



EFFeCT

European Methodological
Framework for Facilitating Teachers'
Collaborative Learning



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CASE OF GOOD PRACTICE

(School Level)

**Collaborative Teacher Learning
at Jelgava State Gymnasium (Latvia)**

PORTRAIT

This is how we began



November 14, 2012

Willingness to change something in one's lessons, to change oneself

Artūrs (Physics): *I would like to promote students' creativity, to develop their understanding about physical phenomena and their influence on their lives.*

Inita (Informatics): *To improve the structure of my lessons, to be able to use different teaching and learning methods and forms, to be able to get feedback.*

Agita (English): *To improve collaborative skills of students during lessons; to make students with better knowledge help students whose knowledge is weaker.*

Biruta (History): *To change methods used during lessons with an aim to develop students' skills of work with information.*

Silva Sandra (Housekeeping and Technologies): *To optimise the teacher's participation at the lessons, to increase the students' own responsibility for their work, to use help by classmates.*

Jānis (Mathematics): *To highlight the importance of group work and to promote the students' motivation to help one another.*

Nora (Mathematics): *I would like to talk less during the lessons. I would rather listen to the students, let them speak and to avoid situations when I ask a question, nobody replies and I answer myself.*

Difficulties that the teachers encountered at the beginning of the project

Agita (English): *Selection of materials for efficient use of time and interesting work during the lesson.*

Regīna (Russian): *Confrontation in methodological sources among the authors with different approaches to teaching foreign languages.*

Baiba (Physics): *To differentiate the teaching process in the classroom by using methods appropriate to different levels of students' knowledge.*

Inita (Informatics): *In every class, there are students with different levels of knowledge; it is difficult to guess their expectations and to choose appropriate methods.*

Jānis (Mathematics): *I realised it at the very beginning that I had already solved the problem of motivating the students to work in groups during the first lessons after the learning group workshop. Now I have to look for another issue.*

Inga (Latvian): *It is difficult to make junior students be disciplined and participate at work during the lesson.*

Signe (Social Sciences): *It is difficult to make students learn, obtain knowledge, but not only strive for higher evaluation.*

January 9, 2013

The first conclusions after beginning the learning group work

Agita (English): *I have started to observe myself more attentively at the lessons, I put down the ideas that "come running" during the lesson.*

Regīna (Russian): *I am surprised how much I am involved at the lesson; I have to step back a bit and to give more space to the students.*

Artūrs (Physics): *I have realised that I am able to involve students at the discussion and their interest can be increased by looking for interdisciplinary links.*

Inita (Informatics): *If I have defined the aim of the lesson clearly and precisely, it is easier to implement it during the lesson and to ensure feedback.*

Silva (Housekeeping and Technologies): *I checked conformity of my task to the SMART grid and understood that it was fine; I thought over different possibilities for the initial measurement.*

Baiba (Physics): *I realised that you have to begin with yourself; you cannot expect students to be responsive if you do not feel enthusiastic about your work at the lesson. You have to be aware of your own + and -.*

Inga (Latvian): *It is important to see the weak points of the lesson – the technique of the lesson, relations or the aim. If I understand that, I can find out the ways to improve my work.*

CONTEXT

During the last decade, education in Latvia is undergoing significant changes and many schools and teachers are interested to be involved in this process. Attitude of schools and teachers have essential importance in the implementation of change in order to improve quality of learning / teaching process and results.

Due to the current situation in Latvia when the number of students decreases year by year ability of schools to change and the issues of competitiveness of the schools and teachers become more and more topical. It is important for each school and every teacher and student to be able to find an answer to the following question: how do I know that my school becomes better and more competitive?

Jelgava State Gymnasium has been chosen as an example of a case study as this school has been active in seeking ways to improve its performance. The school has the status of state gymnasium granted by the special legislation. There are 26 state gymnasiums in Latvia covering all regions. The status of a state gymnasium makes this school more responsible for learning achievements within the school as well as methodological activities in the school and wider professional community.

Jelgava State Gymnasium was founded in 1922. It is one of the oldest schools in Jelgava, one of the largest industrial cities in Latvia, situated approximately 50 km from Riga, the capital of Latvia. The school premises were built in 1938 and reconstructed after the 2nd World War. Already from the first years of work a new approach to the study process was developed – students were urged to watch, explore, comprehend and draw conclusions themselves. The school had experienced and motivated teaching staff; strong emphases were laid on natural sciences and languages.

