

State of Art in Latvia

Introduction

The goal of the project "Looking@Learning" („Skats uz Mācīšanos”) is to create a place and support for the innovation-oriented cooperation between formal and informal intermediary sectors of education professionals in order to develop modern and successful learning environment for young people involved in learning process. The 1st phase of the project named „State of Art” presents case studies and a collection of information that can be further used to develop methodology for promoting creative learning environment and for doing future studies on creative learning environment.

This study should be viewed as a pilot study inside the project since its goal is to gather initial information about creative learning and creative teaching environment in Latvia. The study outlines problems in the area of creative teaching environment in Latvian education system, simultaneously viewing education policy documents and inspecting the actual situation in Latvian educational establishments. This study focuses on the situation in establishments of formal education (primary and elementary schools), informal education (youth centres), NGO and alternative education (Montessori pedagogy).

1. Study Methodology

The study uses qualitative approach in order to understand Latvian situation, problems linked to creativity, creative learning and creative teaching environment in Latvia. The study was conducted June-July, 2015. Following methods were used in it:

- 1) analysis of theoretical literature in order to understand theoretical interpretation of creativity, creative learning and creative teaching environment (see Chapter 2);
- 2) qualitative content analysis used to analyze national planning documents and education system documents (see Chapter 3);
- 3) individual semi-structured interviews with representatives of different educational establishments. The selection of interviewees was made according to principle of availability and purposefulness, including representatives of formal education (school and educational administration), a representative of alternative education (Montessori pedagogy) in the study. Interviews took place from June 26th till June 29th in the respondents' workplaces, as well as in casual environment – in Jelgava and Riga. Average duration of an interview was 50 minutes (see Chapter 4).

Description of Respondents

| Nr | Name | Institution | Position | Date | Notes on the interview |
|----|----------------|---|---|------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Linda Feldmane | Lielplatone branch of Eleja Preschool and Primary school, Jelgava district | Manager | June 27 th , 2015 | Held in Jelgava, in casual environment |
| 2 | Irēna Domniece | „Iespēja izaugsmei. Ltd” uses new pedagogical approaches to children and youth, and special need children; organization of camps for these children | Manager | June 29 th , 2015 | Held in Jelgava, in respondent's workplace |
| 3 | Ieva Zāgmane | Project, activity – „Fashion Bee” | Project promoter and manager in schools and events | June 29 th , 2015 | Held in Riga, in casual environment |
| 4 | Gunta Auza | Jelgava Education Governance | Head | June 26 th , 2015 | Held in Jelgava, in respondent's workplace |
| 5 | Dace Ekša | Jelgava 1 st boarding school | Social pedagogue and psychology teacher | June 29 th , 2015 | Held in Jelgava, in respondents's workplace |
| 6 | Sabīne Medne | Salacgrīva secondary school | Teacher of Latvian and culturology, participant of Possible Mission program | June 26 th , 2015 | Held in Riga, in casual environment |

- 4) case analysis in order to identify examples of creative learning. Individual interviews and document analysis is used for case analysis and includes both formal and informal education actors. Sample included a case from Gulbene district, case of NGO Humana People to People in Latvia and initiative “Fashion Bee” (see Chapter 5).

2. Theoretical Explanation of Creativity, Creative Learning and Creative Teaching Environment within the Project

The importance of creativity and innovation in addressing the economic, environmental and social crises has been recognized in policy discussion in Europe. Recent policies call for the strengthening of Europe's innovative capacity and the development of a creative and knowledge-intensive economy and society through reinforcing the role of education and training in the knowledge triangle and focusing school curricula on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. It has been recognized that schools and initial education play a key role in fostering and developing people's creative and innovative capacities for further learning and their working lives (Cachia, Ferrari, Ala-Mutka, Punie, 2010).

Creativity is conceptualised as a skill for all and it is argued that educational actors have the power to unlock the creative and innovative potential of the young. It is argued that creativity, in the educational context, should be conceptualized as a transversal and cross-curricular skill, which everyone can develop. Therefore it can be fostered but also inhibited. Creativity is defined as a product or process that shows a balance of originality and value. It is a skill, an ability to make unforeseen connections and to generate new and appropriate idea. The creative experience is seen as opposite to the reproductive experience. The literature shows that creativity is conceptualised in different ways by different people. It can be seen as arts-centred or as relevant to any domain of knowledge. It can also be seen as a quality some geniuses have or as a skill that anyone can develop (Cachia, Ferrari, Ala-Mutka, Punie, 2010).

