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# YOUTH PERSPECTIVE REPORT

I believe that school should be a place where students can learn to prepare for future and build their own experience.



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# INDHOLDSFORTEGNELSE

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## INTRODUCTION

The Youth Perspective Report (YPR) is one of the two outputs contained in IO3: Accompanying Research, YPR being the first and Accompanying Research Evaluation Report (ARER) the second. In the reports you will get to know the student perspective on the DigiLives project scope or focus areas and, also, how and to what degree the overall project outcome reflects the student perspective. Report number one (YPR) forms the baseline against which the project outcome is evaluated in report number two (ARER).

The report is structured as follows: First we contextualize the research. What are the problems targeted in DigiLives and how do they play out at the partnering VETs. We then give a short introduction to co-creation linking the core methodology of DigiLives to the research part. Continuing on to describing the research methodology and the research questions, leading up to the main part: The analysis. It is in the analysis that the student perspectives will unfold. And finally, in the conclusion we line up some main areas of relevance and give tentative recommendations based on the student voices.

## DROP OUT, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The task of the vocational schools is to educate the students for a profession, for example, waiter, chef, pastry chef, blacksmith, carpenter to name a few. It is an exchange education between school and training in a company. VETs are placed at level 3-5 in the European Qualification Framework.

The project is a partnership between three VETs schools from Italia, France, and Denmark, they all have identical problems with drop out. Worst in Denmark were 40% of the VET's students dropped out in 2020 and 2021 (Dst.dk) and in France the national drop-out rate in the VET-system all trainings combined, was 13.71%. Italy is number 5 in EU of early leaving from education and training (Eurostat, 2020).

Recent research on VETs from Denmark shows that the longer the study start are and the better the students feel connected to the education, the less chance there is of them dropping out (EVA, 2017). This indicates that changing the start of the studies can have great significance and in the long run decrease dropout.

Another study shows that there is great diversity amongst students (EVA 2021). The diversity results in a wide range of expectations too the study start and study climate. Therefore, it is recommended to organize small student groups early in the study start, and to stretch the study start activities over a longer period during the first semester. The study start activities could, and maybe should be of both professional and social character as the diversity when it comes to preferences in this area is also extensive. Some students prefer getting to know other students when working and others prefer activities of a more informal character (EVA, 2021).

Youth research in Europa has recently showed that the mental well-being is significantly decreasing (Noemi, Pless, Gölich, Graversen, & Bank, 2021). Among young people in upper secondary schools and vocational education 3-11% experience being sad, irritable / in bad mood or nervous everyday (Jeppesen et al, 2020). Dissatisfaction among young people is linked to several structural and cultural development trends as possible reason for poor mental health particularly the increased performance culture and the educations system and perfection culture in youth life is highlighted (Hansen, Pedersen, Harrits, 2019; Låftmann, Almquist & Östberg, 2013; Pless,2022).

From an education perspective mental health amongst the youth is central because there is a link between mental challenges and the risk of not starting an education or dropping out (Jeppesen et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2011; Sellers et al., 2019). Therefore, the experience of feeling included in the study start and study climate becomes essential. As another study concludes, supporting community building for the students on VETs is central. This could be both communities of social and professional nature (DEA, 2022).

## NOTES ON CO-CREATION

Co-creation was decided upon as a methodological approach in the project DigiLives from the very beginning. Being that prevention of drop-out and developing tools to improving study start and study climate is the overall purpose of the project, it made sense to ask the number one stakeholder: The students. In research as well in educational settings there is a tendency to ask the students about their perception of the problems, be it drop-out or their general wellbeing (or the opposite), but rarely are they consulted when it comes to solutions to the problems. DigiLives sketched out a different approach. The development of the tools was to be taken on in a co-creation process involving students and staff together.

Let's take a quick glance at co-creation before carrying on. What is it, and why is co-creation relevant in an educational setting? The term 'co-creation' appears in relation to therapeutic work and anthropology. But the real breakthrough for the phenomenon co-creation emerges in product innovation, as described by Pralahad and Ramaswamy (2004) in their often-cited article about *interactive marketing*. In product development the effect of involving customers as co-creators is product relevance and increased sales. In education the effect may be slightly more abstract and difficult to measure one-to-one. However, co-creation or similar approaches such as *students-as-partners* (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten (2014) and *learner-led-approaches* (Iversen et al., 2015) is becoming increasingly popular. In a world characterized by exploding complexity and information over-load the ability to select, analyze and create knowledge becomes an imperative skill (Iversen & Stavnskær, 2017). Which again requires educational settings where students become active partners in learning processes and in the planning, framing and execution of education as well. And here the effect, as in product innovation, is relevance. And, equally important, students who can navigate the hyper complex, late modern (work)life.