Jelgava State Gymnasium has always been a school with classical traditions but at the same time open to changes and up-to-date approach to the teaching and learning process. The mission of the school is to create modern learning environment in order to give the students the possibility to acquire competitive education, to give the possibility to enter higher educational establishments and to compete in labour market.

Students from age of 13 to 18 study in this school and they can get the second stage basic education (forms 7-9) and general secondary education. At present there are 680 students (370 in forms 7-9; 310 in forms 10-12) and 75 teachers. The school offers 6 study programmes (1 for forms 7-9 and 5 for forms 10-12).The school has undergone accreditation and all study programmes are licensed.

Since 2005 Jelgava State Gymnasium is a pilot school of the Science and Mathematics Project of the Ministry of Education and Science. The teachers of the Gymnasium have been involved in all project activities, have initiated many activities, have demonstrated a great number of open lessons for the teachers of their gymnasium, as well as other schools in the town, region and country. In 2015, Liene Sabule, a biology teacher, was awarded the Excellence Prize as the best biology teacher in the country.

In 2015, Jelgava GeoGebra Institute was founded and it is located at the Jelgava State Gymnasium. GeoGebra is a dynamic mathematics programme for visualizing mathematics. The

teachers of the GeoGebra Institute teach other teachers of mathematics in Latvia how to use possibilities offered by the programme.

The teachers of the gymnasium are interested to share their knowledge, to improve it and to be involved in new projects. During their meetings with colleagues, they discuss how their work at school can improve the students' learning results. To promote their students' progress towards positive motivation and results, a number of influencing factors are taken into account, such as interest, motivation and confidence; involvement, action and collaboration; academic achievements, life skills and career, blended with promoting of self-awareness and belief in one's ability to achieve goals. Life related content, technologies and research presence are also important components for improvement of performance of the school, teachers and students.

The students' way towards a positive learning result is complicated and influenced by number of factors including a lesson that creates interest. Well performed teaching process helps students to promote confidence in their abilities, increases motivation and belief in work results. A skilful teacher must make all students at the lesson to be involved, active and improve cooperation skills and willingness to apply them. In many schools academic achievements are the priority but it is also crucial to master life skills and to be able to connect them with the future career. To make the learning process interesting for the students, they must be able to see its practical application in real life by using modern technologies. To promote creativity and skills to make independent decisions, teachers shall pay more attention to the use of research methods at the lessons.

All direct and additional factors are important in the process. To improve the teachers' teaching efficiency that is aimed at the students' learning, one must be aware of the influencing factors, such as the qualification of each teacher, competence, involvement, students' abilities, the qualification of the school management and its ability to change.

METHODOLOGY

During a number of years the researchers of the Centre for Science and Mathematics Education University of Latvia (CSMU UL) have worked with the issues how to promote cooperation of teachers; they have investigated experience of creating learning groups and their efficiency in the world.

In 2012/2013 CSMU UL invited three teachers from Jelgava State Gymnasium – the Deputy Heads Līviņa Rāte and Alda Spirģe and the teacher Evija Slokenberga to join the group of teachers – action researchers with an aim to investigate and analyze their professional activities. Participation in this group, a very favourable and inspiring atmosphere and willingness to share their knowledge with other colleagues at school initiated the establishment of teacher learning groups in Jelgava State Gymnasium. The above-mentioned teachers were ready to become coordinators of the teacher learning groups. Voluntary application process to the learning group was announced. There was a hope from the involved teachers that joint learning, discussions, experiments, observations and analyses will improve skills and work results of each teacher and that teachers will receive support from the colleagues, as well as will be more satisfied with their work.

Thirteen teachers applied for the learning groups; they were divided into three groups: two with 4 teachers, one with 5 teachers in each. The teachers in each group taught different subjects.

Knowledge obtained at CSMU UL was applied to elaborate the methodology for organising learning groups. Inspiration was also got from theoretical work of M. Fullan, Taylor, LaBarre and other researchers. It was taken into account that every teacher would base his/her research on the specific needs in the particular class. At the first working group meeting, was achieved agreement on joint principles: confidentiality, gradual achievement of results, mutual support and collaboration, truth (every conclusion should be confirmed by facts), trust, transparency and awareness that the results could be achieved if we changed our own attitude or activity.