Creative learning is therefore any learning which involves understanding and new awareness, which allows the learner to go beyond notional acquisition, and focuses on thinking skills. It is based on learner empowerment and centredness (Cachia, Ferrari, Ala-Mutka, Punie, 2010).

By teaching environment we also understand environment of a particular educational establishment characterised by social components, special objects and matters, as well as interpersonal relationships. These factors influence and complement each other and affect every person involved. Teaching environment additionally specifies educational environment; it always implies organization process. It ensures correlation of material, communicative and social conditions in the learning process and beneficial circumstances for the development of student's creative potential. By using different sources of knowledge and various learning methods, a student constructs his knowledge, skills and dispositions on his/her own (Mežinska, 2011).

Creativity as a concept in the context of educational system can be attributed to person's character traits and skills, teaching methods/content and teaching environment. Besides, creativity can be viewed as a result of some activity – new, original product or idea. If creativity is viewed as a personality trait or a skill, then it is described by innovation, originality, unconventional solutions, anticonformism, courage, productivity of innovation activities in various sectors, creative intuition, rich imagination, inspiration, psychic plasticity, viragoes activity (Bebre, 1997). Also creativity can be defined as ability for unusual thinking characterized by highly developed imagination, divergent thinking, psychic plasticity, subconscious and viragoes activity (Medne, 2014). Assuming that the goal of education system is to encourage creativity of youth as personality trait or a skill, education documentation has to provide for fostering of the mentioned qualities.

3. Analysis of Policy Documents

Creative environment and creative people are named in Latvian planning and normative documents as one of the goals that must be attained and developed in both the near and distant future. In the Strategy of Sustainable Development, Latvia in 2030 is described as a green, clean, easily accessible and also creative place. Thus, creativity is significant in connection with long-term goal of sustainable development of the nation along with the priorities of clean environment and optimal infrastructure. Besides this concept is not only attributed to individual characteristics and human resources, but also to Latvia as a whole and its environment.

Creativity as a priority interlaces main Latvian mid-term development planning document "National Development Plan 2014-2020" (Nacionālais attīstības plāns 2014 –2020 - NAP); and in it as well, the vision of Latvian future is seen through creativity and – in particular – through creative people. It says in the introduction where the vision of Latvia in 2020 is given: "Latvia will be Latvian and confident, safe and people-friendly, green and clean, prosperous, effective and competitive country with hard-working, educated, creative, fit and happy people living in it". So, in context of the strategy of sustainable development, creativity is more focused on individual characteristics. Also, creativity has its position along with other indicators describing statehood and public welfare.

Courses of action and tasks highlighted in the National Development Plan (NDP) link creativity with two important aspects: development of business environment and human resilience. In the first case, the idea of creativity expresses itself through invention of innovative products and development of creative industries that are viewed as conditions of export capable production.

While human resilience is meant to be strengthened through different competencies, including creativity and critical thinking. A section in NDP course of action part named „Human Resilience” says: „In order for an individual to be able to get and keep a decent job and provide for oneself, one’s people and to contribute to country’s development, he/she needs different competencies (a set of knowledge, skills and dispositions), for example, language skills, ICT knowledge and skills, communication and cooperation skills, work skills, entrepreneurial skills, citizenship skills, creativity, reasoning skills, budgeting skills, ability to assess risks and find solutions”.

Thus it can be concluded that at least on the level of political planning in Latvia there is an understanding that ability to get and keep a decent job and ability to take care for the development of oneself and nation is not possible without a set of particular competencies, including creativity.

There are several instruments that can be used to develop the competency of creativity in the society, and all of them are linked to education: training and attracting highly qualified and creative general education teachers, implementation of innovative study content and work forms in basic education and general secondary education and provision of possibility for informal education in order to encourage creativity and entrepreneurial abilities. Both the role of human resources and education content is being stressed, as well as physical environment, material and technical supply and its impact on the development of a creative individual. Innovative study content has been put forward as the main task and the key words that describe the promotion of creativity and entrepreneurial skills are digital study environment, modern language learning, improvement of study content in the areas of natural and social sciences and strengthening of career education system.

Encouragement of creativity is also linked to provision of possibilities of informal education: support for youth technical innovation centres, organization of summer study camps, science seminars, competitions and science projects.

Based on NDP guidelines, it can be concluded that on political level creativity is viewed in the context of entrepreneurial abilities and creation of innovative, exportable product. The corresponding tasks are viewed only through education system using opportunities of both formal and informal education.