Back to the project DigiLives, co-creation is embedded in the project design, the project progression as well as in the project results (IO's). In phase 1, a series of workshops are executed where Student Panels and staff co-create tools in accordance with the project purpose. As it turned out, the students were the primary creators. In phase 2, the outcome of the workshops is given a digital form which again is tested and evaluated by students and staff together in phase 3. Finally, the toolbox is tested and implemented at the participating VET's.

In another EU-funded project, CO-CREATE, the production of the IO's evolved around co-design as a methodological approach in higher education. However, in CO-CREATE, involving students as co-designers of education was limited to 'non-formal learning activities' defined by the EU Commission as *purposive but voluntary learning* (2023). In DigiLives co-creation or co-design constitutes a basic methodological approach in the project itself. The purpose is not, as in the project CO-CREATE to teach the students *about* co-creation as a professional skill, but to *involve* them in co-creating solutions to problems in which they are stakeholders. And – we might add – experts on. Hence DigiLives evolves around the student panels. They are at the center of the intellectual outputs and their perspective on the project objectives are paramount.

So, to sum up on co-creation as a methodological approach and to further the understanding of the term within the frames of the project DigiLives we define co-creation as *the collective creative process involving students and staff leading to the realization of the project IO's, and the active participation of students in*

*developing digital (and analogue) tools to preventing drop-out and improving study start and study climate in the partnering VETs. Which again points to the inner logic and the progression in the project, starting with asking for the student perspective, proceeding in a series of co-creation workshops, testing, and finally implementing the project result on the backdrop of student/teacher feedback.*

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We wanted the research part of the project (IO3) to reflect the overall co-creation approach as well. The baseline is constituted by a survey looking into the student perspective on the project scope: Study start and study climate. The survey is carried out before the workshops to make sure we get the student perspective 'uninfected' by the project content. It evolves around a series of questions with mainly open response categories. For instance: *What does it take for you, to feel good when starting at a new school?* The survey constitutes step one in the research design which mostly comprises qualitative approaches drawing inspiration from ethnographic methodology (Hviid Jacobsen & Jensen, 2018). Observation, and in some cases participatory observation, and structured dialogue in workshops compliments the survey. The research questions that both inform the research methodology, and the analysis, are: **1) What is the youth perspective on study start?** and **2) What is the youth perspective on study climate?** These two questions are based on the hypothesis that the students are the main informants on the way to building sufficient knowledge for the project to actually produce results that have an impact on drop-out rates and student wellbeing in the participating VET's. As such, the research is closely linked to the overall co-creation approach of the project. The research progression is:

### Step 1:

Investigating the student perspective on study start and study climate. Survey and preliminary analysis.  
Data consisting of: Survey 1

### Step 2:

Co-research. Two on-line workshops were set up with participation of student panels. The purpose was to qualify the survey result and give the student panels an opportunity to comment on selected findings from the survey.

Data consisting of: Observation notes & student produced content from workshops (IO3).

### Step 3:

Designing 2x1 hour process for workshops 2 & 4 (IO1) to broaden the student input to both the research part of the project and to the tool development part.

### Step 4:

Observation. On-line and on location observation of workshops (IO1 & IO2).

Data consisting of: Observation notes & student produced content from all workshops (IO1 & IO2).

### Step 5:

Analysis of data, forming the baseline and writing the Youth Perspective Report

The data analysis strategy draw inspiration from grounded theory (Watt Boolsen, 2010) although not conforming to the rigidity of this approach. In the analysis we look for patterns, going through the data repeatedly and comparing the survey answers to the workshop content. What deviates from the patterns and what is significant? We let the voices of the students stand out in an iterative approach for their input to be a guiding principle in both structure and content of analysis of the data.

Throughout the report there will be a number of direct quotations. They are all anonymous. When relevant the nationality and location of some data may occur. For instance, information about content produced by the student panels, or findings that are distinctly associated to location.

