakeholders, experimented with different methodologies for embedding SIE in their contexts. This paper captures briefly the impact of these efforts towards the cultivation and progression of students' social innovation (SI henceforth) competences. As part of the model, 14 SI competences, whose progress was evaluated, have been introduced falling under 3 interrelated categories: competences for identifying opportunities for social and collective value creation, competences for developing collaborations and building meaningful relations and competences for taking action both on an individual and collective level. Methodologically wise, the evaluation strategy employed was informed by a realist approach, enabling the researchers to go beyond synthesizing 'what happened' and towards understanding 'why it happened', delving into 'what works, for whom and in what circumstances'. The reason for choosing such an approach was because it goes beyond attempting to answer the basic yes or no question of evaluation and focus on an 'explanatory quest' tracing the limits of when and where intervention is effective. A rich mix of sources of evidence have been employed, from focus groups with 80 people from the 5 EU countries to an online survey to 206 students, classroom observations, students' narratives granting them with the opportunity to freely express their opinions, short stories letting students express their feelings through their imagination and also, drawings so that younger children can express their perception of reality. All these evidences offered insights on the impact of SIE on the development of students' competences. Research findings showed that students progressed in all 14 SI competences through their involvement in the different activities. This positive progression is attributed to the model's three core principles: 1) the student-centered approach, rendering students active and self-determined producers of their own learning, 2) the co-creation process fostering intergenerational interactions, empowering thus students by making their voices heard and valued and also, 3) the transformative social action whereby through their projects, students are able to witness the impact they are bringing about with their actions. Concluding, these initial findings, together with the forthcoming evaluation research to a pool of 30 schools around Europe, have the potential to raise the dynamics of the under-investigated field of SIE and encourage its embeddedness in more schools around Europe.

Keywords : competence development, education, social innovation, students

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