All coordinators of the groups used a joint activity plan. The plan was elaborated, discussed and compiled on paper before each of the learning group sessions. After each learning group session, participants compiled a summary that was forwarded to every member of the group and preserved for future evaluation of the activity. The joint objective of the group work was to improve the students' results, but every teacher worked at perfection of personal skills in a particular field. During the whole academic year, the learning groups held workshops once a month for about 2 – 2.5 hours each. The structure of a learning group workshop consisted of the following five steps:

- 1) Individual writing – reflexion on activities during the previous month,
- 2) Sharing information about what was written,
- 3) Discussions about the received information,
- 4) Working time (the issue discussed at the current workshop),
- 5) Tasks for the learning group members till the next workshop.

The workshops were held in a free atmosphere, with a cup of coffee. The task of the coordinators was to create a supporting atmosphere, to promote thinking and discussions, to help the teachers of the group to identify their topical problems and issues. The coordinators monitored the process of discussion and reflection and ensured that the workshop preserved the planned topic. The coordinators were involved in the same reflections and discussions as the other members of the group but they also carried out research in their specific fields.

Each member of the group had chosen a particular field of improving his/her activity; they started with the investigation of the current situation and making the initial measurements. The initial measurements consisted of observation, compilation of examples, enquiries and interviews. It helped to highlight the problems, to set tasks for the future activities and to get a better perspective of the situation. The teachers defined their individual research issues and planned the expected results. At the workshops, they also discussed activities for the following month. Depending on the chosen field to be improved, they carried out experiments, compiled strategies and structures, fixed results and drafted observations. Participants also discussed how to obtain data, how to process and analyse them. There were discussions and conclusions were defined. The final workshop of all learning groups was scheduled for May. Each group had to present the evaluation of their work, most interesting research cases and to decide which of the research cases should be presented at the pedagogical council meeting at the final session of the academic year.

PRACTICE

At the first workshop of the learning group, the teachers admitted that there were a number of activity fields that they would like to improve their students' performance. They offered different topics for investigation:

- How to involve all students in work?
- How to plan the teaching material so as not to be in a hurry during the lesson?
- How to work with the students who cannot manage in time?
- How to encourage students to love reading books?
- How to connect literature with history to improve students' understanding?
- How to differentiate work during the lesson so that the students who can do more would benefit from the lesson? etc.

At the first workshop, it was difficult to focus on changing own activity to achieve the aim. Participants made use of five steps and tried to help one another concentrate on one's own chosen issue. It was important to realize that the change in each specific activity could bring about the changes in the whole situation in the classroom.

It was important to understand and accept that work in the learning groups does not mean teaching colleagues how to work but it is a way to perfect one's own work, to be responsible for oneself, and to receive answers to unclear questions through collaboration, to get and to provide support. As the groups consisted of a number of teachers who worked in the same classes, the discussions with colleagues could give a lot of commentaries and supporting advice. The work of the coordinators was especially important at the first workshops of the groups; they did not allow discussions to deviate from the chosen topic, to become verbose; they controlled the timing, but also allowed the group members to discuss the topical issues. The first group workshops were longer because the teachers had a lot of issues that they had not been able to discuss professionally before. At the end of each workshop, they agreed upon individual tasks for the next workshop.

During the workshops, teachers learned to compile questionnaires and to record observations. It was agreed that each of participants will invite another colleague from the group to a lesson and he/she will record necessary observations, for example, how much time the teacher talks at the lesson and how long the students learn actively; how the teacher formulates questions; how the teacher informs the students about the expected result and how the teacher makes formative evaluation, etc. At the first workshops, the main expected result was the elaboration of an issue to be investigated by each teacher.

The topics to be investigated were formulated in the following way: "if ..., then ..." etc. After 3 - 4 workshops each of the learning group teachers had compiled a checklist on his/her investigated topic and drafted the first observation entries. They precisely defined the investigated topic, pointed out activities performed by the teacher and by the students. They planned activities for the students and indicated the way how to record measurements (See an example in the *Annex 1*).