Whereas the document "The Guidelines of Education Development 2014-2020" (Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2014. – 2020. gadam) names creativity among the main goals, among the course of action it is only mentioned secondarily. It often highlights modern methods and modern infrastructure, but it is hard to understand whether they are linked to creativity or not.

The document points out necessity to improve education content to be oriented on the competencies, healthy lifestyle, creativity and promotion of innovation, that is in demand in knowledge society. In the other tasks, creativity is not particularly accentuated. But, when making development of individual skills one of the goals, it emphasizes the approach based in value education which among others includes development of creativity.

„Value-oriented education on the planning level is understood as development of basic human values – spirituality, morale, culture, spiritual and physical posture; spreading awareness of family values and national identity; cultivation of individual confidence, self-worth, self-reflection, language skills and creativity; advancement of tolerance, ability to reconcile, compassion etc., general human skills; orientation, motivation and preparation for a successful professional career” (Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2014.–2020. gadam).

In the context of value-oriented education, the meaning of informal education which is mentioned in NDP is emphasized as well. While putting forward the significant tasks, the necessity to support youth science centres, summer study camps, science seminars, competitions and science projects and other activities that are directed towards cultivation and development of children’s abilities.

Interestingly enough, other normative documents that regulate education system mention creativity as a part on goals and tasks, but fail to specify how it would be promoted. The Law of General Education points out the necessity to create conditions for cultivation of creative individual; it says in the Council of Ministers Regulations of the standard of basic education, standard samples of elementary school subjects and study programs that one of the tasks of the programs of elementary education is to provide opportunities to gain experience in creative activity, to stimulate development of creative and intellectual abilities and while perfecting experience of creative activity to facilitate development of student’s emotional and creative abilities.

Generally speaking, policy planning documents that relate to the education system present creativity as one of many political priorities which fits into overall context of value-oriented education. Such concepts as ‘creative personality’, ‘skill of creativity’ and ‘creative place’ are often mentioned among the goals and particular tasks, but most of all they are mentioned in goals and some of the tasks without specifying the ways how creativity is defined from the standpoint of policy planning and how it will be promoted. Abovementioned actions and tasks are general enough and can be applied to nurturing of any skills. The Council of Ministers Regulations attempt to specify what aspect of self-expression and creativity is, but this explanation only partially reveals

creativity and its meaning is reduced to the areas of the development of artistic creativity and imagination.

„The aspect of self-expression and creativity as experience of creative activity, ability to independently seek and find solutions to practical problems, discover correlation, nurture ingenuity and imagination and opportunity to practice artistic creation and sports” (the Council of Ministers Regulations of the standard of basic education, standard samples of elementary school subjects and study programs). This document also highlights necessity to include analytically critical aspect in the education content, which, from theoretical standpoint, is closely linked to creativity and its endorsement.

Relatively narrow understanding of creativity is revealed by standards of school subjects. As it is concluded by S. Medne, creative skills are mostly nurtured in subjects linked to artistic world (visual arts, music, literature). Relatively less promotion of creativity is connected to social studies and subjects related to health. Subject standards for general education do not provide for promotion of creative skills in science and maths and IT subjects (Medne, 2014).

The documents regulating youth policy refer to creativity secondarily or do not mention at all. In “Guidelines of Youth Policy 2009–2018”, creativity is not included in any of main guidelines or basic principles. There is a mentioning of creative self-expression in relation to the support of interest education.

Besides The Law of Youth does not mention creativity, but it accentuates necessity to provide support for youth initiatives that would create favourable circumstances for their intellectual and creative development. In essence, there is no connection between the priorities of education and youth, because in education, promotion of creativity is mentioned quite often, while in youth policy, it is mentioned in a very narrow sense - only in connection with youth education and creative self-expression.

Comparing to other member states of EU, Latvia is among those that rather often include ideas of creativity and innovativeness in their education programs. But there are different approaches to the conceptualization of creativity – from creativity that is centred on arts to creativity as interdisciplinary competence that is related to different areas of knowledge. All the while teachers believe that creativity is sufficiently emphasized in education programs. Latvian teachers are among those in Europe that mostly agree with the notion of creativity playing an important role in study content (Cachia, 2010).

