



Daphne: Youth and inter-Ethnic
Schools



DAPHNE programme: Youth and inter-Ethnic schools (YiES)

REPORT ON FIELD RESEARCH IN LATVIA

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1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to present and analyse the information collected in the field research phase of the EU DAPHNE programme *Youth and inter-Ethnic schools (YiES)* in order to identify the existing good practices in managing conflicts and ethnic and cultural diversity and conflict solving in schools in Latvia.

At first, the system of education in general as well as the stages of education concerning the age group of pupils in question will be shortly described. The ethnic background of pupils in schools as well as and the main tendencies concerning ethnic diversity in schools will be looked at. The selection criteria, the way of developing contacts in the schools participating in the project, and as well as the research methods applied will be described afterwards.

After that, a brief description based on the research results of the schools studied is also included, composed of the basic statistical data, an overview of the intercultural activities of the schools and the general evaluation of presence of interethnic conflicts at school. It is followed by description of the common features of the conflicts in schools and a general perception of ethnic and cultural diversity. Finally, the good practises in managing diversity and preventing and solving conflicts are described. In addition, a couple of other experiences that could not be directly identified as being good practice, though having features relevant to promoting multiculturalism, are described.

Hopefully the practices – tools and strategies to promote multiculturalism and prevent intercultural conflicts – will be applicable also in different contexts in Latvia and in other EU countries.

2. Education System and Ethnic Diversity in Latvia

The comprehensive education in Latvia is provided by schools with Latvian as the language of instruction, and schools implementing different models of bilingual minority education programmes¹.

Until 1995 two systems of schools actually existed: education institutions with Latvian as the language of instruction, and education institutions with the Russian as the language of instruction. From 1990 till 1992 the first other ethnic minority schools (Riga Polish Secondary School, Riga Ukrainian Secondary School, Daugavpils Polish Secondary School) and classes (with Lithuanian, Estonian, Roma being as one of the two languages of instruction) were established.

In the period of 1999-2004 bilingual education reform was implemented in Latvia, establishing the models, tools and approaches for use of the official language and minority languages in curricula and the teaching process. In 1999 implementation of education programmes for ethnic minorities was introduced, determining the use of Latvian and ethnic minority's languages for the acquisition of curriculum. Transition to bilingual approach in teaching and learning has been commenced in basic education, setting a 3 year transitional stage. In 2004 it has been envisaged to commence the implementation of the requirements set by the state in class 10 (i.e. up to 60% of the total curriculum of general secondary education must be acquired in the state language in the education programmes for ethnic minorities), setting a 3 year transitional stage.

Today government-financed bilingual education in Latvia is offered in eight minority languages – Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Roma and Belarusian. In 2004/2005, there were 724 schools in Latvia in which classes were taught in Latvian, 155 schools where classes were taught in Russian (a bilingual education programme is being offered in those schools), and 108 schools where classes were taught in Latvian and in Russian (dual flow schools where education programmes in both Latvian and minority languages are implemented).

Over the last 10 years, there has been an increase in demand for an education in Latvian, and there has been a correspondingly lower level of demand for an education in Russian. The formation of minority schools other than Russian certainly also contributed. In 2003/2004, 74.4% of preschool children began their studies in Latvian, and in the 2004/2005 school year that percentage was up to 75.2%. This is mostly because non-Latvian parents increasingly want their children to have an education which will later offer them greater opportunities to study at the university level and to become more competitive in the labour market. To

¹ For more detailed information on the application of bilingual education models in minority education institutions see "*Desk research*".

some extent this can be seen as creating some extra burden for the teachers in schools with Latvian as the language of instruction.

This research project had its focus on schools in Riga, as it is the largest and ethnically the most diverse administrative territory in Latvia².

Schools with Russian as the language of instruction exhibit a higher ethnic diversity. According to the statistical data of Latvia Ministry of Education, in 2004/2005 academic year in Riga, 89% of students in schools with Latvian as the language of instruction were of Latvian origin, and in minority education schools with Russian as the main language of instruction 72% of students were Russian by origin. 11% of students in schools with Latvian as the language of instruction and 28% of students in schools with Russian as the language of instruction were respectively of another ethnic background (Russian ethnic group being the second largest in schools with Latvian instruction language (4%), and Latvians (12%), Byelorussians (4%), Poles (3%) and Ukrainians (3%) being the largest ethnic groups in minority education schools with Russian as the main language of instruction).

The schools having participated in integration and civic issues oriented projects were chosen for participation in the project. Schools with Latvian as the language of instruction and that of the largest minority schools with Russian as instruction language were asked to participate. Different suburbs of Riga were also represented, and the size of the school was also taken into the consideration.

Schools with Latvian language of instruction and minority schools with Russian as one of the languages (that are now the largest minority school group), represent features characteristic to some extent to the former organization of education in 2 systems – Latvian and Russian, representing in a way the major ethnic and linguistic groups in Latvia, and they are also manifesting some of the basic attitudes characteristic to these groups. Traditionally, schools with Russian as the main language of instruction have been providing somehow more ‘international’ education in Russian for those not speaking the national language; while schools with Latvian as the language of instruction have traditionally been more oriented towards the national language, culture and such aspects.

These schools have traditionally different ethnic and linguistic structure of pupils, and partially also, as the previous research projects show³ there is a slight difference

² See Desk research for more information on the ethnic composition of the pupils in schools in Riga and Latvia.

³ Since 1999 several studies on education reforms and problems of ethnic conflicts have been carried out by the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. See www.biss.soc.lv.

in the issues and attitudes considered important issues, for example, the bilingual education reform.

2. Case selection

In order to find the good practices of managing intercultural diversity in schools, plausible criteria were to be found for choosing the schools.

2.1. Criteria for selection

Based on the information collected for the *YiES Desk research Latvia*, it was concluded to select 5 schools in Riga being active in projects oriented towards civic and ethnic integration. Research cases were chosen among the schools which in past few years have taken membership in *State Society Integration Foundation* school cooperation program “Ethnic integration program” E.2 (subprogram: „Support to school cooperation”) and project “Open school” administered and supported by the *Soros Foundation Latvia*. Participation in the projects hence was criteria indicating that the schools are aware of issues related to ethnic and cultural diversity.

The other criteria for selection were the language of instruction for a school, the dominant nationality of the pupils, and the location of the school. Three of the schools had Russian as the main language of instruction, 2 had Latvian. Three of the schools could be considered large judging by the number of students, 2 were of average size.

2.2. Contacting the Selected Schools

The school principals were first contacted by sending letters of information on the project by fax. Information included short description of the project, its aims as well as the research activities planned. The school headmaster was contacted on the phone, and the first interview was conducted. All the contacted schools eventually agreed to participate.

Afterwards the headmaster nominated further contact persons responsible for help with organizing the interviews and focus groups. Further on the organisational aspects were discussed with the nominated persons. The contacts were kept with the schools throughout the whole field research period, November 2005-February 2006. Usually the schools were visited for several times - separately for each interview or focus group in order to adapt to the school routine and schedule, only in a couple of times two interviews were made at the same visit. The benefit of this approach was flexibility to adapt to the school life and to an appropriate time for

respondents, but the problem might be that the interviews were made in the middle of a usual working day, and the people were not specially prepared for the visit of the researcher.

In general schools were cooperative throughout the whole field research, taking into the consideration that they had to devote considerable time and effort to meet the goals of the project.

3. Methodology

Qualitative research and data analysis methods were applied: in depth interviews with the school personnel specified in the project guidelines and focus group discussions with pupils and teachers.

3.1. In-depth interviews

Most of the interviews were conducted during the November-December 2005. Interviews were conducted with 5 school principals, 5 teachers (working with the pupils in the age group of 13-16, and in Latvia thus studying in classes 6-9), 5 social pedagogues, and 5 representatives of parents (of which 1 was also a teacher and 1 was working for the school as an accountant) were conducted.

In each school, an in-depth interview was first conducted with the school headmaster. After the interviews with other school personnel were made, and finally the representatives of the parents were interviewed.

The interviews with the school personnel were done in the school premises, i.e., their working environment. As the interviews were mostly about the events and issues in school settings, it was good, though as the interviews were held during the working hours, there were some cases when they were delayed or interrupted, even though the interview time was scheduled before.

In general, the interviews were held in the office of the person, so most of the interruptions were cases of a phone call or some occasional visitor, and they were not long, except for 2 cases when the interviews with the social pedagogue were interrupted by an unexpected visitor, and the break lasted for approximately 15 minutes.

Interviews with the representatives of the parents were also held at school premises after the regular working hours except for one case when the office of the researcher was a more appropriate place for an interview.

The basic questions asked in the interviews followed the outline provided by the *Cras Onlus*, though some were adapted slightly to suit the national situation and

education system better. The average length of interviews was around 45 minutes, though the difference was between 35 to 90 minutes.

The interview guidelines for teachers and representatives of parents after adaptation from English to Latvian were afterwards translated into Russian. The school headmaster, teachers and social pedagogues irrespective of their native language and language of instruction in school should have a definite level of knowledge of Latvian, though it was supposed that for some it would be easier to express their thoughts and attitudes in Russian.

In schools with Latvian language of instruction all interviews were conducted in Latvian. In the 3 minority schools with bilingual education in Russian and Latvian, 6 of the interviews were made in Latvian, 4 of the interviews were conducted in Russian (3 interviews with parents and one with a social pedagogue who preferred to talk in Russian); in 2 other interviews (with school headmasters) some of the answers were given both in Latvian and in Russian.

In the interviews, issues of diversity of cultures, managing intercultural difference, and conflict solving and prevention were discussed. Other issues brought up by the interviewees were issues related to the use of languages, bilingual education reform and its results and political aspects of ethnic integration in Latvia. All the interviewees were very positive about the school, the pupils, educational achievements and school atmosphere. Most of the interviewees shared also willingness to facilitate a higher involvement and interest of parents in the schooling process.

3.2. Focus groups

Following the project requirements, 15 focus group discussions were conducted, of which 5 were with students, 5 with teachers and 5 were mixed groups with teachers and pupils participating. All the groups took place in school settings, usually in a class-room that had been rearranged to suit better the discussion.

Most of the discussions were conducted in January-February 2006. First, the discussions with pupils were arranged, usually, by the help of a teacher, and then the discussions with teachers and, finally, mixed pupil-teacher groups were arranged. The language of the focus group discussion was Latvian in schools with Latvian as the language of instruction, and was agreed upon in the schools with Russian as one of the languages of instruction: discussions with pupils and mixed pupil-teacher groups were conducted in Russian, but teachers could choose between the discussion in Latvian, Russian or partially in Latvian and Russian when the

questions are asked in both languages and also answers are accepted in both languages.

The basic questions for the discussions followed the general aim of the research project, and were oriented towards raising a discussion on emergence of conflicts, conflict solving, and multiculturalism in school settings and in society in general. The questions in general were the same for all the discussions except for some minor differences. For the mixed group discussions emphasis was put on the issues identified and discussed earlier in the pupils' focus group discussions or teachers' focus group discussions. The average length of a focus group was around 50-55 minutes, though the difference was between 45 to 90 minutes.

The pupils' focus groups were usually organised during the hours of regular classes, usually during the time dedicated for civic and social education. In the focus groups 9-10 pupils from classes 7 and 8 (usually from the same class) participated. 3 of the groups were held in Russian, 2 were held in Latvian. The group discussion took place in a separate room; no teacher was present in the discussion.