The teachers had to repeat more than once to themselves and their colleagues that they were investigating the individual activity of the teacher in order to help students to receive the expected result. Although it sounds simple, it was not simple at all. Neither the coordinators, nor the involved teachers had previous experience in such approach. The teachers used to attend

training courses, they listened to presentations and at the lessons either used or did not use those issues that had appealed to them. Some of the teachers had read a lot and educated themselves. Almost all the teachers experienced a shortage of cooperation skills. Gradually teachers started to admit that they felt very well as they could discuss their success and failures in the safe and friendly atmosphere. There was nobody to criticize them, just the opposite; they were interested in providing assistance to find solutions of the problems. The coordinators saw some of their colleagues with different eyes; they had not known so much about these people, their interests and their readiness to take responsibility and to be leaders.

It also turned out that in the common activities of the school it was possible to observe more enthusiasm and willingness to participate. At the end of research, the learning group teachers interviewed the students once again, drafted the process and invited one of the colleagues as an observer. The obtained data were filed and analysed. At the last workshop all participants informed their colleagues about the results. Together they evaluated the work of the whole group and prepared a report for the final session of all three groups.

The final event was held on May 10, 2013. Each of the learning groups presented their experience, highlighted the benefits, as well as pointed out some risks. A number of individual researchers also made presentations. All colleagues were very interested and asked a lot of questions. The work experience of the learning group members was very different. There were teachers who had been working at school for 2 – 3 years, but some of the teachers – for more than 25 years. It was surprising that the colleagues whose working experience was longer were more thankful than the younger ones for the greatest benefit of the learning group – the ability to collaborate, to be listened to, to receive support from the colleagues. Less experienced colleagues were happier about the possibility to learn together and to master new teaching methods how to ensure a good teaching atmosphere in the classroom and how to motivate students. To analyse the obtained experience, a questionnaire was compiled and all teachers of the school were interviewed. The analyses of the obtained data showed that the teachers who participated at the learning groups had already changed, they had become more open and eager to collaborate. (See an illustration in the *Annex 2*).

The main result of the learning group work was a decision to organise an open air school day (study trip) for all students of Form 9 (120 students) to Vilce ravine in the Jelgava municipality, Zaķu meadow, 35 km from Jelgava. On this day, students had a possibility to test themselves – whether they could use the obtained knowledge in real life situations. All teachers of the learning groups participated at organising this event; some of the other gymnasium teachers helped them as well. (See agenda of the day in the *Annex 3*).

By now such open air school days have become traditional; they are held in May and September for different age groups in different times with tasks suitable for each form and with close connection to the school curriculum and learning process.

PARTICIPATION

It is important that the gymnasium teachers make independent decisions that the process of changes is important for them, that they would like to improve the quality of their work that will directly influence the quality of students' learning, their feelings in every particular situation, make them confident for their abilities and creativity, and will allow them to move towards the result.

As it was already mentioned, during the first year the teachers could join the learning groups voluntarily. The group leaders were representatives of the gymnasium management team. In this case one might doubt the democratic way of group formation and work. It turned out that these were the difficulties only during the first practice year. When the teachers had voluntarily applied for participation at the learning groups, they had chosen a way to change being aware that they would like to improve their work essentially.

The role of the school management and the school principal is very important. If the school management is not interested in the process of change it will not proceed in the desirable direction despite the willingness and expectations of the teachers. It was not the case at the Jelgava State Gymnasium because the school management team was supportive and promoted the necessity to change.

Leadership at school is complicated and it needs special skills. Leadership means that it is democracy in action. As the situation in the school changes, the role of the school principal and the school management team changes as well. In the process of change in Jelgava Stage Gymnasium it was very obvious that the modern school leaders has to act as a moral agent, organisational and social architect, educator, member of community seeing school leadership as capacity building (Joseph Murphy, 1993). Such leader will be able to ensure faithful mutual relations among teachers, other school staff and stakeholders outside the school that would promote willingness to share both positive and negative experience.

During the work in the Science and Mathematics project, the teachers mastered theoretical and practical courses. One of the authors whose ideas on the change at school were mostly considered and applied is M. Fullan (for example his work "The Six Secrets of Change, <http://www.michaelfullan.ca/images/handouts/2008SixSecretsofChangeKeynoteA4.pdf>).

Out of the six secrets in this report teachers in the Jelgava State Gymnasium have picked two, the second and the fourth which are the most relevant to the situation and created experience in the school. Secret Two "Connect Peers with Purpose" emphasizes that purposeful peer interaction within the school is crucial. Student learning and achievement increase substantially when teachers work in the learning communities supported by school leaders who focus on improvement.