It can be generally concluded that in political planning documents creativity is more revealed in the broadest sense (Latvia as a creative place), instead of mentioning of it in particular study standards (creative self-expression, artistic creativity). Although creativity as a concept permeates all planning documents and education regulations, one cannot find a precise definition of creativity; thus it has created a situation when different documents accentuated different aspects of creativity. Besides, promotion of creativity is mainly assigned to education system, and the role of other social institutes (family, economics) is not accessed and it can create problems in the area of implementation of creativity in the life of society.

There have been several studies of creativity and its significance on different levels of education system in Latvia. The following studies can be mentioned as the most significant:

- 1) Cachia R., Ferrari A., Ala-Mutka K., Punie Y. (2010) Creative Learning and Innovative Teaching.

- 2) Gala ziņojums par rekomendācijām strukturālo reformu īstenošanai radošās izglītības jomā (Final Report on Recommendations for Structural Reforms in the Area of Creative Education) (2012). SAFEGE Baltija;
- 3) Medne S. (2014) Radošuma izpratne un loma Latvijas vispārējā vidējā izglītībā. Bakalaura darbs Latvijas Kultūras akadēmijā (Understanding of Creativity and its Role in Secondary Education in Latvia. Bachelors paper in Latvian Academy of Culture);
- 4) Sākumskolas mācību saturs, metodes un vide: kvantitatīvā un kvalitatīvā pētījuma rezultātu ziņojums (2011). Iespēju tilts izglītībai sākumskolā (Study Content, Methods and Environment of Primary School: Report of the Results of Quantitative and Qualitative Study, 2011. Bridge of opportunity for education in primary school).

4. Analysis of Interviews

Interpretation of Creativity, Creative Learning and Creative Teaching Environment

In their interpretations of creativity, creative teaching environment and learning, respondents are fairly consistent. Sometimes it is not easy for respondents to define these terms, but the essence of explanation is similar. Respondents refer to creativity as a skill necessary for teachers¹, pupils and youth, as well as teaching methods, equally emphasizing all three aspects.

Sabīne Medne that has studied creativity for several years defines it as divergent thinking that implies ability to create new correlations between different ideas and ability to understand which idea is worth implementation, realization and sharing. The highest expression of creativity is when each pupil has opportunity to express his/her creativity, to reflect on it and understand what must be done differently next time. Ieva Zāgmane defines creativity as ability to create new opportunities and change situations. Creativity also implies making of mistakes and learning from them, but the main accent is placed on gaining experiences, testing one's strength, daring and opportunity to do "as a pupil sees the best". So, creativity is defined as a set of skills that allows pupils and youth to take responsibility for their work and choices.

According to respondents, creative teaching environment is when child's senses, attitude towards training content and understanding of the life around them is being nurtured. Creativity implies connection to real life and accentuates things that are useful for everyday life:

„This is the right creativity – searching for links between grammar law and its practical use. Here is my task – to place theory into the everyday context so that they could both gain Latvian language skills and obtain something they might need later in life. And it is important for them to realize it!”

In the case of special needs children and youth the emphasis is placed on sensual experiences, and this very principle in the context of creative learning can be related to all pupils. So, creative learning is a way for pupils to be prepared for real life when they 'learn by doing', not by theorizing, thus learning to adapt to the changes of labour market, to critically assess situations, find solutions and feel secure in unusual settings:

„Kā es saku, lai viņiem būtu čūjs, ņuhs, poņa un fiška”². (“I like to say, I want them to get it; to have a sense and a clue”.)

Respondents believe that creativity includes such important qualities as boldness, daring to try different things in life, finds those that suit the best and trust in own strength and communication skills. A creative person will be able to solve different problems and life situation; it is a resource that allows individuals to adapt to different life cycles:

„An individual must be creative all the time”.

Creative learning is necessary and allows seeing both gifted children, children with different disorders, helps to notice and nurture individual gifts and meet different needs, to increase diversity and tolerance towards one another, and to reduce uniformity in schools. Generally speaking, the result of creativity is ability to live.

¹ Terms „pupils”, „teachers”, „schools” are used in the report inspite of their formal designation in the system of education.

² No translation; the expression can be understood by Latvian speakers only.

Part of Latvian society sticks to stereotypical beliefs about creativity as part of bohemian lifestyle that is not meant, available or necessary for everyone. Respondents deny this view emphasizing the potential of creativity in every individual. According to respondents, talented is not the same as creative, since it narrows the notion of creativity to particular field and does not apply to every individual. Even though it is easier to nurture creativity through subjects linked to arts, respondents emphasize necessity to integrate creativity into all school subjects and social and cultural activities in school as well:

„This is what I tell the children: put your whole heart into this”.