Most important issues discussed were those related to the diversity of cultures and experience with conflicts with other pupils and teachers. Mostly conflicts with teachers and interethnic conflicts outside the school were discussed, less eagerly pupils discussed conflicts with other pupils. Also issues of interethnic relationships were touched upon. In the minority schools, pupils were eager to talk also about the benefits and drawbacks of the bilingual education.

The teachers' focus groups were organised after the classes. Teachers working mostly with pupils in the age groups of interest (13-16) were asked to participate in the groups. On average, 5-7 teachers participated in the focus group discussion. As the teachers in minority schools are supposed to know Latvian well and expressed interest to discuss in Latvian, the group in general was moderated in Latvian, though in some cases also Russian was used by the teachers to express some more sophisticated and complex ideas.

Most important issues common for the focus groups with teachers, as in those with students, were related to the multicultural events in school. When talking about the conflicts, these were mostly depicted as being minor and short term arguments among pupils and arguments about marks and dress-code with pupils. Linguistic competences and bilingual education of students were also important issues discussed in focus groups.

The heterogeneous focus groups with teachers and students participating were also usually organised after the classes, as the teachers and pupils were in general

available there. Usually 3-4 teachers and 3-4 students participated in the group discussion. The language of discussion was Latvian in the 2 schools with Latvian as the language of instruction, and Russian in the 3 schools implementing bilingual education.

The heterogeneous focus groups were not a very effective method in Latvia, because teachers seemed to be more dominating the discussion even though without intention to do so. Therefore in future to avoid the uneasiness of pupils and teachers participating in this kind of discussion, we suggest implementing only homogeneous focus groups.

4. Five different schools

The description of the schools is based on the documents, statistical information as well as information obtained in the interviews and focus group discussions. Most of the schools are located in residential areas, some having a longer history (up to 60 years); some have been established not so long ago (20-30 years ago). In all the schools pupils mostly come from the local neighbourhood, though in all of them there is a proportion of pupils that due to different reasons are coming from other places.

As the criteria for choosing schools were based on participation in projects related to civic and ethnic integration activities, all schools have had some experience in organising events related to diversity of cultures.

4.1. Medium-size School with Latvian Language of Instruction

The school is located in a formerly industrially active suburb of Riga, surrounded by a local residential area. There are other schools in the neighbourhood, implementing bilingual education programme or other.

In general, the environment where the school is located is considered as safe and good by the pupils and the school personnel. The school takes part in different community related activities; some of the school projects are oriented towards further cooperation with the neighbouring schools and involvement in other community related activities. However, some pupils and teachers refer to the environment being 'Russian', sometimes unfriendly, vulnerable, and even dangerous.

Outside the school, as I have heard from pupils in my class, it often happens that older Russian boys ask them to give away their money, and then they give it for the sake of peace. (Teacher)

To escape from problems, the main entrance doors of the school are usually locked during the hours of regular classes, and in order to enter or exit the school during

the class, the students' card has to be showed to the guard. This is reflected with some jokes from the pupils, though they perceive there are possible problems and threats outside the school.

The school is a typical school implementing comprehensive primary and comprehensive secondary education. In the study year 2005/2006, there were around 1000 pupils studying in the school in classes 1-12. Most of the pupils come from the locality nearby, though there are also students from the rural territories nearby Riga. Social background of the pupils is very different, and so is the financial situation of their parents. Still, this is not considered a problem for the school atmosphere.

..There is a wide diversity of social background – there are children for whom the price of the school-trip is a problem, and then there are children, whose fathers agree to buy the persiennes for class at once. But it is a pleasure, that no conflicts are noticed because of this. (Parent)

Pupils are almost exclusively Latvian by the ethnic and linguistic background. There are also schools with other language of instruction nearby, so, as stated by the head master of the school (and her opinion was supported also by other interviewees), the opportunities to gain education in other language or bilingually exist, so the non-Latvian students coming school are in general highly motivated and integrated in the school environment.

The majority of pupils are Latvian, a few are Russian. Problems might be in the classes where there are more of them and they talk Russian among themselves. Though in general we have not noticed any problems; pupils with Russian ethnic background adapt. There are also some pupils with Roma background, with whom everything is fine. However, there are also some, whom we have to search for, as they do not really want to come to school. Also the relatives say – it is enough to study – because they do not assign any value to the studies. (Social pedagogue)

There are pupils from ethnically mixed families studying in this school, and in these cases the linguistic identity is more important than the ethnic identity. When the native language of the pupil is different and the pupil has a poor knowledge of the language of instruction (Latvian), some problems in the study process are faced and the teachers have to put some extra effort (usually in the first classes) to ensure the pupil is able to proceed successfully.

For those, who really come from the Russian families, it is important to notice that this child has got problems, which he himself does not understand, cannot manage. Then I have to think, how to explain somehow differently. I have to know, if the child really speaks only Russian at home, and then the result can be seen in Latvian language classes – the child does not succeed as well as the others, and then I have either to pay more attention to him, or the child can attend additional classes, or I have to do something in a different way. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

Sometimes parents of non-Latvian pupils do not know Latvian, and the teacher and the parents have to adapt to the situation.

There are two pupils in my class - a girl from ethnically mixed family, but the language spoken in the family is Russian, and a boy from completely Russian background. He speaks very good Latvian, but when his father comes to the parents' meeting, then we have to talk Russian. He understands Latvian, but cannot talk. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

In case the number of pupils without knowledge of Latvian would increase, it might be problematic with the extra load for the teachers, as these children require extra attention and work.

Well, for teachers it certainly is an additional workload, and unfortunately the remuneration of teacher does not change in such conditions. And in case, for example, if more and more pupils like that [speaking only Russian or language other than Latvian] were integrated in the school - were attending the school – we should think already now about extra remuneration for work with children like that. The teacher has to work also individually with such pupils. Without additional individual help, it is very difficult for the pupil. But if a teacher knows exactly, what the pupil needs, teacher helps. (Headmaster)

School has a tradition of putting a special emphasis on teaching German in both primary and secondary school curricula. Some of the special subjects connected with Germany are taught bilingually. There are teachers and guest students coming to the school from a partner school in Germany each year. Guest students usually stay in the families of the pupils and study together with the class. No special integration programme for the guest students is arranged, though the study programme is specially adapted for these students and they are able to catch up well.

During the regular classes, issues concerning different cultures and languages are addressed, and, according to the teachers, pupils feel interest in the subjects of diversity and are interested to share their experiences gained in international inter-school cooperation.

We talk about diversity of cultures during the classes, if the subject is relevant and it is possible to show, what we have in common and what is different. We talk about the countries – Germany, Austria and other. It really helps, when we prepare the students for the exchange programmes. [...] Even before the exchange trip we talk with children what they have to be prepared for. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

As a teacher and as a person I also like it very much. But it is connected to my subject [geography]. In each topic there is something I can tell them – about Norway, Sweden – you have been there, visited the schools and so on. It is interesting for them. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

Activities and issues connected with multiculturalism include active participation in different projects both with schools in Latvia and abroad. Pupils in the focus group discussion also remembered some cases, and could express their opinion on interethnic activities and attitudes.

The school atmosphere is in general characterised as peaceful, democratic and friendly as in comparison to the outside environment of the school.

For me as a headmaster, it seems that we have a very democratic atmosphere in school, and it is to a great extent determined by the children, who do not have this arrogance and snobbery typical to the big city. What we have, is democratic relations and, to my mind, also

the collective of teachers is quite democratic, friendly and easily available for pupils. (Headmaster)

And, if compared to the city schools, here we do not have this snobbery; the atmosphere is more like that in a countryside school. The children are nice, and many things can be talked through like in a big family. (Teacher)

There are two social pedagogues, a school psychologist and also a speech therapist in school. Among the problems social pedagogue works with, are those of absenteeism and problems with cooperation with the parents of these pupils.

..pupils and their relationships and conflicts. Then the other area certainly is absenteeism – we try to find pupils that miss the lessons, try to find out, why they do not attend the classes, and how such an idea can emerge. Then also the educational achievements, but not in the way to tell them that they have to study, but in case of poor achievements to find out, if there are any psychological or medical problems. (Social Pedagogue)

Conflicts in school are characterised more as sudden and happening episodically than long and persistent. The causes for the conflicts are mostly characterized as caused by leadership problems and interpersonal conflicts.

It seems to me that in every class there are children that are willing to lead, to dominate. If I see that, I try to talk also to the others, to prevent the domination. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

In my class, there were no conflicts. There was one, but the boy was himself aggressive and nobody liked him. There was a case, when he was lacking self-control, but the conflict was solved soon. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

Both verbal arguments and sometimes also conflicts involving violence are observed. However, fighting in the school premises is now a very rare event if compared to the situation some time ago. Though sometimes the conflicts might be brought outside the school or become more latent.

If compared with the situation 9 years ago when I had just started to work here, pupils could easily start a fight in the school corridor, and it happened often. I do not say it does not happen now when additional attention is paid to that. Of course, they argue and quarrel, but now they know it is not good and try to hide these emotions. All in all, to my mind, pupils are in their interpersonal relationships becoming crueller, but it is not just apparent to us. (Social pedagogue)

Among pupils in school, differences in tastes and language skills are noticed and sometimes referred to; but these usually are not among the causes of conflicts in school.

It has happened, that in Russian as second language classes Russian pupils speak better than Latvians, and then pupils sometimes say – “But you are Russian, you should go and study German as the second language!” (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

I also had experience in my class that Russian girls dressed differently. But now I am not going to say „Oh, God, what are you wearing!” It is a question of taste. (Pupil, heterogeneous focus group)

However, ethnic aspects were referred to when talking about the conflicts outside the school, both by children and the school personnel.

For example, it seems to me that Latvians are not people that take away money from others, rob. Well, of course, there are some, but it is not so much often as it is for Russians.

I have myself been robbed from money by Russians. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

5.2. Small-size School with Bilingual Education in Latvian and Russian

The school is located in a residential area. There is another school (with Latvian as the language of instruction) and a free time centre for the children of the neighbourhood nearby. The school implements bilingual education in Latvian and Russian. In the secondary school programmes with a more business oriented and the exact sciences oriented approach are offered.

Around 600 pupils were studying in the school in classes 1-12, most of them coming from the local area, though part also coming from other administrative regions of Riga and even outside of Riga. Due to different reasons, the demographical situation in the country probably being one of them, the number of students has been diminishing each year. Children are very different both by the social background and by the educational achievements.

Pupils are very, very different, but mostly children living nearby are studying in our school. We do not have any competition. So both very capable students and also children having problems are studying in school. Families are very different. But children are very friendly. (Teacher)

There are many pupils in our school that are not coming from the local residential community though majority live nearby. Some time ago, the school was a specialised technical school and had known teaching traditions, so perhaps that is the reason pupils from other places keep coming, but one could not say that this is the best school in the administrative area. We do not have any tests for entering the primary school. (Headmaster)

Data on the ethnic background of the pupils has been collected, and more than 10 ethnicities are represented among the pupils, the biggest ‘minority’ groups being Lithuanians, Jews, Byelorussians and Latvians, but there are also pupils of Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnic origin. Many pupils come from ethnically mixed background. Ethnicity for the statistical purposes thus is a construct to some extent, and is not the most important aspect for the identity. As to the knowledge of languages, however, all the pupils speak Russian, and for many of them, Russian is also the language spoken at home.