From the project start it was agreed upon that the project activities were to be carried out in English. It turned out that the students in the student panels for the most part speaks and writes English only to a limited degree (with some variation across the three VET countries). Consequently, both replying to the survey and participating in the workshops required translation back and forth from English to the mother tongues of the students. The task was taken on by the participating staff. This obstacle needs to be considered data wise as the translation both to and from Italian, French and Danish can involve some degree of interpretation. As researchers we cannot know to what extent the translation influences the data. In the cases where students did answer the survey without assistance of staff, their limited English skills may as well have put a limit to what they were capable of putting in writing, hence answering as well. A reservation which goes for parts of the workshops too. Also, due to a series of logistic obstacles fewer than planned (students) answered the survey. This concerns mainly the Danish students. The follow up workshops in research step 2 lacked participation of both Danish and French students, again due to logistics. Given that the project progression prevented us from repeating the survey and the follow up workshops the data set is slightly less representative than expected.

A couple of words on the student panels. They consist of students appointed by the VETs. The number of participants varies from 7 at one school to 12 or 13 at the other schools. The age varies between 15 and 31 years and the students attend vocational education in cooking, waiting, bakery, pastry, and ice-cream operating, tech high school, general high school, middle school, and other vocational training. About half the students are at the beginning of their education and the other half at second or third year. Some students live at a boarding school, others don't. From a research perspective this makes the student group inhomogeneous but despite this, we were still able to find converging student perspectives across nations and professions.

## ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION

The analysis will show that, not surprisingly, feeling welcomed and safe, being surrounded by friendly people, and feeling respected is of great importance to a majority of the students in the student panels in DigiLives. Again, building on the hypothesis that the student perspective on study start and study climate constitutes a platform for awareness and development, we would, however, like to stress that some factors such as socioeconomic, cultural, and personal factors could well be beyond the influence of the VETs. Hence participating at an education is more than attending school. Personal factors such as psychological wellbeing, personal preferences etc. influences the student's prerequisites for attending and completing the education. Adding to this the educational system is embedded in structural, societal, cultural, and everyday life factors (Leth, 2018). Which is to say that no matter how highly effective and thorough the methods and didactics in the schools may be, early school leaving as a phenomenon will continue being at stake for the years to come. That being said, we turn the attention towards the possible inspiration to enhancing student wellbeing, and hence preventing drop-out residing in the data material.

As announced in the methodology chapter the overall principle of the analysis is iterative. And by that we mean directed by the patterns that forms when reading the many answers in the survey and when studying the content produced by the student panels in the workshops (IO1, IO2, IO3). The analysis is organized in

four themes: 1. Starting at a new school, 2. Student-teacher relations, 3. The classroom, the teaching and beyond and 4. Socializing. Each headline represents main areas of interest, but they are interconnected to some degree and there may be some overlaps.

In the conclusion, we will be summing up on the four themes as an entity. Here you will also find tentative recommendations to the ongoing work with preventing drop-out and enhancing student wellbeing at the VETs.

## 1. STARTING AT A NEW SCHOOL

*For me, to feel good in a new school is to find people to be friends with, to be confident and to feel safe.*  
(Student)

According to the survey, one out of four students have NO good experiences from starting at a new school or education which of course accentuates the need for special attention towards study start. On the other hand, a majority of students have former positive experiences and when asked to describe these experiences they give a number of examples. Such as making friends at boarding school, being invited on a tour around the school while at the same time getting to know the other students, feeling comfortable when knowing somebody at school before study start, clear and simple information, not being picked on or bothered, being left alone, teachers presenting themselves in a pleasant way and presenting the subjects they are teaching, eating well or even sharing a meal with the teachers.

The survey answers to the question: What does it take for you to feel good when starting at a new school? can be divided into three areas or themes:

1. Communication and information
2. The staff and the other students
3. The physical environment

Frequently used expressions by the students are 'confidence' or 'feeling confident'. Starting at a new school evokes the need to feel confident, and depending on former experience and personality, building confidence is a challenge very different to each individual student. According to the survey answers, some confidence building measures can be taken by the schools. In theme 1. Communication and Information, the students call for information about where to be and what to do, so to speak. A tour around the school and digital maps is amongst the suggestion for getting acquainted with the school. Also, getting introduced to the teachers, the vocation, the school and maybe even the surrounding city in a proper way is highlighted by some students.