At the same time creativity does not mean the lack of planning or anarchy, as it is sometimes presented in literature and pointed out by respondents; it implies planned learning process with expected results and known methods.

By teachers' creativity, respondents understand their ability and skill to use environment and teaching methods to motivate and teach their pupils. Teachers' creativity is considered to be a vitally important condition, since everything else depends on teacher's personality and motivation.

Creative learning is interpreted as teachers' and pupils working methods that ensure the development of pupils' creativity:

„How do I learn and how do I teach? Teacher must become a support”.

Creative learning means to deliver current training program using variant teaching methods. Respondents do not see the need to significantly alter training programs, which correlates with the results of other studies.

Respondents give almost unanimous description to creative teaching environment: it is a set of supportive, interesting, favourable conditions (school, community, society) for the training:

„A child must feel welcome. If a child sees that the janitor greets him/her favourable in the morning, that the flowerbeds are neat and pretty; if he/she sees that every work is valued and that every task can be done with the right attitude”.

Assessment of Training Methods in the Context of Creativity

| Methods that 'work' | Methods that 'do not work' |
|---|--|
| Games and role-play | Reading seminars |
| Discussions | Writing seminars |
| Brain-storms | Tests with the closed questions |
| "Spiders of ideas" | Methods that do not match age, season, class composition |
| Live poem | |
| Double diary | |
| Creation of comixes, booklets, presentations and collages | |
| Free writing, composition of fairytales | |
| Forecasting, prognostication | |
| Reading in pairs | |
| Sharing of personal experiences | |
| Group activities | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Orientation, expeditions (field trips) | |
| Green living | |
| Creative workshops | |
| Freedom to choose activities | |
| Drama improvisation | |
| Games | |
| Different festivals, for example, language festival, Latvian traditions etc. | |
| Opportunities provided by modern technologies and the Internet | |
| The use of unusual new materials | |
| Research work | |
| Bono's thinking hats | |

While describing current school situation in relation to creative teaching, respondents admit that the potential of creative learning is not used sufficiently. One of the respondents believes that only about 20% of teachers are creative in their work, and the percentage is smaller when working with special need children and youth. It can be helped, to start with, by agreeing on a common platform for the concept of creativity. It means creating empirically understandable, clear definition of creativity, creative learning and creative teaching environment. It is needed, for example, for cases when it is difficult to assess particular teaching methods from the standpoint of creativity:

„Creativity can be interpreted so widely that a teacher can easily say, here, we are developing creativity through this essay. But is it really so?“

Respondents Understanding of Formal Requirements for Promotion of Creativity

The results of the pilot research confirm known facts about the weak connection of normative documents to the real life in Latvia. Even if respondents theoretically know that there are some formal requirements in relation to promotion of creativity in schools, in their work they are governed by other principles – by the particular situation, problems, finances and other factors.

The interviews did not create an impression that teachers that are not faced with policy-making on any level took into their consideration NDP or education policy guidelines; Chapter 3 talks about it:

„I keep thinking if I should have read theory of what creativity is before the interview“.

The teachers that are creative and use creative methods in their work do it in accordance with their personal understanding. This aspect can also be viewed as an advantage of the situation in Latvia, since teachers feel rather free in how and with what methods they manage to teach their pupils necessary topics. For the very same reason the teachers that use traditional, teacher-centred methods feel no need to change something, since creativity is not a mandatory requirement.

Respondents do not believe that it is possible to enforce creativity by repressive means; popularization of good practises, learning of new methods and informal sharing are much better means. Respondents also emphasize that creative learning cannot be enforced through regulations or laws that begin in teacher's office:

„Law can attempt to correct us; we can write on the paper everything we need. I don't know if it can be enforced throughout the country...”

Teachers have experienced that creativity is 'addictive', that good practices slowly, but surely spread wider and wider. Education program "Mission Possible" can be mentioned here as one of essential agents in spreading of creative teaching methods³. Respondents think that the gap between theory and practice is maintained because of vague, indefinite definition of creativity, fear of change experienced by teachers and complex evaluation of creativity.