We prepare a report each year, and this year we have pupils representing 14 different ethnic groups. But one can change the ethnicity. Ethnicity is more reported following that of the mother. There are no conflicts, we do not emphasize that. We are all similar, but very different at the same time. We have the same duties and rights, but we look different – we all have our own outer and inner world. (Teacher)

[..] There are many pupils of Lithuanian, Jewish, Byelorussian origin, but they all have Russian as the first language. (Headmaster)

There are also cases when students do not have so good knowledge of the languages of instruction – Russian and Latvian. In such cases, close cooperation with parents as well as extra effort in classes is important, in some cases – private tutor or additional effort of the teaches is required. It has to be noted, however, that the

differences are mostly visible in the language classes and language competences, and not so much in other subjects.

There was a case when a boy had studied 4 years in a school with Latvian language of instruction and afterwards came to our school. He had problems with Russian, but his parents hired a tutor, and as the boy was talented, there were no problems with other subjects, except Russian. He had no problems to adapt in the class. His mother was very responsible. She cooperated with the teachers and was coming to school every day the first weeks. (Headmaster)

It is also recognised by the students in the focus groups that the educational achievements are not really connected with the ethnic background (students that are Latvian by ethnicity do not have it much easier in subjects taught bilingually or in Latvian because of the ethnic background). Still, there have been occasions when pupils with good knowledge of Latvian have left for a school with Latvians language of instruction. Pupils also support an opinion that those knowing Latvian well, should study in schools with Latvian language of instruction, and pupils who know Russian better should study in minority schools.

The school has been involved in many activities, and issues connected with multiculturalism among them. Pupils are active in the recently established School Council, they are participating actively in essay competitions and projects oriented towards cultural and civic integration.

But children are very good-tempered and open; they are interested in everything that is new. Recently a School Council has been established that was not here before and children are really very active. During the last 3 years we have had guests from schools in India and Lithuania; from schools in Moscow and Novgorod in Russia. Children really enjoyed that, and they want to participate and show what they can do. (Headmaster)

Students have themselves been involved in research projects connected with ethnic and cultural diversity (so-called 'scientific projects' on chosen topics are to be elaborated by students as apart of study plan).

There was also a large and important project about the development of democratic society. This year for the Project week we chose subject „What I can do for my country or how I perceive my citizenship?“. After each project you can notice changes in school. Pupils in class 5 even made a research on how many ethnicities are represented among the pupils, how many pupils with the same name are studying in our school. The presentation was very interesting for the pupils. During the last 3 years we really have not had any problems with managing this ethnic diversity. There are also Latvian pupils studying – I can tell by surnames. It is very difficult to say, how many are Russian. Father can be Byelorussian by ethnicity, but mother can be Latvian or Russian. (Headmaster)

There are projects and discussions in our school concerning different ethnicities and cultures. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

The multicultural activities are mainly oriented in two directions – first, an emphasis is put on keeping the national Russian traditions, and secondly, learning traditions of other cultures – both in the class as part of the educational process, and outside the regular school hours, like celebrating traditional festivities, learning about cultures of other countries.

If we talk about identity, then I have to say that we celebrate all festivities - we celebrate Lāčplēša Day, Proclamation Day, but also Masļeņica – Russian festivity, Ziemassvētki [Latvian traditional winter festivity - solstice], Mothers' Day etc. The most important issue is not to lose the ethnicity and that is why in school we teach both Latvian language and literature and Russian language and literature. The school offers all this. Pupils can learn also French and learn about French culture or about English culture by studying English language. There are, for example, Lithuanian and Polish schools and they have this task – to solve problems within their language and culture. In our case, however, it would not be good to talk only about Russian festivities and Russian culture, even though we are Russian school. Yes, we will celebrate the Russian festivities, we will not lose our identity, and we will be citizens in our country. (Headmaster)

Cooperation with the school with Latvian language of instruction nearby has been established.

This year we would like to invite pupils from the Latvian school as experts to the scientific conference on our school. The students from the Latvian school did a survey in our school for a research project on problems of pupils. The conclusion was that pupils of both schools had similar problems. It was good to know that. (Headmaster)

The pupils do not seem to communicate much with children from the other school, though.

-We do not even notice them.

-If we notice them, we do not pay any attention. (Pupils, focus group)

“Language Days” are being organised each year, where people learn about different cultures and traditions. There have been international school-cooperation projects with schools in Russia, Byelorussia and also schools from countries like India and Japan.

Besides, activities towards civic integration, projects emphasizing importance of citizenship and loyalty to the country of residence have been promoted. The students have been successful in these events, so in general there is a positive attitude towards this kind of activities in school.

There is a free-time centre for all the children in the suburb – this school is mainly responsible for the centre, but children from the entire suburb irrespective of their linguistic or ethnic identity are welcome to spend their free time there. In the centre, they can communicate, play games, watch TV etc. in an informal environment.

Free time centre is open from 3pm to 8pm in school. TV, table tennis and books are available there; pupils can draw, play all games, watch TV there. Pupils from other schools are welcome there as well. Parents are very pleased, because there is a teacher there taking care of the children. Dance parties where also pupils from other schools can participate are organised 3 times a year. (Headmaster)

In general, there is a social pedagogue and a psychologist in the school. For teachers, a special *School Code of Ethics* has been established to facilitate a cooperative and positive atmosphere in the class. Besides, in case of problems,

pupils feel free to contact the headmaster directly or via an anonymous note to be put in a special box.

Work with parents is well established: the Parents' Council has been organized, the 'Parents' Days' in school are being organized regularly, and other activities to involve the parents more in the work of the school is planned.

3 times a year we have „Parents' Days” in school, when parents can come and meet all the teachers. (Teacher)

In general, the school is characterised as having an open, positive and friendly atmosphere both by teachers and pupils.

Most of the conflicts occur among the students in classes 5-7. In this school period, different conflicts (verbal and sometimes also violent). Most of the conflicts are short term and non-violent, and arise because of differences in outer appearance, dress code, for example, or leadership problems.

Conflicts among children arise because one is plump, the other – slim. In classes 5-6 they have problems with the outer appearance. (Headmaster)

In classes 5-7 the situation is the most difficult. Conflicts happen, for example, when a new pupil joins the class and is different from the others. Then the problems start. (Teacher)

I had a quarrel once with a boy that was stronger than me, and he started to go rage. So I tried to smooth the conflict so that it does not escalate. You can see that the other is stronger, so you try to smooth it. (Pupil, homogeneous focus group)

Exclusion of particular students from the group is also the most common expressions of problems in managing diversity. Some cases were recalled both by pupils and teachers of the pupils who were somehow different from the class, did not adapt and were excluded from the class collective. It is the problem of both the student that is perceived as different as well as of the 'excluders' to communicate and negotiate the differences.

A boy arrived from abroad and is in class 6. He has got problems with Latvian, Russian; he has also poor health - child of the war. All these problems can be felt in the class. He cannot manage. And classmates do not help. He was not accepted from the first day, and so it continued. Finally, he had problems in studies and behavioural problems, so it was decided to provide home-teaching for him. We had discussions both with children and with parents, but the situation did not improve. But in younger and older classes such problems do not exist. Teachers coming to our school from other schools consider our situation is quite good – no fighting, no youth problems. [...] Outer appearance, sometimes the way they act and talk. If a child is not accepted in the first day, there will be problems. In my class a boy came, who had had problems in the previous school, because he was different – studied very well, was very polite. This is probably not a typical way to behave in this class. This year another boy and a girl came, and there are no problems so far. But then there is something to think about, if it is just the boy that has a problem to solve or the whole class collective has to adapt. (Teacher)

-Atmosphere in the class varies. One girl left the class last year.

-She had conflicts with the teachers.

-She was studying in this school, but we did not like her, because she made herself in such position.

-It was her fault. (Pupils, homogeneous focus group)

Some minor arguments between pupils and teachers also occur, concerning the marks and other issues, for example, dress code – what girls should or should not wear in school.

It is completely unacceptable, that girls wear the closes with bare stomach, I do not like it. But they think it is nice. If you take Latvian school, they do the same. There are no limits as to the ethnicity – it does not matter, if it is a Latvian, Russian or Jewish school. And then there are those trousers till knees, these are also stupid. (Teacher, homogeneous focus group)

Then another problem is the authority and that sometimes teachers lay own problems upon the children. But we have a school's Code of Ethics – the principles of pedagogical ethics that the school psychologist is working with. But if a teacher is aged 60-65 years, it is difficult to change. For younger teachers it is not a problem. I personally have a box, where pupils can write an anonymous note about their problems. Besides, they can also come directly to my office to talk to. (Headmaster)

No conflicts have been observed where the interethnic or intercultural aspects have been essential.

No, they even do not know, what is the ethnicity of their classmates. It is not an event we would pay much attention to. Everything can happen, but hardly a conflict because of ethnicity could emerge. (Teacher)

In general, there are no active contacts, nor arguments with the pupils with the neighbouring school with Latvian language of instruction. Teachers consider the relationship better than the pupils do, though the former recall some conflict situations between the pupils outside the school.

There is a Latvian school nearby our school, and there was some kind of conflict – something was written on the walls – not on the walls of our school, but on the walls of the other school. In the beginning of 1990-ties someone was beating out windows of our school, but we do not know, who did it, so I cannot say it was because of the ethnicity. Then there was a conflict when the children of our school wanted to rob a CD-player from a younger pupil of the Latvian school, but one cannot say they would not come up with an idea to rob a younger child from our school. Otherwise we live friendly. We do not disturb each other. (Teacher)

The interethnic relationships in Latvia are considered to be good by the adults in school, and it is the politics that make them worse. They consider that in everyday life people of different ethnic background get along well, except for some minor disappointments, for example, the pupils did not like Latvian to swear in Russian if they otherwise are speaking in Latvian.

For example, it sounds funny, that a Latvian swears in Russian, but speaks Latvian. I cannot understand this. (Pupil, homogeneous focus group)

5.3. Large-size School with Bilingual Education in Latvian and Russian

The school complex is quite big and is located in one of the comparatively new residential areas. The school is one of the biggest schools not only in Riga, but also in the whole country – there are around 1400 pupils studying there from class 1 to 12.

In general we are very big school therefore we have different programmes and we are able to do a lot. (Headmaster)

The school implements the bilingual education programme in Latvian and Russian. The school has had experience in bilingual education for around 10 years already (bilingual education was implemented in school exceeding the formal requirements at that time), and the experience has been very helpful.

We are working bilingually already more than for 10 years. I am a teacher of Latvian language and geography; I started already 10 years ago to teach geography in Latvian. I saw all these problems; I saw it is very difficult to keep the distinction between teaching subject and teaching language. What is more important – the language or the subject? (Headmaster)

In the secondary school, the bilingual education module is organised so that 60% of all the subjects are taught in Latvian and 30% - in Russian. An informal support network of teachers of Latvian to the teachers of other subjects on the bilingual issues is established at school.

To help the teachers who teach in Latvian language we have a special council. Every Latvian language teacher counsel and advise 5-10 other teachers who teach minority pupils in Latvian. This is done on voluntary bases. (Headmaster)

In addition to the general education, programmes specialised in performing arts (singing, dancing, theatre) and fine arts (like painting, for example) are offered. Besides, the school offers some activities for children of pre-school age – like a free time centre for a couple of hours a week, supervised by the teacher of the primary school on a voluntary basis.

Already those four and five years' old children come for training free of charge. We found a possibility that the teacher who will be main teacher for this class for the next year devote two hours in a week to prepare children. We are looking forward to prepare children already before. They paint, model from clay, play theater, read. In the context of local neighborhood also the leisure time problem has been solved. They have got an impression what is school. This is done on voluntary bases. (Headmaster)

Pupils are mostly coming from the neighbourhood, but as the school is known to provide a high quality of education, pupils are coming to school also from different administrative regions and even from outside Riga. Still, there are no tests in the primary school to be passed, so the social and ethnic background of the pupils is very diverse, reflecting the social and to some extent, also ethnic (ethnic groups apart from Latvian) diversity in the neighbourhood.