Not surprisingly, the staff and the other students stands out as the most important factor in study start. The teachers in particular plays an important role in the meeting and greeting phase as what you could call representatives of the school climate. Not only must their attitudes be welcoming, kind and open, but they should also facilitate the inclusion off all students in the classroom community from the very beginning. According to the students, that is: *To feel good when I start a new school, I would need teachers who help me join the class group and make me feel comfortable, without putting too much pressure on me.* Or, in the slightly different words of another student: *It takes that I have a comfortable classroom and a teacher that can help me with whatever I need and you start soon to meet some people and get to know them.* Getting

to know the other students can be challenging to some and several students state that knowing somebody at the school before starting can be an advantage.

Amongst the ideas generated by the student panels in workshop 1-4 several address the potential insecurity and vulnerability in the first encounters with other students. For instance, creating games for the students get to know each other, creating smaller teams of students with the same purpose and making small written or oral presentations, drawings, or acting/miming. Some suggest that elder students welcome new students, show them around the school and explain how things work. In addition, it is suggested that the elder students involve the new students in school or extracurricular activities. Also, digital approaches were suggested. Virtual spaces or apps where students could create a profile or an avatar and connect to each other based on shared interests or simply get to know each other in the virtual space as a supplement to and a safe(r) practice field for socializing in real life.

In theme 3, The Physical Environment, the school's general appearance and state of maintenance is mentioned as factors having influence on study start. School surroundings, proximity to a city and the possibility of staying in a boarding school close the VET are mentioned too. Especially the latter was pointed out as a positive factor in regard to building relations and feeling welcomed and included in the school community.

## 2. STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONS

*With the teachers of the school where I am now I find myself very well. They understand our needs and are able to understand our problems. They listen to us and they like to joke around, which is really fantastic.*  
(Student)

We wanted to know the student perspective on the student-teacher relation and on the teaching approaches or didactics if you may. In the survey we handled this topic by asking similar sounding but qualitatively different questions (see appendix 1 for the complete survey). For instance: How would you like to be met by the teachers, when starting at a new school? What does it take for you to feel good about the way the teacher(s) teaches? Can you describe what a good relation to a teacher is to you? And – as it would turn out – reflections on the teachers' role also came up in more open questions, such as: Other comments?

A frequently recurring student reply to how they would like to be met by the teachers is 'with respect'. Being met with a smile, with kindness, not to be criticized or demoralized from the start can be added, but also meeting teachers who show a genuine interest in getting to know the students on a more personal level or at least enough to help and support each student when needed: *They [the teachers] should know the students, understand how to approach them in the study, perhaps helping those who have difficulties in studying.*

Feeling supported by caring teachers who include you in the classroom community and engage in relations with the students in a both professional and personal way is significant to a great number of students. Whether it is expressed in joking around and laughing in the classroom, in showing a personal interest in the individual student or simply smiling and saying hello to the students when meeting them outside the classroom. But it is also a fine balance as other students prefer teachers to stick to the matter; *we're not here for a third-rate stand-up routine, but rather to learn.* Which is supported by research showing broad



diversity amongst students (EVA, 2021) and hence the wishes to teachers' performance and behavior can be expected to be broad as well.

As researchers we had the opportunity to observe interaction between staff and students (on-line and IRL) and these situations demonstrated the combination of formal/informal interaction between staff and students. Shared laughing, discussions and relaxed attitudes were predominant. Maybe a representation of what one student describes as *a positive state of mind between students and professors*.

However different they students may be in their attitudes towards socializing with the other students and the character of the teacher performance, all students express the need for settling in and finding their *points of reference*. For this to happen, the teachers have a key role in making the students feel understood and supported and in supplying adequate help when needed.

Maybe not surprisingly sharing meals plays a special role in the suggestions from the students, considering that a majority attends VET sections in catering, cooking, and serving. 'Integration meals', 'welcome meals', breakfast for students and teachers and similar activities with the purpose of integration, inclusion, and getting to know both the professional line of work and each other.

### 3. THE CLASSROOM, THE TEACHING AND BEYOND

*A good teacher is someone who search to pass a knowledge and not to just write lessons on the board. A bad teacher does not invest himself, he does not truly care for the students and just spit out what the school program says.*

(Student)

To answer the question about study climate one must understand that the study climate consists of several aspects. *Students and teacher relationship*, which is answered in chapter 2, and the interaction *between the students themselves* which will be answered separately in chapter 4. This chapter examines the part of the study climate focusing on the didactic choices of the teacher, the classrooms' interior design, and co-creation as an approach basic in the project as well as suggested by the students as a way of improving the study climate.