Some municipalities (education governance) require school to take formal policy documents into consideration, but even there next school year objectives are set primarily on the basis of the existing situation in the city or county. Conceptualization of creativity varies in different municipalities depending on their participation in different projects or individual initiative and other factors. This conceptualization is made more difficult because of broad application of the idea of creativity. At the same time, as recognized by Gunta Auza, every interested person has easy access to information about creativity, its interpretations and expressions. In Jelgava the idea of creativity is linked to teachers' creativity, creative training process and creativity in children, first and foremost encouraging changes in the attitude of school leadership in favour of creative thinking that corresponds with theoretical understanding of the role of school leadership in the promotion of creativity. One of the most popular methods in Jelgava and Latvia in the promotion of creativity is '6 thinking hats' of Edward de Bono that is promoted by 'Castle of Creativity' group⁴.

Generally speaking, education policy at the national level is quite far removed from the real situation in schools. For example, they talk in the Parliament about teaching of virtue in schools, but representatives of local governments believe that it is already being done in different ways. The head of education governance thinks that children and youth are best taught by personal example of the officials of all levels, as well as by the practices of mass media in youth socialization.

Factors, Stimuli and Hindrances Affecting Creativity

The analysis of interviews indicates different factors that promote creative teaching environment and creative learning:

- 1) Physically accessible, positive, creative, emotionally supportive environment and work atmosphere where the chosen methods correspond with abilities, age, group size etc. of children and youth. It can be concluded that methods, their diversity and consistency are especially emphasized, because the result and assessment of particular activities are significant not only for children, but also for teachers and experts. Positive experience, feedback, as well as assessment which is especially important (peer assessment, leadership assessment) helps to initiate new ideas, practices and cooperation at different levels (individuals, groups, schools, families, municipalities etc.) and between different social agents.

³ <http://piesakies.iespejamamisija.lv/?p=89>

⁴ <http://www.radosumapils.lv/index.php?p=9477&lang=1562>

- 2) Small schools, small classes and individual approach encourages creativity since it allows to create cosy atmosphere, to know one another, to see each other's needs and highlight best abilities of children and youth. Sometimes threats of school closure, small number of pupils and other difficulties are grounds for creative ideas and successful solutions:

„One school is taking a new direction in technologies and science that would not have been there if the school had 1000 children“;

„Activities of Druviena primary school (Gulbene district) as creative centre are focused on the maintenance and popularization of Latvian identity, Latvian culture and crafts. School has organized a system for life-long development and growth of creative individual .It encompasses different target groups and interest groups“.

- 3) Pedagogue's desire and ability to develop individual talents of children, encouragement, empathy, emotionally supportive environment and creation of new opportunities. It is the development of individual potential that must be put forward as the main goal; it cannot be lost under the influence of different hindrances.

- 4) Human factor is mention in interviews as something that can both encourage and hinder creativity. Personality, activity, attitude and willingness of a teacher, an expert, and a partner to do something differently and to use different methods.

„If a teacher is active and wants to participate in all possible activities, then the children go along. This type of teachers usually has wonderful ideas!“

“A more creative teacher helps the creativity to flourish in the pupils. Teacher must start with himself/herself. If I can show my students that I am a creative individual, it is the easiest way to pass it along.“

This situation can be changed by further training and individual growth. Creativity helps to stay 'on fire in profession' and reduces the burn-out risks for teachers and experts. All suggestions relating to creativity can be applied to all levels of education. A teacher, a lecturer, a head of interest circle – they should all be viewed as mentors and a guide.

- 5) "Learn by doing" principle. It is through practical operation and activity that new sensory experience; new knowledge and skills necessary for individual development and growth can be obtained.
- 6) Supportive (financially and morally) school, municipal, project leadership that cares for environment (outdoor and indoor), available technology and favourable atmosphere. Opinions on the significance of environment are divided; some respondents believe environment to be something not significant and place larger emphasis on the personality of a teacher who forms the environment; but others think that environment help to release creativity and to harmonize. Environment plays a special role working with special need children and youth. So it can be concluded that creative physical and emotional environment is closely related to the willingness and interests of people in it.

„...creativity cannot be linked to finances, city, the countryside, nationality, because it is a skill. I do not use modern technologies, like a projector and the like, but I do not feel disfavoured or unable to implement creative teaching methods“.

- 7) Available financial resources and technical support. Although the respondents see creativity as a way to 'manage' with available means, all of the interviewees point out that technical support is important as it allows to get results better, faster and often more effectively. Respondents admit that environment has been organized thanks to the available EU

financing. There is enough money at present for the organization of environment, purchasing equipment, especially if the needs are identified and expenses are planned timely. Modern technologies also is one of the things that allow actors to express themselves in different activities, for example, interactive board, technologies that causes various feelings, develops and stimulates them etc.