We made an inquiry in Internet and found out that we are in the first tenth of the best schools in Latvia. Of course, we can not compare us with the Riga 1st Gymnasium, because there the children are selected, but we have the average ones. Mainly all children of the neighborhood come to our school, our community. Firstly, all children living here, secondly, pupils from schools of the Riga region come to our school. (Headmaster)

Most of the pupils are coming from moderately well-off families.

We are comparably one of the biggest schools in Riga, earlier we were the biggest. In respect of social problems, I have to say that this is a new district and there are nice houses around. Therefore flats are more expensive here than for instance in Latgale suburb. A part of unfavorable families have moved away to cheaper flats, therefore now such families are less here than, for instance, five years ago. They have moved to other parts of the city or to the Riga region. (Social pedagogue)

Most of the pupils are Russian by ethnicity, but also other ethnic groups are represented – there are Belorussians, Ukrainians, Azerbaijani, as well as pupils from mixed families and other ethnic background studying in the school. The ethnic differences are rarely felt by the pupils or students. In fact, the ethnic identity is reflected upon only in class and not in the context of the interethnic processes within the school, but more in relation with the interethnic processes and issues in society in general.

I think that we do not notice different ethnicities very much. In general there are Russians, but we have one African origin boy as well. I think that Latvians do not feel any discrimination, although they are few. There are children with Latvian surnames, but I have not been confronted with any ethnic conflicts. (Social pedagogue)

There are Belorussians, Ukrainians, and few Moldavians; there are children who consider themselves Latvians although their knowledge of Latvian is very poor. They consider they are Latvian, but they have not grown in Latvian environment. A lot of children are from mixed marriages – for instance, mother is Latvian and father is Russian, or vice versa. They have attended Latvian kindergarten, and speak Latvian at home, then they come to our school, but they are not pure Latvian anyways. It is easier to talk with them, but they are writing worse, the languages have mixed up. (Teacher)

There are cases when pupils from abroad have started studies in school, and then extra help with improving language skills is necessary.

Teacher is helping them as far as possible. The work is individual. To integrate in a group it is not a problem for them, because they all are very friendly. (Teacher)

Educational achievements of the pupils reflect the social and ethnic diversity of the pupils. It is typical that in case if a student changes the school with a different language of instruction in Latvia or from abroad, some time to adapt is needed and is being reflected by the educational achievements, though it is recognised that the differences disappear soon.

Yes, we have had a cases when children from schools with other language, not Russian begin to study in our school. Previously this happened less frequently. Most often Russian children who have attended Latvian schools change the school to Russian language of instruction. There are also Latvians, although very few. I am usually asking parents or grand parents: why are you coming to our school? The answer is: you have a good level of education. Parents are interested to insure good education. (Headmaster)

For choosing a school type, the linguistic and cultural background of the pupils is more important than the ethnic one.

We have one boy who came to 7th class after six years in Latvian school. It was difficult for him, and in general I am against Russian children going in Latvian schools. Why? – There is something what we call different mentality. (Headmaster)

Pupils noted that the teachers' ethnic background is sometimes important. One can notice the ethnic origin of the teacher, for example, when the teachers of Latvian origin teach bilingually in classes.

-At first, teachers themselves hide their ethnic background; maybe someone knows, but we do not know, for example, the ethnic background of the teacher of biology.

-If a teacher is Latvian, it can be noticed, when there is a class in Latvian - then usually someone will speak correctly, pronounce the words, the rules.

-But a Russian teacher perhaps will say it incorrectly.

-For Latvian teachers to teach in Latvian it is the same as it is for Russian teachers to explain things in Russian – they feel the language. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

Activities and issues connected with multiculturalism are very widespread in school. Diversity of cultures and religions is addressed in both in the history classes, Latvian as the second language classes as well as in extra curricular activities. Events devoted to diversity issues – for example, diversity of ethnic groups, cultural and religious groups – have been organised.

Last Friday we had a meeting with the representatives of different religions. The representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, Buddhism, and Islam had come. They were well prepared, and the pupils really enjoyed meeting and talking to them. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

Cooperation and exchange of visits with schools in other countries has also been a widespread practice in the school. Pupils have participated in pupil exchange with the neighbouring school with Latvian language of instruction, and this experience was considered to be a good one and promoting understanding and diminishing interethnic bias.

We had an exchange of 10th classes. Every child has a possibility to learn in Latvian school for one week. The aim of this activity was to give a possibility for pupils to evaluate how well he or she knows the Latvian language. I was glad that there were no problems, all children were speaking very well, and even those pupils who are not among the best manage this. Latvian children were shocked when they came here. They were expecting that in Russian school everything will be only in red or blue, because they think that these are favourite colours for Russians, and they were surprised what everything seemed very nice here. Well, but as we live in Latvia, our taste adapt to current conditions. We have very calm colours in school design, not bright blue, and everybody is satisfied. Latvian pupils told us: you have very clever pupils, very good results. Our children were very glad as well as they could understand everything in Latvian school. (Headmaster)

Pupils are interested in learning more about different cultures. It is expressed both as willingness to travel and to learn new languages.

-It is interesting, for example, to go to Lithuania or Estonia by bus to see the way they live, their culture, their currency.

-More exotic cultures are especially interesting as they are very different from our culture. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

There is a Parents' Council at school, and Parents' Days when teachers can be met in out-of class hours. The parents in most cases are interested and willing to participate, though there are cases when the parents of the children having most problems refuse to come to school and to get involved in solving the problem or the conflict.

Maybe you already noticed the sigh informing about the parents' days once a month. Parents are coming to meet and talk with teachers; they have a possibility to meet every teacher at school. We have this tradition already for tree years, and parents are very interested to use

this possibility. At the beginning the interest was not so big, but now they are already inquiring when the parents' day will be? We are announcing this event already two or three weeks before, although we have a schedule for all year. We have very many open lessons bilingually or in Latvian. Why? One thing is to speak about the possibilities and problems, but another – to show to parents how it is in reality. We have had these lessons, and parents see themselves that children have no problems and they speak Latvian. If we have problems, we speak with parents about them. (Headmaster)

School environment is characterised as good both by pupils and the teachers. Pupils seem to be proud of the school and consider the atmosphere as good and friendly, though crowded and loud sometimes.

A very positive aspect in school is its positive atmosphere, nothing is disturbing, and the school is being renovated. (Pupil, homogenous focus group)

The atmosphere depends on the leader who has taken up the initiative in the class. There are classes where there are many leaders that want to show what they can. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

As a pedagogue, I always have emphasized that all pupils can study in our school – both with some physical disabilities or any other differences. Our society has to be ready to accept them and give them opportunity; everything depends on our attitude towards them. And children accept it. Of course, we tell examples about inclusion and tolerance in other countries. Pupils understand it. It is easy for them to find their position in our school collective or in society in general, they build interpersonal relationships very easily. Even though it is not in all classes, in general they are open to issues like that. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

As the school is really a large one and offers a variety of programmes and free time activities, there are groups of pupils forming on the basis of interest in different activities.

There is a social pedagogue and a school psychologist at school. The main tasks of the social pedagogue at school is solving of different conflicts in the school context and social problems resulting in pupils being absent from school because of different reasons.

I often deal with children who have problems in attendance of school. This can be even a complex of the problems, but most often the reason of not attendance is a lack of motivation, unwillingness to learn, and social conditions, of course, - when family is in shortage of something or parents are not insuring something. But in general such families are more seldom. (Social pedagogue)

As reported by the participants of the study, mostly verbal short time conflicts occur, and they are solved quite soon.

Pupils sometimes say bad and evil words to each other. (Teacher)

It is all about stupid jokes. If someone sees someone doing something and tells others, then it starts. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

There are also situations when children already having had long term problems in other schools start studies, but the problems they had, still prevailed. In these cases, it is especially difficult to find an appropriate solution and to help.

Pupils that have changed the school do it mostly in case of behavioural or learning problems. Some children are wandering from one school to another to find an easier life. Of course, if

they have had problems in previous school, they have them here as well. We have had cases when the change of school has had a positive impact, but sometimes they change a school after a year again and leave for some private school or somewhere else. (Social pedagogue)

The most typical conflicts are verbal arguments, though also violent conflicts occur, and even cases like theft. Violent conflicts are mostly typical to the pupils in class 7-8.

The conflicts are different – between pupil and teacher, between pupil and parent, among pupils themselves – miscalling, doing wrong to somebody, thefts (of mobile telephone or something more simple), and scraps. (Social pedagogue)

Conflicts happen suddenly and in different ways. Unfortunately during the last years there is such a negative attitude among children. I am glad that we have not many scraps, they happen mainly among 7th – 8th class, because in this age there is a fighting for leader position. (Headmaster)

Conflicts among the pupils arise because of differences in taste, dress-codes etc. Pupils stress, that it depends also on the attitude of those considered as different.

-Now those who do not dress stylish are not liked by others.

-But it has happened to me. Those, who do not dress fashionably, or listen to different music, they are not liked.

-Or those that dress all in black. It is also unpleasant. They have also to adapt to others.

(Pupils, homogenous focus group)

There are leadership problems in class between boys sometimes. There is also an actual problem of hyperactivity. Reasons of these problems can be found in family – business of parents, insufficient attention to child. If parents are with low level of education, children often are aggressive or in opposite – passive, but not focused on confirmative behaviour. Bigger problems are with children whose parents are with low level of education or too busy to talk or have no contact with children. Parents do not acknowledge this and often have no skills to solve conflicts. (Social pedagogue)

Conflicts between pupils and teachers are mostly related to the dissatisfaction of pupils with evaluation of their work.

With teachers we quarrel about minor things. For example, everyone was talking loudly, but she wanted to say something, but nobody heard anything. She simply misunderstood the situation. But otherwise we have not had any grave conflicts. (Pupil, homogenous focus group)

Conflicts in most cases are hardly due to interethnic or cultural differences.

We have no quarrels or negative attitudes. They do not ask each other who are you and why are you. This question they do not touch upon. Parents are not worried about the different ethnicities as well. There are children who often have anger. We can see how child is angry, shows his “I”. But teachers have to have skills to stop him, to say that this is not appropriate behaviour. This is the only way how the ethnicity sometimes has been shown. Conflicts are not connected with ethnicity of the child, but with his or she’s character. If he or she becomes angry or becomes insulted very quickly, then you have to think carefully how to treat him, what and how to talk with him. But this has nothing to do with ethnicity. (Teacher)

Outside the school, pupils have experienced disappointment when being referred to as ‘Russian’ in a negative way.

-Only on the street sometimes, when someone emphasizes the ethnicity.

-When Latvians speak badly about Russians and Russians speak badly about Latvians. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

Teachers also refer to some situations they have felt discrimination. For example, a recent event was recalled, when one of the days in the Orthodox Easter weekend was considered to be made a working day this year. Both teachers and believe that the negative interethnic attitudes are to a great extent created by the politics.

The ethnic issues are more stressed by the government. [...] But this is politics, and we cannot escape from it, and it has an impact on our pupils. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

5.4. Small-size School with Latvian Language of Instruction

School is located in a formerly industrially active part of Riga near residential and industrial area. The school exists for almost 60 years, and has been in its present premises for about 20 years. It is a typical community school providing primary and secondary comprehensive education in Latvian, but some time ago it was a dual flow school providing two education programmes - in Latvian and in Russian. Right now the work on two additional slightly specialised education programmes for children with health problems is ongoing.

