



Schools and students as drivers of change



This paper is addressing teachers and schools that might like to take the students' innovation activities further.

They might wish to take the engagement from a student team level to a school level - a "school in the community" level, so to speak: the school doing what the student teams are doing.

Now, what is that about?

Traditionally, schools are responsible for education in classes, tests and exams, not engaging in any form of community activity, in community politics or community innovation.

In the limited version open schooling is about students' and student teams' learning through interaction with the community and real-life challenges in the community. In the extended version open schooling is about the engagement of the *school as organisation* in community challenges.

In a 21st century context innovation is no longer expected to only be driven by public authorities or major private enterprises within a top-down approach. On the contrary, innovation is expected to be driven by citizens, all sorts of community resources - and by any stakeholder in the community able to and willing to drive change.

Such a stakeholder able and willing to drive change might precisely be... a school!

Of course, this is not obvious if we think about a traditional school. The traditional school will mind its own business, so to speak.

But what about a school that:

- organises open schooling activities for teams of students to create innovation interest and mentality
- works to create entrepreneurial mentality among its students
- increasingly integrates real-life challenges in the students' learning
- would like to be a pioneer school offering its students 21st century skills and competences

What about such a school?

This school might be willing to take the innovation engagement to a higher level, from a few student teams to the school at large, and to integrate open schooling didactics more and more in the schools' learning activities and in the school's "identity".

Interestingly and importantly this school has the full support of the European Commission 😊

In fact the European Commission encourages schools not only to be more active in the community, and not only to facilitate students' learning through community interaction - but to play the role of drivers of change and innovation in the community...

The reasoning of the European Commission is at the same time extremely advanced and really simple:

- now, when we organise open schooling activities for students, learning through community interaction (for example in science), and support the student teams' engagement in innovation, *why not see this form of activity as a resource for creating bottom-up and citizen-driven innovation and change in the community?* Why not allow the community to benefit more systematically from these new learning processes, offering students powerful learning and creating change in the community at the same time?

One thing is sure: the more “real” and “serious” the students' engagement, the better the students' learning and the more benefit for the community!

In short, such a school works to integrate its learning activities in the life and needs and future of the community.

In this way the school becomes an important stakeholder in the community, becomes a driver of change and initiative-taking - and becomes a meeting place for innovate resources in the community.

And, not to forget, becomes a pioneer of 21st century learning, from which the students will benefit tremendously.

This will give new life to the school and will offer the school important social dynamics to invest in the students' future-oriented skills and competences.

Easier said than done, of course...

Such engagement of the school as driver of change needs strategic planning, dedication and pioneer spirit - from the management as well as from groups of teachers.



Let us try to give some advice on HOW this could happen. Each school will find its own way, but there are certain general approaches that we would like to share:



STRATEGIC APPROACH

Schools wishing to engage in such roles as drivers of change and innovation are strongly recommended to apply a strategic approach: careful discussions and preparations are needed, and in particular it is important to build on strong consensus among management and teachers, as well as create serious dialogues with potential community alliances.



BOTTOM UP

It is also of the utmost importance not to create top-down initiatives through organisational agreements between leaders and managers in the community. The extended roles in the community of the school should build on the students' open schooling engagement and take this engagement to a higher level. This bottom-up approach will ensure that the school's engagement is continuously focused on the students' learning and co-driving.



STUDENTS' CO-DRIVING

The ultimate aim of the school's new community roles is to offer students' relevant 21st century learning opportunities. To maintain this aim students should always be at the centre of the school's engagement, as co-drivers of the innovation missions.

The school should not attempt to replace the students' engagement, on the contrary: the new roles of the school should increase the quality of the students' learning and allow more and more students to engage in and benefit from open schooling.



CREATING ALLIANCES

One of the prominent new roles of the school, in support of the students' innovation missions and innovation learning, should precisely be to continuously build new permanent alliances with institutions, resources and citizens in the community. In this way the school will allow the students to benefit from a still growing eco-system of collaboration in the community and will allow the community to benefit from a systematic and sustained engagement of the students and the school.



SHARING THE STORIES

The school should take advantage of its new roles and of the students' innovation missions: it should systematically share the stories with all relevant resources in the community and describe the benefit of the engagement for students and for the community and its citizens. Visibility is key...

Evidently, the students must be deeply engaged in this sharing, including through the social networks.



EXPLOIT FUNDING

In case the school is willing to take on such new community roles the school will inevitably become a *pioneer school*. This means that the school can apply for a variety of funding - from local and national funds to the European programmes. This is a great way to create more economy for the activities and to share the new experience in wider circles.



OPEN SCHOOLING MAINSTREAMED

Most schools will start its new pioneer journey through engaging a few student teams in such innovation missions.

It is important for the school to build further engagement on this practical experience.

However, as soon as the school wishes to extend the innovation missions to more students and to widen considerably the number of students engaged in such open schooling learning, it will be necessary for the school to take the open schooling approach to a higher level: precisely to a “school as organisation” level.

It is at this point the school will benefit from engaging as driver of change in the community, as this would be the best framework for engaging more and more students in innovation learning.

Mainstreaming open schooling for innovation learning might precisely happen through the systematic engagement in community innovation of the school as organisation.