„It is also expression of creativity to use new things, not going into extremes, of course“.

Factors Hindering Creative Environment and Creative Learning:

- 1) Lack of common understanding and team work between parts involved. There is a lack connection between school subjects, topics, between training programs and real life; teachers fail to share their experience (due to unwillingness to accept someone else's experience since there are different courses and seminars, but the information presented at these events is used insufficiently). Teachers underestimate each other's creative expressions:

„Teacher is not a robot; he or she wants to hear a thank you... that in itself is a motivation“.

Mistrust of colleagues (teachers), negative, sceptical attitude:

„...there was a big fight; some denied, some scolded, but I did not give up“, „Why do you need it? You are not paid for it, aren't you?“

„...so much energy is lost trying to prove that standardized environment is not necessary in our education system, for our children; we need creativity in our everyday life; current standards and stereotypes do not work any longer“.

Interviews have shown that older teachers ("stagnant") are more negative towards creative learning, but this statement cannot be generalized, since everything depends on teacher's/expert's personality.

There is no cooperation between teachers of different subjects (it could be corrected in the new teachers' payment model that provides one paid hour a week for teachers of different subjects to discuss children's progress.

„...we all teach the same child, so to speak; we form him through tiny tributes from all sides. At present colleagues do not experience enough time together to discuss these matters and share“.

- 2) Personal qualities of teachers, school staff and experts that can be observed by children and youth, including superficiality, inaccuracy, indecisiveness, uniform teaching methods and standardized evaluation. Just like in relation to personality, the problem usually is the unwillingness to learn and use new methods and to grow spiritually. There are situations when teachers are willing to learn new things for the sake of certificate and not the knowledge and its implementation. One of the most essential hindrances is teachers' poor language skills; because of it teachers are unable to read international studies, publications, to exchange experiences with other teachers internationally, so they have to manage with the information available in Latvian which limits their understanding, hinders development and cooperation on various levels.

- 3) Communication barriers and lack of cooperation. There is a triangle of cooperation – teacher/expert, pupil and parent that requires active communication; whereas the sides are not ready or willing to communicate or there is a lack of empathy, it causes conflicts:

„...we often demonstrate demanding communication where school presents its demands, parents – their demands and everyone stays in their position”.

„Experience tells us that one thing is to create physical environment, but the minus is that colleagues are not ready to accept this new environment, and it leads to conflicts. Parents see one expert working in the new environment, and if other do not work there, it leads to conflicts between parents and teachers, teachers themselves; and, as a result, children, their needs and goals disappear”.

- 4) High weekly workload and existing wage model that forces teachers/experts to take up additional jobs. In general, creative learning requires teachers/experts to sacrifice their free time and draw on financial and moral support of their families.
- 5) Pupils’ resistance and disinterest in learning process, at least in the beginning; creative learning is harder since the main part is played by students, not by teachers or experts. This problem can be solved by revealing the opportunities provided by this type of learning:

„I also interviewed the students. They say that in the beginning it is very hard to get used to creative learning methods; it took a month of inner fighting and then we realized that things won’t change, that it is easy and interesting, and then it starts working”.

- 6) The lack of sufficient, budgeted finances, since environment and technical support, as well as different courses take finances. Rather often schools or children and youth centres must share their equipment, since there is a lack of equipment and materials and facilities and infrastructure are inadequate, - it limits the quality of activities.
- 7) Insufficient number of teachers in the areas that are interesting for boys (robotics, technology), lack of male teacher in schools and interest centres.
- 8) The issue of aid for special needs children. At present, the state finances assistants for general education schools, whereas this service is not available for special schools (with an exception of some districts where local government pays for it) and the largest workload falls on teachers/experts.
- 9) Social environment, attitude of society and various decision-makers towards teachers/experts. Issues of teacher’s prestige, wage policy and social accountability.

5. Case of Fashion Bee and Gulbene District

Fashion Bee – through Clothing Transformation to Discovering of Creativity in Me

Fashion Bee is a private initiative that has existed for 3-4 years; it is an opportunity for designers to share their ideas with people that want to have their clothes transformed and re-designed. A significant aspect of Fashion Bee is environment and understanding of its maintenance; it encourages people to not follow brands and buy new clothes, but instead to give new life to old clothing. New outfits are created by transforming the old ones.