#### THE DIDACTIC CHOICES OF THE TEACHER

The student quote at the top of this chapter demonstrates how answering the questions in the survey often turn into instructive dos and don'ts from the students to the teachers. In this case the student distinguishes between 'passing knowledge' and 'just writing lessons on the board'. When put together with the following sentences one possible interpretation is that there is to categories of teachers: Those who invest both themselves and their knowledge and those who deliver a depersonalized more mechanic performance. In another essentially similar quote, a student calls for a combination of *professionalism* and *drive* in the ideal teacher. All characteristics which reside in a space outside the formal frames of education and teaching. A space where the teacher relates to the students on a personal level and becomes more than just a mediator of curricula. Many students point to this informal extracurricular level as a central aspect of the teaching. An aspect most teachers can be assumed to aware of but may somehow underestimate the importance of the formal character of student-teacher relations taken into consideration.

If we take a closer look at the activities in the classrooms and labs many students express a need for clear instructions and an overview of school activities. This goes for both general information, and the day to

day, hour to hour agendas: Where to be, what to do and how the elements in teaching and curriculum are interconnected and organized. In line with this, students also request that the teachers communicate their expectations to the students clearly: *That they tell us what they expect from us* which calls for a mutual exchange and alignment of expectations between students and teachers. As the culture changes it is highly likely that the expectations will need adjustment and hence to be communicated and negotiated.

Among other dos and don'ts in the survey, there are several reflections on the pace of the teaching. This student, for instance, prefers a steady pace: *when we are taking things slow* and other students stress the importance of being able to ask questions without being ridiculed or looked down at. Also, the teacher should, again according to the students, take the responsibility of creating a safe study climate where students can feel comfortable and build confidence: *Make sure that the students feel comfortable and confident* although without giving more precise instructions as how to do this.

Another quite distinct tendency among the student replies is a call for being seen and met as an individual human being and not just one in an anonymous group of students. For instance, teachers are recommended to take an interest in the personal lives of the students: *The curiosity to discover stuff about our personal life and our personal issues. It shows a will to consider us as individuals and not only the group entity.* Which shows that this student is willing to share private information with the teachers and form a close bond with them to make the study climate safe. And which also points to an overall awareness on how cultural changes also may affect the circumstances in which education and teaching is carried out. What used to be formal and to some degree distanced relations may move in a more personal or even private direction. Not all teachers (or students for that sake) may feel comfortable with that.

One student delivers this extensive summary of what a good study climate can be for them: *For me, having a good relationship with a teacher means that I don't feel shy if I want to ask questions during a lesson, it means being able to have moments where you laugh and joke but then go back to studying. It means that if the class needs five minutes to relax because they are tired (perhaps after some heavy lessons), the teacher allows it, so that later the students are more attentive to her lesson and what she teaches. These are just some examples and I think there are some teachers like that.* Apart from giving an indication of the degree of awareness requested from the teacher, it is worth paying attention to the finishing sentence: *That there are teachers like this. But some, are we left to assume, are not.* Given the great diversity amongst the students as expressed in the data, finding the right path is not an easy task to take on for the teachers. But some advice is obvious. For instance, in this student's answer to how they would like to be met by the teacher: *Not starting by demoralize the students, I need them to be positive and not criticize me because I failed, nor with arrogance, with kindness.* Although obvious this quote may also reflect that not all school and teaching experiences are good experiences.

#### THE CLASSROOM INTERIOR DESIGN

In workshop 4, the students were to design the interior of the classroom. A spontaneous comment from one of the students was *places with quietness – where you can sit alone or two and two, couches.* Others agreed on the quietness. In the process of creating the classroom, several opportunities were discussed, and the students argued for their ideas. One group agreed on a door to the common garden to which they only have windows at present. They would like to be able to get fresh air between the classes and use the outer space as a group room. Similar suggestions came up in another workshop but instead of access to gardens the students suggested green plants in the classroom to help create a more relaxing atmosphere.

Three out of four groups of students created a flexible classroom with a section in the end of the room or at the side of the room with couches. The section would be divided by a whiteboard on a rolling table that

makes it possible to divide the room into two smaller sections and allow for both smaller groups and the whole class to be together at the same time. Another suggestion was to divide the section with an Aquarium which could also serve as a shared project for the class to take care of the fishes. Flexibility wise chairs with wheels was suggested by one group. All groups included spaces for social activities, for instance with electronic devices and analogue games available, in their designs and several mentioned sustainability as a factor in classroom interior.