School is a local community school, no specialization. We are working on that actually. And actually it seems to me, that we have such an open and welcoming atmosphere, because we do not sort children. No selection procedures are applied for children – so far everyone has been accepted, irrespective of the place of residence. (Teacher)

The school is not large, as in study year 2005/2006 there were around 500 pupils in classes 1-12. Mostly pupils from the neighbouring residential areas are studying in the school, thus reflecting the social and ethnic diversity characteristic to the community. Some stay in the school even though the place of residence has been changed. As characterised by the school headmaster, most of the students are coming from low or medium income families.

The social factor is represented – the school is like mirror to what happens in the community. Many children come from not so well-off families. (Headmaster)

The ethnic background of pupils is quite diverse. Besides the dominant Latvian nationality of pupils, there are a considerable number of Russian pupils and pupils with Jewish, Roma and other ethnic background as well as pupils from mixed families. It is important to emphasize also that there are also minority schools providing bilingual education in the neighbourhood, so the choice for the school with Latvian language of instruction is also somehow motivated.

The collective of pupils studying in school is quite mixed, because all pupils are accepted, and the ethnic proportions in the region are as they are. Quite many pupils with Russian origin have got to our school with an intention to assimilate in the Latvian environment. They learn themselves, teach their parents. (Teacher)

Yes, we have many pupils with Russian origin, in this respect we are an example of successful integration. (Headmaster)

In the younger classes, the ethnic composition is the most diverse. If we talk about the older pupils, they are not so different there. They have coalesced there though years. There are mostly children with Russian and Latvian ethnic background in the older classes. Recently in the youngest classes there were also Jewish and Roma children starting studies. The situation is interesting. (Social pedagogue)

One could say that in some classes up to 40% certainly are from Russian families or mixed families. And now I see that in 1st and 2nd classes there are also Jewish and Roma children. (Parent representative)

There are also pupils that do not live in the local community anymore, but they just do not want to change the school, as they are used to this environment. (Social pedagogue)

The headmaster reflects that outside the classes pupils are having good relationship with the pupils from the neighbouring schools irrespective of their ethnic background. This is because children are used to life in an ethnically diverse environment.

The mentality is not that much important. Sarkandaugava suburb as such has got own mentality that is the same both for Latvians and Russians. Sarkandaugava is to some extent the outskirts of the city. Living here, we have already become integrated, therefore it cannot be said that the presence of Russian children would bring any serious changes. (Headmaster)

Ethnic and cultural diversity has also been a subject in regular classes, where it is a part of the school curricula. Events related to diversity of cultures and languages are organised in school, as there is a tradition of having a 'Month of Languages' each year, where pupils can take part in different activities, like competitions, preparation of theatre performances in one of three languages (Latvian, Russian or English) and other. Teachers recalled in the discussion, that recently festivity traditions had been the central topic of the 'Month of Languages', and pupils had really shown interest and also put effort in gaining information on the traditions, involving also parents and grandparents. When festivities or other events are organised, a special effort is put to involve the parents of the minority origin pupils.

Pupils also expressed interest in diversity of cultures and in learning more about other countries and people living there.

It seems to me also, that when you go to another country, it is more interesting to meet people, to live in a family, than to walk around and watch the houses. Relationships between people are different in all the countries. (Pupil, homogenous focus group)

They are aware of the intercultural differences and have formed attitudes and opinions, based on their experiences abroad.

-It happens quite often, that something seems unacceptable for me I have found out about another culture. Exactly, very nice, very interesting, but then at one moment I realize, that we are used to do something in a different way and not otherwise. [...] It is interesting, but I am simply grown up in a different family and I completely understand that something can seem weird and unacceptable for me.

-Each nation has some typical features of character, for instance, Germans – they are so awfully pedantic. It just irritates. But at the same time, they can put a dirty bag on a bed. And

it is the same with Russians – they also have such features, and probably also Latvians. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

Educational achievements of children, especially in the beginning of studies, are also uneven, and there are differences as the pupils are coming from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. Those pupils having another language than Latvian (mostly Russian) sometimes are having problems because of the low language competences.

It is difficult to judge, if they form ethnically and linguistically homogeneous groups for themselves and thus separate from other pupils.

It could be that the pupils with Russian as the main language stick together, but not always. There are some classes, where they have something more in common, but it is not so that they would disport from the class. I would even say that very often Latvians start talking Russian to them. (Teacher)

In class separation of Russian pupils is not as apparent as in school in general.

You could say that Russian pupils are separated from the rest of the school. We are all a big company, but they are somehow keeping aside.

-Also in the class, but not so much. It is more in school in general. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

Even though the linguistic difference is otherwise not a problem and does not create conflicts, teachers have noticed that these pupils speak too much of Russian at school, especially during the breaks. It is considered that pupils with minority background should use more Latvian at school, in order to improve it. However, they consider the exchange of language competences as positive, because students with Latvian as the native language acquire a better knowledge of Russian as a result of ethnic and linguistic diversity at school.

I do not think it creates conflicts. Only we do not like these pupils to speak Russian, because they should speak more Latvian in order to improve their language skills. If they speak Russian also in school, they deprive the opportunity to improve Latvian language. But it is not a dislike towards Russian language. At the same time Latvian children gain a lot by talking Russian. (Teacher)

There is also a special pedagogue and language instruction groups for younger pupils with weak knowledge of Latvian to strengthen their linguistic competences to promote inclusion in the school environment and educational process. The groups, though, are organised irrespective of the ethnic aspect, but based on the necessity to improve the language skills, and are not directed only towards children with minority linguistic background. Also individual training and help is available in case of serious linguistic problems.

We really would like them to improve their knowledge of the language, especially the vocabulary. It has been taken care of. Therefore there is a special pedagogue and special language instruction groups for children who need to improve their knowledge of Latvian. The instruction is after the regular classes and is oriented to conversational language skills. It is not sad directly that it is exactly for children from minority families, but it is oriented towards them to facilitate their inclusion in the school and schooling process. I will be honest, their

level is very low. They can speak, and parents think that they can send the child to study in this school. But if such children do not receive any additional support from the family concerning language in particular, it is very difficult. Sooner or later the child somehow 'breaks' and problems emerge in the study process. At home they usually talk Russian all the time – mostly it is Russian that is talked at home. (Social pedagogue)

As the school language of instruction is Latvian, but some pupils are from mixed or entirely minority origin families, the gap between the school and home environments can emerge. To reduce it, the close cooperation of parents and their participation in different school activities is important. The decision to choose the school with Latvian language of instruction usually is made by the parents not always aware of the actual linguistic competences of the child, which is why work with parents is so important. Besides, work with parents of minority origin is very important to ensure the child feels support, as usually because of lack of knowledge on the language parents soon stop coming to school and helping the child.

We really work on that, we think of the ways to invite and involve, what kind of activities we should organise, to create and maintain interest of the minority pupils' parents. This work is put in the School development plan as one of the most important, and everyone is involved in that. (Headmaster)

Special attention is paid to personal invitation, individual call home, to make them feel welcome and create feeling of belonging. It is important, that parents do not feel burdensome or uncomfortable and uneasy, because they cannot talk in Latvian. (Social pedagogue)

There are one social worker and one psychologist working part-time at school. Even though their work of the social pedagogue and psychologist has been evaluated as very good, the teachers consider there is need for extra services, for example, education and training for working in multiethnic and culturally diverse environment.

We all learn how to understand the mentality of the minority children, and it requires additional effort. There is an interest from the teachers' side, but there are simply no materials and training available on how to get along with these children better. Should we promote this Latvian environment for them, or should we learn from these children also? (Social pedagogue)

The differences as to the ethnicity, described by the teachers and the pupils are mostly different languages that can be heard during the breaks between classes. Russian is often heard.

And, of course, if you do not consider Latvians, mostly Russian children can be noticed. Sometimes it just seems to me that a pupil could be Russian, but actually the ethnicity is not important to me. The only occasion I feel these differences is when I sometimes hear pupils speaking Russian during the breaks. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

Pupils neither consider the ethnicity important, though they are aware of interethnic differences.

I personally do not distinguish between the ethnicities – Russians, Latvians. To my mind, all are similar, and it does not matter, if a person has one ethnicity or other. It does not bother me. Perhaps they have a different taste or something, but something is similar, too. It is not so that they were completely different. (Pupil, homogenous focus group)

Also for the minority pupils the ethnicity does not seem to be very important.

I presume it could be important for them, but they do not emphasize their ethnic identity, they do not take it personally in discussions. They try to integrate in the Latvian environment, but are preserving their identity at the same time. (Social pedagogue)

Both pupils and teacher recall an argument having happened some time ago being directly connected with the cultural differences, tastes in particular.

We recalled once, how it was when in class 5, I left the pupils alone to decorate the Christmas tree, and they had had a conflict – not a scrap, just an argument. They were little, but they had completely different opinions, if some decorations should or should not be used. This is the only occasion I recall. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

And then a real quarrel emerged: 'No, this is completely „Russian style“'. (Pupil, homogenous focus group)

Awareness of diversity and differences is more noticed in younger classes, when children discuss things more openly among themselves and also with the social worker.

The pupils in the younger classes are most active in showing interest about pupils of other ethnic origin, and they ask directly – where are you from, how do you live? (Social pedagogue)

In the primary school, the work with the parents is very important, as children often reflect the stereotypes and other bias and assumptions about the other groups that are common and prevalent in their families. This is noticed both in the interviews and in the teachers' focus group.

It has never been a public issue, but informally stereotypical remarks can be heard – parents teach their children to avoid another pupil or just explain the difference with word 'he is like that'. The stereotype about this culture is: 'they are thieves', so the stereotype is applied. And if it is explained like that at home, and child comes to school and is not ashamed to talk about it aloud, then it becomes quite dangerous. But it is not the majority. (Social pedagogue)

A particular case was remembered, when pupils with Jewish and Roma ethnic background had a conflict because of mutual bias and stereotypes, most probably, stemming from those in the family. After a comprehensive counselling and discussion process with both the involved children, their parents, grandparents and the class in general, it was possible to overcome the stereotypes and reach a common understanding that the school is open and welcoming for diversity of cultures.

Other pupils were in the middle of the discussion, of course. So we had to do a huge educational work and counselling, that it is not at all like they had assumed. And then the argument among the adults was important, because from children we only hear phrases they hear at home. We had to meet a real conviction from the both sides, and here I have to say that the adults are also ready to change their assumptions, stereotypes. They see how their child feels at school, and it is not at all they had imagined. (Social pedagogue)

Attitude, communication problems, anger, problems with controlling the emotions are among the most often mentioned causes for conflicts and arguments.

We have had conflicts, they are about the attitudes and the communication styles, but they are not about the ethnicity, this is not characteristic in our school. The conflicts between teacher and pupil are mainly based on a lack of skills to express emotions and anger. There are teachers who speak in different language, but I have not noticed undignified behaviour. The relationships are healthy and even sincere. (Social pedagogue)

Conflicts are among pupils concerning some daily life aspects, for instance, his role in group, his expressions of himself, leadership. Pupils are against teacher if they do not like him, if child wants to show he is not acceptable. There are pupils who can not learn something and are learning after lessons, but there are pupils who have not understand something in lessons, but want to proof that others have to be blamed for that. This is a demonstration of position towards those who are learning (has been considered as fools) and towards teacher who wants to secure order. (Headmaster)

Conflicting attitudes on the ethnic base are recalled when talking about the pupils in the younger classes.

