

## Study of activities from a study visit in Latvia November 6 - November 10, 2017

There were six goals that I set up during my study visit to Latvia:

- First, to exchange experiences with other participants.
- Secondly, to observe good pedagogical practices used by Latvian school teachers.
- Thirdly, to examine how students are doing their homework and whether this is a problem in schools in this country.
- Another problem to investigate was to see how schools are managed by directors.
- The fifth problem was to examine the environment in which schools function and the role of external institutions in the school's life.
- The last problem that I wanted to study was the education system in Latvia.

During my stay in Latvia, I had many opportunities to talk to teachers about their experiences in working with both talented students as well as with those who have learning difficulties. Because I work in an integration school, I was particularly interested in it. In the schools in which we stayed, I did not notice special integration classes as it is in my school. Teachers just work on lessons with all students. Perhaps it is also due to the different nature of work in a big city school as well as in a small town school - Gulbene Secondary School No.2 and in the village - Lizums Secondary School where classes are not too numerous. As for the observed fragments of the lessons in the schools in which we hosted, I noticed that students like to work in groups, which is of course also practiced in Polish schools. I noticed that students like working in small groups. It is similar in my school, although not all teachers appreciate this way of working with students, especially when it comes to including students with special educational needs in the group. For sure, this way of working brings good results both in teaching and in the adaptation of students with various problems. From conversations with school teachers in Gulbene and Lizums, I learned that their students like to work in groups, help each other, share skills and knowledge because they share a common responsibility - they feel safe, which in the case of my students in integration classes has a special meaning. With regard to the next problem, ie the issue of homework, I did not notice any special differences between our countries. Homework students try to do their homework after school with the help of their parents and teachers check them at the beginning of the lesson. Polish parents are convinced that pupils have too much work at home in relation to the tasks assigned to be carried out by teachers, but similar problems occur in many countries, which was confirmed by my study visit in Latvia.

The role of the director in the two Latvian schools being observed is similar to that in my school. The overall climate of the school depends on the head of the educational institution, which was confirmed by my observations. There was a warm and friendly relationship between the pedagogical team and the director. In this case, my previous experience has been confirmed as an important task of the school's director is to care for the proper atmosphere of the school and interpersonal relations. Of course, I am aware that every person has a different personality, but some activities for interpersonal relationships at school are of a supranational nature. School is a special place of work and the environment in which a child resides is of great importance.

Regarding the next item of my previous observation plans for the Latvian school or the environment around the school, I must admit that the teachers use extensively the external institutions to enrich and diversify the offer of school activities. I had the opportunity to observe, but also talk during visits to the cheese factory and confectionery factory as well as in the Museum cooperating with the school and the Youth Center. Students can observe the production of regional products and then choose their future profession. In Polish schools, such a system has not existed for many years. It is worth transferring the experience of Latvian school teachers to the use of companies and workplaces in the future elections of the students' professions in relation to the subsequent levels of their education. An interesting idea that I saw during the study visit is the participation of students in charity activities in their environment. Young people get involved in community work (for example cleaning the park, planting trees). They work with parents in schools - workshops for parents to build a community. Personally, we had the opportunity to make small items of everyday use, which are a permanent element of these workshops. From conversations with students and teachers, I could conclude that parents like this activity very much. Volunteering, which is, as I have seen, a permanent element of the school's work, is to help students choose their future educational career. Students can receive certificates that will help them to get to university. It was evident in the Latvian schools visited that directors and teachers at schools engage students in community work and motivate them to do so. They show how important social bonds are, that building and maintaining them helps every member of society. The education system in Latvia, as in other countries participating in our project "Culture of Learning" is obviously different than in my country. The Polish experience of the last twenty years is the most positive - the primary school system, junior high school and then upper secondary schools proved themselves in practice but unfortunately, politicians decided to make changes, hence the Polish school is in the next rebuilding of the education system.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, my study visit in Latvia allowed me to compare the education of our countries as well as to gather experience but on the practical side some teachers could take some interesting ideas to transfer my teachers to the Polish school. Here, the following ideas merit particular distinction:

- systematic work of pupils in small groups with special emphasis on students with special educational needs
- convincing my students 'parents that homework is a very important element of reinforcing students' knowledge and skills
- cooperation between the school and the environment, especially in relation to showing companies and workplaces located in the local environment to help students choose their future profession
- the role of volunteering in the life of the school, especially since it is one of the current priorities of the educational policy of our country

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