Some groups keep the traditional horseshoe formation for the more classic teaching situations and argues that this formation make it possible for the students to look each other in the eyes and thereby creating a friendly atmosphere. Among other design features were a refrigerator for the lunch box, a water dispenser, wireless chargers, a printer, pictures of the classmates and a large table for eating breakfast.

A recent Danish research report (DEA, 2022) on the physical environment's impact on the study climate at VET schools recommends *flexible room both to teaching, workshops, and leisure time in the same room* which is completely in line with the results from our research. They also conclude that the students at VET schools are very diverse due to all the different professional specializations. During study start the new students and *lack local anchoring... New students move around without same directionality as experienced learners and need clues that communicate clearly to them to take the school as their place.* (DEA, 2023, p. 5). An analysis that resonates with the findings in DigiLives where the students stress the need for points of reference and for clear guidance when it comes to where to be and what to do during the day.

Generally speaking, involving the students in creating spaces for both socializing and teaching could be a way of improving the study climate and making the students feel included and seen.

#### THE STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS

In the survey some respondents suggest that inviting students to take part in designing, and deciding on, school activities, and thus becoming co-creators of school stuff, is a possible way of improving the study climate. A group of students elaborated on this theme in one of the follow up on-line workshops. Among the things students could be involved in deciding was, according to the panel, school rule decisions and school activities in general. Also, students could be involved in discussions and decisions about where and what to improve at the school; *being involved about what is needed in the school to improve it.* This suggestion was agreed upon by a majority of the students in one of two workshops; *involve students in the school decision making process, for example by creating a student committee, letting them suggest new activities.*

During the different project activities in all three partnering VETs both students and teachers have acknowledged the qualities of involving students more directly. In one case a teacher shared the reflection that the project approach and activities had inspired more and further discussions between students and teachers about other aspects of school life and thus allowing him as a teacher to understand a broader student perspective. In another case a student panel expressed appreciation of being asked about their perspective on the school life. The many ideas and input from the student panels in DigiLives suggest that there is a wealth of inspiration to be discovered when involving the students in school development. And this goes for measures taken to prevent school drop-out as well.

#### 4. SOCIALIZING

Some find socializing easy and enjoyable; *It doesn't take much for me to feel good, as long as I'm interested in them and they're interested in me*, and others not so much. As demonstrated here in an answer given to the question "What does it take for you to feel good in a group of new people": *I don't*. A surprising number of students identify as 'introverts': *Many introverts like myself will need time to adjust to new people, figure out who they want to spend time and resources on and who aren't worth the effort*. To some students, getting to know the classmates can be stressful and requires 'facilitation'; *I need to spend time doing something with these people, the activity will help to create the link*. Some students are, in their own words, *not used to getting to know new people* and tend to 'isolate themselves' unless active steps are taken by either staff or fellow students to include them in the group: *To feel good when I start a new school, I would need teachers who help me join the class group and make me feel comfortable, without putting too much pressure on me*.

As described above parts of workshops 2 and 4 were designed for research purposes. In workshop 2 the student panels were asked to develop student typologies based on a broad selection of student statements from the survey. Although this exercise was difficult to some students and others never got to the typology part of the exercise due to time limitations, the student panel in one of the participating VET's produced two typologies. Typology 1 comprises of three profiles. Here quoted from the panel reply:

- 1. First profile: this is an extroverted student who is not afraid to relate to others but needs time, the support of the teacher and above all of his peers. This student is sociable but needs to feel welcome*
- 2. Second profile: this is an introverted student who has difficulty getting along with new people, needs to feel involved not to feel too much conflict*
- 3. Third profile: a student who has difficulty in studying, learning, needs to go slowly and has the support of the teacher*

Typology 2 also has the distinction between extrovert and introvert and adds two primarily character-based categories and the 'generic':

- The introvert: Is selective about who she/he/they socializes with and might need teacher's assistance to feel included*
- The extrovert: Is a get-to-know-other-people-right-away type who enjoys social games and socializing*
- The shy: Takes time to feel included and prefer being invited to socializing*
- The mistrustful: Doesn't feel comfortable around new people*
- Generic: Would like information about the school, friendly people and classmates and not to feel judged*

Being, as they are, developed based on statements from the survey, both the typologies reflect general tendencies amongst the survey replies. However, what stands out in the typologies as opposed to the survey, is the introvert-extrovert distinction as a basic principle in student characteristics. It is a common presumption that about half the population of any nationality is introvert and the other half extrovert. The distinction was developed by C.G. Jung (Jung, 1921) to describe orientations of personality, and a third category, ambiverts, has been added leading up to the present time. Although not so commonly used, the ambivert personality may be the most frequent; "pronounced introversion and pronounced extroversion merely represents extremes of behavior, connected by continuous gradations. In other words, the evidence points to a single mixed type, rather than two sharply separated classes" (Heidbreder, 1926, p. 123).