During the adaptation period there was a very interesting situation when both Roma, Jewish, Russian and Latvian children began the studies. We had a conflict we discussed for a very long time, and it was based on stereotypes about Russians and Roma people acquired in family. These were small pupils expressing family stereotypes about different ethnic groups. (Social pedagogue)

Conflicts with teachers are also mentioned by the pupils, emphasizing that they would like them to be more cooperative and less authoritative.

-I think, teacher should at least admit a possibility that he or she is wrong.

-When we are dissatisfied with a teacher, they always tell us: 'Teachers are only people'. In this case the teacher should understand that he or she is only a human being and can make mistakes. It appears that teachers often act for their own benefit, change their opinion. (Pupils, homogenous focus group)

When referring to the frustrating and disappointing experience with other ethnic groups outside the school settings, it is mostly connected with the situations when people they do not know have started a scrap or insulted someone. Pupils are sometimes very extreme in their opinion.

In Latvia the mentality of Russian guys is such that they hang around in group, and if they notice a Latvian, they ask a cigarette in Russian. If Latvian guy says, he does not have a cigarette, because he does not smoke, Russians start a fight. That is how they entertain themselves. I have been beaten up by a drunken Russian even without being asked something. (Pupil, homogenous focus group)

The personal experience or the experiences of the friends create some kind of attitude towards other ethnic groups, mainly Russian.

-That is the most typical that comes in mind when we think of Russians. Many people say so. But you can never be 100% sure, because I know also some very nice and cooperative Russian people. There are also Russian people that I like better than Latvians. Latvians can be as bad as people say about Russians, and sometimes a Latvian person can act even worse than a Russian.

-Here it was an example how a group attacks one person. It is typical for Russians. We, Latvians, can stand for ourselves and solve conflicts without involving others.

(Pupils, homogenous focus group)

Also teachers recall interethnic interaction creating frustration and disappointment, though at the same time, it may refer also to the communication between different generations.

Yes, I have experienced it, and I have myself been involved. It seems to me the Russian people are very different from Latvians in their attitudes, in the way they act. We say something about them, and they reply publicly. Children are children, sometimes we have to use public transport together, but retired Russian people do not like it, so you can listen to comments how bad these young Latvian teachers are, that they do not know the culture, and cannot teach it to the children. These Latvians are not well educated and so on. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

5.5. Large-size School with Bilingual Education in Latvian and Russian

The school is located in one of the comparatively new residential areas; there is another school with Latvian language of instruction and a kindergarten nearby. The school is also quite new, and quite large by size, there are around 1300 pupils studying in classes 1-12 in the school.

The neighbourhood is characterised by a huge residential area built comparatively recently, and to a high extent, people with minority background live there. This is represented also in the ethnic composition of the pupils.

We are minority school and we are implementing 5 minority education programs. We have elaborated our own model of bilingual education adapted for our circumstances. [...] We have worked in different working groups and we have got a licence for our model. There are children whose parents do not speak Latvian and can not help their children. 10 years ago the similar conditions was with teachers – there were very many sailor families. Bilingual education begins with the 1st class with tiny, tiny steps to prepare children for secondary school. The pedagogic goes hand in hand with learning process. Things we can not manage in learning process we achieve in camps in Latvian or in joint projects with Latvian schools. Together with the Faculty of Pedagogic we developed the program of Latvian literature. In our model the collaboration of teachers is necessary. Things like that make our program slightly different. (Headmaster)

The school implements bilingual education in Latvian and Russian, and has elaborated their own module that is based on the experience as well as on the particular needs of pupils, taking into account their ethnic and linguistic background. One of the problems connected with the reform of bilingual education, is lack of possibility or inability of parents to follow the study process of children and help them in case of necessity, because most of the parents do not have the necessary linguistic competences in Latvia. That is the reason why school also provides support to the parents of pupils that are willing to learn Latvian.

Cooperation with parents is one of the main priorities and a problem at the same time. We are trying to collaborate with parents and in comparison with others schools we have a good experience. We have Latvian language courses for parents already for two years (this year we had four Language courses groups). It is very necessary for them, and they are interested in these courses. It is important because it is a way how to diminish the negative attitude towards reform as well. (Headmaster)

In order to promote a positive attitude of parents to the bilingual education, 'open classes' are organised for the parents, so that they can see and participate in the bilingual education process.

We organize parents Thursday, last time there was 370 parents, and it is a big number for general activity of parents. This is a possibility for parents to talk about his child to every teacher personally. [...] We are organizing open days to show parents, how we work. Parents try to feel themselves in a role of their children and we are conducting lessons to show what bilingual education is. It helps to relieve the stress of parents, they can see what kind of methods are used, otherwise parents think that they know everything and make a comparison with experience they had. Otherwise they see children are learning differently now and are afraid that children will not learn the subject in this way. (Headmaster)

Most of the pupils are coming from the local neighbourhood, though, as the school is quite well known for the good study results, also children from the whole Riga and even other towns are coming to this school. The social background of the pupils is different.

Most pupils are Russian, but there are also pupils with Latvian, Byelorussian, Lithuanian and Estonian ethnic background. Linguistically the school is more homogeneous, as for the majority of children Russian is the first or most used language. Occasionally, pupils from other countries with a different level of linguistic competence also start studies in the school, and then extra efforts should be put to help them to adapt to both the school environment and the requirements of the study process.

We have children of different ethnicity; we do analyse the statistics every year. We have Belorussians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Roma, Latvians and Russians. The common feature is that native language is Russian. Last year we had two girls with Latvian as a native language from Latvian school pretending to learn in our school, but the level of knowledge and marks were insufficient and they did not pass our competition. There are also exceptional cases when pupils, for instance, from Germany or some Islamic country arrive. Generally, these cases are connected with family problems, when mother returns with child after divorce and tries to integrate her child here. We have a boy in our school from Jordan. He speaks Russian, but he could not write, we had a special program for him. He had to learn Latvian from the very beginning as well. But in general he had the same classes as other pupils. (Headmaster)

Differences between the students are not noticed or paid much attention to neither by pupils, nor teachers. Though there are some cases when these can be noticed.

If the outer appearance is different, then perhaps we can tell it is different ethnicity. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

It is more typical to the primary school when they try to emphasize the difference, but later it is not so important. We had a classmate from Ukraine, and in primary school he tried to show it by pronouncing some words as it is typical for Ukrainian language, but he does not do it anymore. (Pupil, heterogeneous focus group)

Educational achievements and possible differences in groups of students are different. It is closely related to the previous linguistic experiences the child has had.

It is more difficult for those pupils which had attended Latvian kindergarten, because there the children are taught speak grammatically correct Latvian and learn Latvian letters. If parents plan to send their children in Russian schools, they should think about it before. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

There was a child from Voronezh [Russia] in one primary school class. The teacher of Russian literature decreased the mark to the girl just because her pronunciation was different. She told she had been taught to speak like that. It is an example of how different pronunciations can create difficulties. (Teacher, heterogeneous focus group)

For already about 10 years the school has been active in projects and events connected with multiculturalism and civic integration, thus good contacts with other schools both in Latvia and abroad have been established. Pupils have participated in student-exchange with the school with Latvian language of instruction nearby. Events with intercultural character have been organised both for the pupils of the school as well as jointly with other schools.

There are different projects, for example, a project "I am a citizen". We are participating in this project for six years already. This is almost a tradition. There are different tasks and forms of the work in groups. We have a club of debates in school for 10 years already. Debates are organized in Latvian and in English about different issues. We are implementing the projects financed by Social Integration Fund. At the moment we have a project together with Luxemburg and the title is "Small languages in small EU countries", the aim of this project is the development of Latvian language and culture, and the culture of Luxemburg. The result of the project is everyday speech vocabulary. [...] The impact of the projects is the increasing number of pupils who receive the citizenship. Secondly, our pupils did not participated in the protest meetings, organized by the party For Human Rights in a United Latvia. Thirdly, we have no protests in our school inside. In Russian newspapers before the beginning of the school year there was a call to boycott Latvian language and learning in Latvian. We had no boycotts in our school. (Headmaster)

We are interested in the way people in different countries live, what they do. (Pupil, homogenous focus group)

There are more than 100 teachers in the school. Besides, there are also 2 social pedagogues, 2 psychologists, a speech therapist and a nurse in school, where to turn to in case of a conflict or a problem.

In general, the atmosphere in school is considered to be good and creative, though sometimes too stressed because of the size of the school and high educational requirements.

Both pupils and teachers refer to conflicts as being mostly minor everyday arguments about the marks and dress code (with teachers), and about interests with other pupils.

I just wanted to add, that we do not have such irritating pupils that would disturb others. They are simply all very active and interested in everything. Misunderstandings and arguments are because of the features of character. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

Teachers think they are more clever than others, but each person makes own decisions, has own opinion, and I think pupils have right to say what they think. (Pupil, homogenous focus group)

One says something, other says something to the third, finally somebody feels insulted, and scraps happen as well. This year we have not had any big conflicts. It depends on the

atmosphere in a class. Of course, children are hyperactive, it is hard for them to sit 40 minutes, and they start to talk and to bother teacher and involve others. Although biggest part of them understands what lesson means. When they come to me they are different, they are calm, but during the lesson there are more children and more activities. (Teacher)

We have Conflict commission in school, and I even do not remember, if we have had any cases to solve on this level. (Teacher, homogenous focus group)

No conflicts on the ethnic basis were recalled nor by pupils or teachers.

Nor ethnicity, nor religious affiliation is a base for conflicts in our school. (Headmaster)

Rather it was emphasized by the respondents, generally that in case where conflicts had aroused, other issues were at the core of the conflict, and also in cases given when children with an apparent physical differences (the case of African origin boy, mentioned before) have been accepted and have adapted really well.

About a year ago, a girl came from the neighbouring school with Latvian language of instruction; she wanted to return to the Russian environment. There was, of course, conflict at the beginning, but it was just because a new person entered the collective. Now she is already well adapted. It is simply so that girls and boys did not get along in this class that is why there was the conflict. (Headmaster)

6. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity, Conflicts, and Violence in Schools

Both in the interviews and in the focus group discussions, pupils and teachers were asked to express their opinions and experiences related to the multicultural issues in general, interest in different cultures as well as personal experience with interethnic and intercultural events. Most of the information on these issues was given in the context of school environment already as it was obtained in interviews and focus groups in that way, though there are some common features that are presented in this chapter.

6.1. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Schools

Manifestations and perception of linguistic and ethnic diversity is different in the researched schools with Latvian language of instruction and minority schools implementing bilingual education module. As already mentioned, the ethnic composition is different, thus also the interethnic relationships and perception of ethnicity differs.

Teachers in schools providing bilingual education, when discussing the ethnic background of pupils both in the interviews and discussions, characterize ethnicity as a construct. It is not important, though sometimes interesting attribute of the pupils. Each year statistics on the ethnic background of the pupils is collected at school, but, as some teachers say, the data is not really relevant. As many people come from mixed backgrounds, and sometimes from year to year the ethnicity given in the questionnaire has 'changed'.

The issue of ethnicity emerges in September, when we have to fill in the documents and then the 'ethnicities change'. They have to write their ethnicity there, and then I see someone who was Russian last year has written „Latvian“. I ask: „You were Latvian last year?“ – No I decided that I am „Latvian, because my mother is Latvian“, or vice versa. (Teacher, homogenous focus groups, minority school)

Pupils in minority school do seem to know, but do not pay much attention to the ethnic background of other pupils or teachers, except for clearly seen physical differences in outer appearance, or manifestation of linguistic competences (hearing a person talking another language, talking with an accent or similar).