Any person can become a participant of Fashion Bee (fashion clean-up), but it is interesting for the „*fashion addicts*” – mostly lovers of fashion and young people. Fashion Bee also includes special workshops in schools where special guest speakers talk about clothing, environment, fashion; they ask young people questions like, “Why it is important to you to follow fashion?” and “Would you appreciate your clothes more if you had made it yourselves, instead of copying ideas from magazines and other media?”

When visiting small towns, the organizers of Fashion Bee first encounter confusion and diverse expectations. People expect Fashion Bee to offer them clean lines and tailoring services. However, Fashion Bee offers a very different form. From the very beginning, it talks about what creativity is, what it means to be creative, and one of the expressions of creativity is clothing; it forces participants to think and to put aside their ready patterns. There are always some people that *go along*. People are afraid of creativity; they underestimate their own work. They create things, but do not wear it and give to someone else, since they do not attach any monetary value to it. Unfortunately, they do not realize that their creations are more worth than things made in China. Fashion Bees help people totally change their thinking.

Municipality of Gulbene – a Platform for Creative Expressions

There are both formal and informal educational institutions in the municipality of Gulbene for students ages 7 to 25 and that function as creative centres for the advancement of various creative expressions in children and youth. Local government understands ‘creative teaching environment’ as supportive environment in all educational institutions on all levels that ensure and encourage self-expressions of students, formation of new ideas, personal growth and opportunity to express a different view from others.

Participating in different international projects, educational institutions draw young volunteers from Europe, carry out the approach of global education, and simultaneously emphasize preservation of Latvian identity. Some educational institutions function also as craft skills acquisition centres: pottery, weaving, wicker weaving, woodworking and musical instrument making, jewellery making and painting. In addition to employing innovative teachers and implementing methods that encourage creativity in all educational establishments, municipality seeks to support an appropriate, creative training environment.

In order to integrate different young people into society, special education programs are implemented in two municipal educational institutions: one for students with mental disorders and another - Youth guarantee project – for young unemployed people that allows them to obtain profession. In order to encourage young people's initiative, Gulbene municipality annually announces "Gulbene County Youth Initiative Competition" where youth centres, associations and informal groups can obtain funding to implement their ideas, developing an active lifestyle and love for their native land.

Conclusions

- 1) In Latvia, creativity is defined as individual self-expression, ability to create new opportunities. Creativity is mostly developed by linking theory with practical activities, with everyday processes.
- 2) Creativity is believed to be mandatory skill necessary for every cycle of human life. Creativity is related to all individuals as attainable and developed skill.
- 3) Creativity is mentioned in goals and objectives of all levels of policy-making, but there are no clear directions on how it can be promoted. School leadership and teachers have no clear understanding how creativity should be conceptualized. Promotion of creativity is insufficiently institutionalized and structured which is often an obstacle to achieving the aims and cooperation between the parties involved.
- 4) Some local governments and schools implement creative learning methods independently of policy documents, mostly based on individual initiative. There are many good examples that testify of presence of creativity in the education process.
- 5) Creativity, creative learning and creative teaching environment encourage communication, emotional and physical development, thus causing changes not only in individual children or youth, but also in classes, groups and families.
- 6) The main stimuli and initiators of creativity are different social agents in the environment of formal and informal education, local government, projects etc., that promote cooperation as essential prerequisite of creativity. These few 'key' people are essential, since they initiate and develop different activities, and different understanding of parties involved, acknowledgment and implementation of their opportunities and competencies are very important for the reaching of common goals.
- 7) The main obstructing factors are related to the lack of common understanding, goals and cooperation between parties involved.

Suggestions

- 1) Finding agreement on common understanding, platform and conceptualization of creativity.
- 2) Popularization of creative practices, describing and sharing of new methods on social networks.
- 3) Promotion of teacher-parent cooperation that is insufficiently used for development of creativity; for example, utilizing of parents' jobs, professions, hobbies demonstrating the link with real life.
- 4) Online course for pupils and families that allow to solve problems and to study at home, since some families see the issue of physical distance as a hindrance.
- 5) Local governments and school leadership should give support to teachers and field experts that practice creativity, since appreciation is an essential part of one's work.
- 6) Paying of more attention to special needs children; it is possible to adjust creative methods to different life situations.
- 7) Undertaking of research and inspecting the utilization of technical support.
- 8) Studies of how to measure creativity and whether the creativity of students has increased. Gaining of understanding whether there is need for special reforms. Need to inquire if what we do is useful.

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