But why focus on these categories? Based on the data, a higher amount of the participating students characterizes themselves as introverts compared to an average population. In the workshops, two out of three national students panels expressed the shared opinion that they were all introverts. A finding which is substantiated in the survey by a relatively high number of statements that express characteristics and emotions commonly related to the introvert personality. For instance, a preference of small groups over large, the preference of calm and quiet over hullabaloo and a tendency to be socially reluctant. Note also that three out of five types in the above Typology 2 displays characteristics usually ascribed to the introvert personality. Though some caution must be applied in generalizing based on such a small number of respondents, this finding is worth paying attention to and putting to use for instance when planning study start and other social activities to also include the introverts. There may be a need for more facilitation and teacher or mentor presence than the average get-together activity offers. In other words, putting the students in random groups and sending them off on their own to have fun, may not be the optimal all-including approach. Adding to this that there is an increasing number of youth suffering from social anxiety, the frames and logistics around socializing at the schools is worthwhile paying attention to. In workshop 4, one student panel produced the following input to the physical and virtual environment at their VET:

*A room designed with the intention of bettering group work, eg. Whiteboards, tables, chairs and enclosed area; preferably with curtains/blinds (...) Improved work premises where you can work privately. This would make it easier for students with social anxiety to work and come up with ideas (especially in a class like this, where we are all introvert persons) The possibility to have private chatrooms.*

But aside from the introvert-extrovert significance in findings, living at a boarding school seems to have a positive influence on the students experiencing belonging and inclusion. Especially in one of the VETs the students attribute the boarding school life quickly getting to know other students, making friends, and feeling welcomed. Another positive aspect of boarding school came up one morning in on location workshop observation. When the workshop was about to begin, one student was missing. The teacher excused himself, and a while later the student turned up and after him the teacher with coffee and breakfast for the student. It turned out the student lived at a boarding school close by and the teacher had extended him the service and kindness of waking him up and buying him breakfast. In both examples the boarding schools enables inclusion, either by offering frames for socializing amongst the students, or between teacher and student in an informal but study supporting way.

## CONCLUSION AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

*It takes that I have a comfortable classroom and a teacher that can help me with whatever I need, and you start soon to meet some new people and get to know them.*

(Student)

### STARTING AT A NEW SCHOOL

Starting at a new school is a potentially scary business to a great number of students. According to the data, meeting new teachers and meeting the other students requires a whole lot of confidence. One out of four students have not had any good experiences at starting at a new school. Which of course support the DigiLives focus on study start as an issue of great importance when it comes to preventing drop-out. Hence, supporting the students in building confidence must be given high priority.

It may appear logical but if you imagine going to a new school for the very first time. What would you need to feel confident? Well, according to the students: Information. About the school, about where to go, who to meet, what to expect, what is expected and other basic things. Some of the students call this 'points of reference'. And secondly: Being met by kind, smiling, and sincerely interested teachers with a capability of making the students feeling both safe and seen as individuals. Thirdly: Meeting the other students and getting to know them. And, in this relation building being able to find other students you resonate with. Being potentially scaring to a high number of students, this initial relation building between students may require more facilitation than many schools offer at the present.

- It is recommended that the schools take measures to welcome each individual student given that there is great diversity amongst the students. Elder students can be involved in study start activities as mentors.
- It is recommended that study start activities accommodate and take into consideration the individual diversity amongst the students (see also 'Socializing' below)
- Information is paramount. It is recommended to provide maps, instructions, guidance of all sorts – be it digital or analogue. Better too much than too little given the student diversity.
- It is recommended that the teachers meet the students, present themselves and help the students form the initial overview of what is to come.

### STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONS

Especially three words are frequently represented in the data when it comes to how students would like to be met by the teachers: Respect, kindness, support. Given the great diversity amongst the students, supporting the individual student requires a variety of approaches. A significant number of students use the expressions 'respect' and 'mutual respect' when describing the ideal relation between students and teachers. But also, kindness as a basic approach is mentioned by many.