Ethnic and linguistic diversity as a 'difference' can rather be more perceived in the environment of schools with Latvian language of instruction. The groups of minority pupils with Russian as the first or mainly spoken language are, in general, more easy to notice in schools with Latvian as language of instruction, because they speak Russian during the breaks between the classes, sometimes form their own groups, separate from others, that is not always acceptable for other pupils, especially in the younger age and if others do not know Russian.

In schools with Latvian language of instruction the linguistic diversity (having in mind Russian) is more important than the ethnic. It is also important, because of necessity of good Latvian language competences of a child to follow the process of education successfully.

If, for example, to the school comes a pupil that completely does not know Latvian, - there are also such children coming in the youngest classes, of course, it is harder to pay enough attention to this child, because there are quite many pupils in the class. And these children need special attention, even though there are a few of them. (Headmaster, school with Latvian language of instruction)

In minority schools with bilingual education Latvian and Russian, the pupils form a more homogenous linguistic group, and even though pupils are ethnically perhaps more different, linguistically are quite homogeneous, and the presence of other groups cannot be noticed as everyone speaks Russian. Still, for the education processes, as teachers emphasize, linguistic competences need to be paid a special attention, as pupils still come from different linguistic environments - some have studied in Latvian schools, some attended Latvian kindergartens.

Different ethnicities, but they have been brought up on the basis of Russian culture. And they usually speak Russian among themselves. (Teacher, homogenous focus groups, minority school)

Teachers think that some additional resources should be provided to the teachers in both types of schools for integration and management of linguistic diversity.

When talking about the interethnic and intercultural relations and attitudes in general, another term is often used to denote the difference. Mentality as a construct, incorporating a variety of culture-related manifestations, starting from

features of character to taste, language and behaviour is used, to explain the difference.

But it is remarkable, that they all have their own mentality, and this can be felt. (Social pedagogue, school with Latvian language of instruction)

For example, according to a headmaster interviewed, the mentality could be a reason why a child should choose a school with one or another education module (Latvian or bilingual).

The so called 'mentality' is important for the choice of minority school, if we want it or not. (Headmaster, minority school)

Integrating cultural difference sometimes is a challenge, and more attention and resources should be allocated to this aspect of wellbeing in school.

All the schools participating in the study have been very active in different civic and multicultural, and integration oriented projects. Activities oriented towards integration are quite common in the forms of projects and competitions in all the researched schools. Pupils are interested in cultural diversity in an abstract (like interest in travelling, seeing how different cultures are, etc.) way, but also when participating in the projects connected with the ethnic diversity in Latvia.

Still, it can be noticed, that a higher degree of involvement in different integration oriented activities can be noticed among the minority schools. It could perhaps be due to the reason that there are more activities oriented towards these pupils.

Issues related to the bilingual education reform and the ways it affects the situation in the school system, education process, and pupils' educational achievements were addressed in the discussions and interviews with pupils and teachers in minority schools. In general the attitude is positive towards the improvements concerning the knowledge of the language, though ambiguous, when the necessity of such model is questioned. Both pupils and teachers share some scepticism connected with it.

Even though both positive and negative experiences and stereotypes associated with interethnic contacts between Latvian and Russians are recalled by teachers and pupils, they are mostly positive towards cultural and ethnic diversity. Interethnic problems in the country in general both by pupils and teachers irrespective of the school represented are seen as caused by politicians and distracted from the real everyday life. Problems of integration are to be solved more on the political, not on the interpersonal everyday level.

6.2. Conflicts and Violence in Schools

In the schools involved in the study most of the conflicts are characterised both by students and the teaching staff and social pedagogue, as short term arguments or scraps.

From my experience I can tell honestly, that conflicts are very rare. There are some occasions, but they are solved successfully. Cases of grave and long-term conflicts are really very rare. (Teacher, homogeneous focus group, minority school)

We can talk about the psychological violence and even physical violence – fighting between pupils. Children are learning to solve the conflicts, they are acquiring communication skills. Unfortunately sometimes they are using their fists and bad words. The latter happens rather often, we can call it psychological violence. (Social pedagogue, school with Latvian language of instruction)

Long term conflicts are often those when the child has already had problems before, and the school has been changed for several times. In most cases, these problems are characterised by low parent involvement, and the school cannot do much about it. Arguments and scraps occur because of a variety of reasons, most of them being more related to social competences and personal characters of those involved than any other causes. In most cases, interethnic aspects are closely intertwined with other interpersonal and social aspects.

In my class, the girls are very active, especially, Russian girls, and they slightly suppress the Latvian girls that are a bit quieter. Then there all the time is some kind of disagreement in the class – who is going to be the leader? (Teacher, homogeneous focus group, school with Latvian language of instruction)

In summer and also in winter they play either football or ice-hockey together with children from the neighbouring Latvian school. And then conflicts emerge between the teams, but this is because of sports. (Teacher, homogeneous focus group, minority school)

As mentioned above, the interethnic problems are in general seen as caused by the politics, and in the interpersonal level there are minor or no conflicts on the ethnic or cultural basis. The conflicts caused by the cultural codes can be solved via conversations and promoting mutual understanding.

Pupils come to me and worry why Russian pupils are talking in Russian during breaks. They want all to be alike. I think that answering these questions we can help the process of integration. (Social pedagogue, school with Latvian language of instruction)

Parents' attitudes at home are very important, that is why the work with parents is so crucial, as children are noticed to reflect the parents' opinions and stereotypes. It is often emphasized by the teachers and social pedagogues, that single school cannot offer a solution; this has to be done at both home and in school.

Sometimes the interethnic issue is important in student – teacher conflicts in minority schools. Pupils in the focus group discussions noted that there have been cases, when teachers of other ethnicity than Russian have expressed dissatisfaction with the pupils by saying that they are Russian, and if they are not satisfied with something, the pupils can return back to Russia.

And she wants to send the Russians to Russia. She says – ‘You are Russian – so go to Russia!’ (Pupils, homogenous focus group, minority school)

-We have had Latvian teachers, who do not treat Russians very well. I was told once to go to Russia – to take a train and to go back to Russia.

-It was in our school, I also heard that.

-Simply - she asked me in Latvian, I answered in Russian, and then she said that. She was Latvian. But it was the only occasion. (Pupils, homogenous focus group, minority school)

The most severe conflicts, as it is recognised by both the pupils and teachers, are not to be found in school, but have been transferred or have emerged on the street.

Well, sometimes conflicts with Russians occur, but it is mostly on the streets. (Pupil, homogenous focus group, school with Latvian language of instruction)

If there is something more severe, pupils probably do not demonstrate it at school. What happens at school, it is not so serious, and these are not even real fights. You remember, once they showed on TV, near one school there was a whole group with knives and even one policeman was wounded. That is a real fight to my mind. The conflicts and scraps that happen in our school are only because pupils do not understand themselves, they do not know, how to solve conflicts, they have not learnt to be quiet when it is necessary, and so the conflicts escalate. (Teacher, homogenous focus group, school with Latvian language of instruction)

7. Findings on Good Practice

Criteria of finding a good practice were developed commonly for the whole project.

As it was described in the previous sections, the conflicts in schools, except for some cases, have no or indirect relation to the ethnic and cultural diversity. It does not necessarily mean, that cultural codes or ‘different mentalities’, as described by the participants, when talking about the diversity of pupils in school, are not related to the arguments and escalation of arguments in the conflicts. It rather means that the culture related aspects are not explicit and prevalent, so processes promoting intercultural understanding and tolerance as well as general conflict solving practices should be evaluated.

Firstly, we identified activities and processes that could be perceived as good practice – activities described being sustainable and producing good results in conflict solving and promotion of multicultural values at school. Secondly, we tested these activities for the correspondence to the criteria of good practice.

We have identified the practices of having a social worker or a social pedagogue working in school, and elements of multicultural education included in the curricula. Below, these activities are described, and afterwards also other activities identified first as valuable experience, but later dropped as not relevant to the all criteria of good practice, are described.

The practices presented here can be considered as having both conflict solving and preventive impact in the school environment.

7.1. Social pedagogue /school psychologist

Description

Social pedagogue and /or a school psychologist have become a common practice in the schools during at least the last 10 years. The position of social pedagogue in school is a quite new one in schools.

All the surveyed schools had a practicing social pedagogue or a school psychologist taking part in solving and preventing conflicts and social problems in schools. In all the schools researched, there is both a social pedagogue and a school psychologist working. In general, they are working together each addressing different aspects of the problem. Social pedagogue and a school psychologist are usually working in close cooperation, and in some cases cooperate also with a speech therapist and a special pedagogue, these being regarded as the support personnel to the teaching staff.

Social pedagogue is especially trained to work in the school settings and deal with conflicts and social problems connected with and important in the school environment. The aim of having a social pedagogue or social worker at school is to establish a more positive atmosphere in school by helping pupils and teachers solve different school-related problems that are not necessarily directly connected with the studies.

The school pedagogues usually have an office in school where they can be met for consultation during the open hours e.g. during school breaks, but they also offer a number of other services.

Tasks as described by the school principals, teachers and social workers themselves include mainly support to the teachers in cases of problems not directly connected to the study process (conflicts, problems related to social situation of the students at home leading to being absent from lessons, conflict prevention, conflict solving). They might take up also some teaching tasks (one case) or engage themselves in different projects connected with out-of-school activities.

Conflict solving, counselling in case of problems. I usually deal with problems the teachers cannot solve. Also the prevention of smoking and use of other addictive substances. Introduction of pupils to their rights and duties. (Social pedagogue, minority school)

An important role of social workers in schools is to keep in contact with the neighbourhood and to support parents. Parents are often worked with in order to ensure that the pupil at home receives the support needed. In schools with Latvians

language of instruction, a special attention is paid to involvement of parents of minority ethnic origin in the events and activities at school.

Those parents having the biggest amount of problems usually we have to search for. The parents that are really interested in how their children are doing in school are coming themselves; they know and recognize the existence of problems. Very often it is so that those parents having the gravest problems do not realize the problems. Mostly the educated parents are coming to the social psychologist. (Social pedagogue, minority school)

The cooperation network is mostly based in establishment on mutual trust with pupils, as well as cooperation with the school principal, other teachers and, to a very high extent, with the parents.

Impact on prevention and solving of conflicts

The social pedagogues or social workers usually work with the pupils, their parents and the school teachers, though other interested parties might be involved. They usually work with individuals, though sometimes also interaction in larger groups is an issue. In case of an emerging conflict, social pedagogue is the first person to turn to: sometimes it is done by the pupils themselves; sometimes the teachers and parents inform the social worker. Usually social worker is the central person in conflict solving.

For example, this never-ending dialogue with pupils – you say a word, pupil says a word, and if you do not want a conflict to escalate, then the social pedagogue helps - a neutral person from aside. (Teacher, homogeneous focus group, minority school)

The activities of a social pedagogue or a social worker include mostly counselling and mediating conflicts. Counselling and mediation is provided both individually as well as in a group of the conflicting parties. Cooperation with other institutions, the coordination of the problem solving is also among the tasks of social pedagogue or social worker at school. Also activities like participation in parent-teacher-days etc. are in the field of activity of social worker.

In case of problems, pupils directly involved, their parents and teacher are the first to inform the professionals in the centre. The problems are solved first by consulting teachers and pupils, also parents are involved, if necessary. Parents are contacted in cases of pupils being absent from the classes for a long time. The school psychologist works more individually with the psychological problems, while the social pedagogue addresses a broader spectrum.

As described in most of the cases, the role of social pedagogue is considered of a long lasting importance. The rapport established and awareness of availability of other conflict solving sources is considered to have diminished the amount of fighting within the schools as well as has established a conflict solving scheme based on conversations and empathy.

I remember, when I first came to this school, we had a long list of pupils not coming to school. Now the number of such children is much smaller – there are 2 pupils. One has left the school and started to work, and we are now working with his mother. For the other child, we are now organising home-teaching. Of course, there would be more such problems, if there was no social pedagogue at school. I believe children benefit from this opportunity to have someone to turn to in case of problems. It helps also the school. (Social pedagogue, minority school.)

Some time ago we were living nicely without any social pedagogue. Only 4 years ago such a vacancy appeared. At the beginning – for the first 2 years, we could not understand what the social pedagogue will do in our school. Now our social pedagogue has left for studies in Germany, and we feel we really miss something. (Teacher, minority school,)

Though there still exists a threat of the problems being brought outside the school to the street or interethnic conflicts on the street.

The practice can be considered sustainable, as it is institutionalised in most of the schools. The activities of a social pedagogue are in general considered as having positive results in reducing the number of violent and long term conflicts and establishing a more positive and open school atmosphere both by the children and the teaching staff. It is observed, that the occurrence of open fights and long terms conflicts has diminished in schools, because of the mediation and counselling available. The result of the work of the social pedagogue has had both an impact on conflict prevention, as pupils are more aware of the help available before the conflict has escalated, and conflict solving, as the conflicts solved can be recalled.

7.2. Multicultural education in curricula

Description

In Latvia, different issues concerning multiculturalism are taught in classes, and are in fact integrated in the comprehensive primary education curriculum. Issues related to the ethnicity, diversity of cultures and identities are part of everyday learning process in the school.

In the manuals for Russian as native language classes, we have a theme on language, culture competences and identity. [...] This year pupils participated in an essay competition on patriotisms, on how they feel here in Latvia. They write that they feel like citizens, even though not all have acquired citizenship. Now very many pupils have shown interest to become citizens, and I am really pleased to see that. (Headmaster, minority school)

In general creating awareness of multicultural issues refers to the comprehensive education course programme in history, but some issues related to ethnicity, identity and multiculturalism are also addressed in the Latvian as a second language classes as well as Latvian as the native language classes. Ethnic and cultural differences are discussed also in geography classes.

The socio-cultural competences should among other include understanding and awareness on the cultural issues in Latvia and inter-cultural dialogue competences,

as well as ability to perceive, understand and tolerate the cultural diversity. Usually the multicultural education modules are provided in the national language or bilingually depending on the language of instruction in school, i.e., in Latvian when the language of instruction is Latvian, and bilingually if it is a minority school.

Also according to the curricula, in Latvian as second language classes in class 8 they have a topic on nations, ethnicities, ethnic composition and ethnic identity. (Teacher, minority school)

In extra-curricular activities multicultural elements are also important. Pupils participate in different activities apart from classes, though directly connected with the study programme, for example, in essay competitions, events and projects related to diversity of cultures (projects involving performing arts; school scientific projects related to the ethnic cultures and identities).

It is set in the study programme and in the manuals. And we can compare cultural differences very well, when visitors from schools from India, Japan, Lithuania and Estonia arrive. (Teacher, minority school)

Usually multicultural education in forms of lectures and discussions is provided for the whole class. The research shows that there exists interest in different cultures, traditions, and awareness of the multicultural education activities in class among the pupils. In the activities apart from classes, for example, projects, usually individuals or groups of individuals participate.

Sometimes it is important just to discuss these issues with students.

Now then there are more people from Asia and African origin people coming, we have to talk about interethnic and intercultural issues, because these people are different. Russians and Latvians probably will not differ that much, at least, by their behaviour on the street. (Teacher, homogenous focus group, school with Latvian language of instruction)

Information for the teachers is available as well as the manuals and the teaching aids as part of the general teacher training. The working methods include those usually used in the class: lectures, discussions, work in groups on multicultural issues.

In minority schools with bilingual instruction (Russian and Latvian) pupils participate in different activities outside the curricula, but directly connected with it: essay competitions, events and projects related to diversity of cultures (a singing contest in one's mother tongue was mentioned; a school scientific project relating to the research of the origins of different names and surnames of the students in the class was mentioned).

Impact on prevention and solving of conflicts

It is recognised by the school personnel that pupils express interest in these activities when in class.

If we take the national costumes, for example, these differ for Latvians and Russians. That is interesting. (Pupil, homogenous focus group, minority school)

Though teachers presume, that pupils do not reflect on the ethnicity much outside the class. The commonly agreed opinion is that this kind of education module provides information for understanding, thus promoting ethnic and cultural integration, even though the people interviewed did not comment on the positive effects on the education in more detail.

The impact of the multicultural education module in schools as well as extra-curricular activities (projects, contests) were mostly spoken of as having positive impact on the integration process, learning the (Latvian) language, achieving good results in competitions. The problematic issue, however, is the more intensive engagement of schools with Russian as the language of instruction in these activities.

The practice of educating pupils on issues of multiculturalism is established in the study plan for the primary and secondary education. Interest of pupils to participate in different events and willingness to know more about the diversity of cultures confirm the positive results of the education on multicultural issues.

7.3. Other experience

In addition to the practices mentioned above, during the research project other experiences connected with managing diversity and promoting multiculturalism were identified. This other experience than cannot be classified as directly relevant to the good practices in conflict solving or prevention, but still can be considered as having a positive impact on facilitating understanding and sensitizing pupils to the interethnic issues.

This kind of experience refers to the direct interaction with students of different ethnic and cultural background, like student exchange, and learning from experiencing different cultures through festivities and traditions.

7.3.1. Student Exchange

Description

Student exchange projects were mentioned both in the interviews and in the focus groups, when talking about the diversity and actions and attitudes directed towards it. International school cooperation projects involving also short term and long term student exchange, local student exchange from schools with Latvian as the language of instruction to the minority schools with bilingual (Russian and Latvian) instruction were also mentioned.

In the international school cooperation the exchange of pupils usually is organised for a short time period when the groups of students led by teachers are visiting the

other school. Sometimes a student from each school is actually taking part in the study process, so the exchange includes real integration and adaptation activities. Students usually live in the families of the welcoming school pupils, together with the teachers participate in different events and, among other activities, communicate with the pupils of the welcoming school. The sustainability and length of the cooperation usually depends on the availability of resources and initiative and enthusiasm of the teaching staff as well as the pupils and their parents.

The exchange of pupils between the schools in Riga is usually implemented between the secondary schools having some cooperation before and being located nearby, and is made between the schools with Latvian language of instruction and minority schools with bilingual education (Russian and Latvian). These activities were connected with the bilingual education reform and during the process of active protests against the reform. The general aim of the activities was to facilitate the understanding and mutual acceptance among the pupils studying in different schools. The exchange was implemented as students visiting another school nearby for a week, participating in the lectures on a regular basis. After the exchange, pupils shared their experience both with the pupils from their school as well as from the other school. The main message was to get to know the others better, to see the other school functioning and all in all, to promote a higher level of understanding and tolerance.

Impact on prevention and solving of conflicts

The international exchange projects are promoting learning and understanding of cultures, though the direct impact on students' everyday routines was probably more temporary and did affect a small part of the students.

The minority schools with bilingual education (in Russian and Latvian) emphasized the positive effects, like achieving mutual understanding, diminishing of intercultural bias and prejudice, was expressed by the students having participated in the exchange. Though it is again difficult to evaluate, if other students except for those directly involved in the exchange, share the view.

The exchange of students is in most cases based on the enthusiasm and activities of particular schools and people interested. Besides, the results of the cooperation on the perception and attitudes of the students on the interethnic and intercultural issues cannot be directly evaluated, as most students know about the exchange.

7.3.2. Celebration of Ethnic festivities

Description

In schools with Russian as the language of instruction celebration of different traditionally Latvian and Russian festivities was mentioned as activities oriented towards multiculturalism. The most popular traditions and festivities are celebrated – the ‘Latvian’ Christmas, ‘Latvian’ Easter along the Orthodox traditions.

The celebration of the activities is considered as promoting integration, as it is important to share some of the traditions of the country at the same time not losing the national language, culture and identity.

8. Conclusions

The schools in general can be considered as quite well integrated culturally and ethnically. The ethnic diversity in the schools participating in the study is different, and is mostly manifested as linguistic features.

Schools with Russian as the instruction language seem to be more ethnically diverse, as they are traditionally based on the linguistic, not ethnic uniformity.

Participation in events (like participation in projects, essay competitions, student exchange with neighbouring schools etc.) oriented towards ethnic and civic integration is considered important for the schools. In the schools with Latvian as the language of instruction, some important issues related to multiculturalism and integration are concerned with the additional teaching resources necessary for children with ethnic background other than Latvian, and development of more cooperative relationships with the neighbouring minority schools.

The conflicts in schools are described mostly as short term and non violent, though the opposite also occurs. There seem to be no explicit conflicts with ethnic background within the schools. Children of different ethnic, linguistic and cultural origin are involved in conflicts and arguments virtually as much as children of the same ethnic and cultural background. However, ethnic conflicts might possibly be ‘brought outside’ the school to the street.

Except for some specific cases, most of the cases conflicts were characterized as caused by leadership problems widely agreed as characteristic for the age group of 14-16 year olds. Conflicts having occurred in schools are more described as based on a variety of reasons, mostly not connected with, or only vaguely referring to the cultural differences or ethnicity, and occur mostly in a form of an argument without violent behaviour.

However, the ethnic background dimension is not explicit except for some cases, and in general it rather remains latent and underlying, intertwined with other social and personal aspects of the parties involved. This and lack of apparent and impressive cultural differences between the major ethnic groups in Latvia certainly

characterizes and affects the application of conflict solving and prevention methods and approaches, and activities promoting multiculturalism in Latvia .

There seem to be no explicit conflicts with ethnic reasons within any of schools. Conflicts described by the students among themselves were minor. In one case, it was marked by the social pedagogue, the occurrence of conflicts within schools has diminished, but they might possibly be 'brought outside' the school.

Except for one case recalled in one of the schools, where a conflict emerged between primary school children with Roma and Jewish ethnic origin respectively, most of the conflicts were characterized as caused by leadership problems valued as characteristic for the age group or 14-16 year olds.

Children of different ethnic, linguistic and cultural origin are involved in conflicts and quarrels as much as children, though the teachers and social pedagogues describe these as based on a variety of reasons, not connected with differences on culture and ethnicity ('there was a general conflict between boys and girls in that class, and so she (the girl having Latvian as the first language) also got involved', a teacher, school with Russian as the language of instruction).

The role of school psychologist and social pedagogue is very important in preventing emergence of conflicts and solving them, as indicated by the school.

Ethnic problems in the country both by the children and the adults are seen as in general are mainly caused by politicians and not as inherent in the society.

All of the participating schools have a prototype school nearby with another language of instruction (Russian or Latvian respectively). The contacts with people from the neighbouring schools were described as "good" by the school staff, but as indifferent and in some cases even hostile- by the students in focus group discussions.

As the results of the previous research projects show, most disappointment and controversies in the minority schools with Russian as the language of instruction is connected with the bilingual education reform described above. It is often considered as implemented in a hurry and thus determining lack of success and unsatisfactory educational outcomes for the affected groups. The schools with Latvian language of instruction are most concerned with linguistic integration of the non-Latvian students in the study process.

In general, the good practices provide sufficient tools for integrating the diversity and promoting multiculturalism and understanding in schools, though more resources should be provided in dissemination of informative and methodological materials on these issues.