The ideal relation between students and teachers is, according to a great many students, a combination of professional and personal. The students want to be seen as individuals and at the same time they want their teachers to be both professional and personal in relating to the students. For instance, simply being met with a smile outside the classrooms and labs, sharing meals with the teachers or laughing and joking around in the classroom. You could say that the ideal relation according to the students resides in between professional and personal, formal and informal.

- It is recommended to integrate personal skills and 'bildung' in the curriculum and thereby helping the students in constructing an individually fitted new professional identity.
- Paying attention to basic human behavior and basic emotional needs in student-teacher relations is recommended. Note that all relations are mutual and therefore the requirement goes both ways. It is recommended that the teachers incorporate an awareness of the personal aspects of teaching in their professional approach.

## THE CLASSROOM THE TEACHING AND BEYOND

### THE DIDACTIC CHOICES OF THE TEACHER

The professional-personal, formal-informal theme also appears when it comes to the didactic choices of the teachers. And another combination of terms can be added to that: Professionalism and drive. Students prefer teachers who 'invest' themselves. A somewhat abstract request open for interpretation and further investigation.

Another significant tendency in the student perspective is a need for information on all levels – knowing where to be and what to do: During school days, in the classes and in general. Teachers making it clear to the students what they are supposed to do, what is expected from them, and see through plans and schedules. The students themselves are aware of the great diversity amongst them and the general advice from the students to the teachers is to make sure that nobody is left behind.

- It is recommended that the schools provide easy access to information at all levels. Regarding what kinds of information and which channels of communication would be optimal it is recommended to involve the students as co-creators.
- It is recommended to develop and implement feedback tools.
- It is recommended that the schools integrate personal skill building in the curriculum.
- It is recommended that school activities include both plenary activity and group activities.

### THE CLASSROOM INTERIOR DESIGN

When it comes to the physical frames of the VETs the students suggest rooms that are flexible and personal. The classroom designs created by the student panels resonate with the findings in the other data: They want to be seen and met as individuals and points of reference is of great importance. Also, building confidence and constructing a school identity is associated with the physical frames of the schools. The

basic need for feeling a sense of belonging can be either met or not met by the school environment and a personalized classroom can become both a point of reference and an identity creating space, combining social and professional aspects of school life. And thus become an 'inclusion creator'.

- It is recommended to pay attention to how the VET schools' physical spaces can be used as means to inclusion and student wellbeing.

#### THE STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS

Both students and teachers are positive towards involving students in school decision making. The many ideas from the student panels indicate that there is inspiration to be found in the student perspective. In general, and when it comes to the DigiLives focus: Inclusion and preventing drop-out. When regarding the students as experts at their own school commitment and hence involving them in creating drop-out prevention strategies, presumably the chance of success is enhanced.

- Based on the students being experts in their own school life it is recommended to invite them to being co-creators of school development and decision making in areas relevant to student school experience. This also being a more general recommendation given that the students have the inside access to youth culture and as such are obvious experts and primary stakeholders in education.

#### SOCIALIZING

Based on both the survey and the workshops a higher number of students identify themselves as introverts than could be expected in an average population. The introvert-extrovert theme is brought up by the students themselves suggesting that this particular kind of diversity is worth paying attention to. Looking at the usual approaches to study start, many schools arrange a vast amount of standard social activities where the students are on their own in different games and other activities 'having fun'. These kinds of activities may be scary stuff for a whole lot of students and thus preventing them from feeling included.

- It is recommended that the VETs facilitate social activities between students at study start as well as in general that accommodate both the introvert and the extrovert students. Facilitation meaning guiding and helping the students in relation building and offering adequate diverse tools and approaches.

Data point to boarding schools as an inclusion enhancer. Here the students get to meet each other under private circumstances and the proximity of the school make it possible for teachers to support students in their daily school life. Not all VETs have boarding schools and far from all students attend boarding school. But maybe there is still some inspiration to gather from the boarding schools. For instance: Is it possible to extract some principles from the boarding school experience and add these principles to the VET schools in general? We leave the answers to the VETs.

- Boarding schools represent a positive factor when it comes to both study start and study climate. It is recommended that the VETs extract some principles from boarding school life and add these principles to the general VET school practice.



To sum up the conclusion and the Youth Perspective Report there is a great source of inspiration to be found in asking the students about their perspectives on their everyday school life. And across nationality they are very positive towards being involved in development and decision making at the schools. We hope this report can serve as inspiration at the partnering VETs as well as at VET schools across Europe.

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