As experience in Jelgava State Gymnasium has shown, teachers' collaboration and exchange of information both in the subject groups and the teachers of the same class is a relevant proof of the decisive role of collaboration in the process of growth when the school turns into an institution that learns. Every teacher has his/her own motivation to change and to perfect himself/herself. Jelgava State Gymnasium is characterized by the fact that there is significant number of young teachers. Out of 75 gymnasium teachers 19 are younger than 30 years old which is not typical for schools in Latvia. It means that they are at the beginning of their career when mutual exchange of information and experience and joint learning is very important.

Another characteristic feature of the Gymnasium is the fact that 23 graduates are back to their former school and work as a teachers there. People who have studied at this school, have returned as teachers and they can have a look at the school from another viewpoint and see the necessity of change. If you have a strong relationship with the school where you studied then the motivation to improve the work efficiency and collaboration with colleagues is higher. Meanwhile it does not mean that the involvement of other teachers who have different background is less significant or weaker. At the same time it must be admitted that the picture is not only positive, without hindrances and difficulties. Not all the teachers see the value of the learning groups and mutual observation and analyses of lessons but as the process goes on and there is positive feedback from those who participate in the process the number of supporters is increasing every year.

Secret Four “Learning is the Work” is connected with the idea that professional development (PD) in workshops and courses is only an input to continuous learning and precision in teaching. Successful growth itself is accomplished when the culture of the school supports day-to-day learning of teachers engaged in improving what they do in the classroom and school.

Mutual observation and analyses of lessons is an important input in the professional growth of a teacher but it is even more important that the teacher engages in self-analyses and is willing to introduce real change in the teaching process, even despite of the initial frustration and challenges. Analyzing work of different collaboration groups it can be summarized that it is beneficial to organize planning jointly for the teachers of the same area; sometimes there is also very successful cooperation among the teachers of different subjects (e.g., history and history of culture etc.); it saves time for the teachers and consequently for the students as well and provides more holistic and comprehensive picture and understanding. Meanwhile, analyses are important for each teacher individually in order to understand what went well and where improvement or different approach is needed to achieve the goal.

EQUITY

Democratic society is one of the values in the modern world. Every individual, despite of his/her physical and psychological state must be together with others. Individual and social conditions are provided for implementation of one’s potential. This idea was confirmed during the work of the learning group. The teachers who had applied voluntarily had very different professional backgrounds. They had different knowledge about teaching methods and they used them differently in the classroom. A number of teachers had little knowledge about the class management. The teachers also had very different conceptions about the latest pedagogical theories and possibilities to use modern technologies in the classroom. The learning group perceived every teacher as a personality, highlighting his/her strong and weak points. They worked in an accessible, respected and supporting environment and enjoyed the achievements. The participation, viewpoint and success of every teacher were perceived as achievements of the whole group.

Equity and fairness in education refer both to the teaching of students and the collaborative learning of teachers. For example, a test for the students is compiled so that all students understand it, not only a specific group of students.

Referring to equity in education for teachers and especially the participants of the learning groups it must be admitted that during the discussions of the learning groups everybody had equal rights to express a personal opinion on one's own lessons, emphasizing the investigated topic and describing professional arguments. Other participants listened to speeches and presentations of their colleagues without interruption and commentaries, allowing the teacher to express his/her viewpoint, doubt, uncertainty and reflections. When the speaker had finished his/her presentation on the topic, the colleagues could express their opinions, remarks and questions.

Therefore each of the participants of the learning group had equal possibilities to analyse his/her work and to implement pedagogical experiments and innovations; it was a new beginning for perfection of their pedagogical proficiency. It was seen by the group that fairness in the process of teaching and learning is advancement towards achieving equity.

In relation to the learning groups, one more aspect was mentioned that, according to the teachers in Jelgava State Gymnasium can decrease inequity, i.e., instructional inequity. Students may be enrolled in classes and be taught by less-skilled teachers who may teach in a comparatively uninteresting or ineffective manner or in classes in which significantly less content is taught. Students may also be subject to conscious or unconscious favouritism, bias, or prejudice by some teachers, or the way in which instruction is delivered may not work as well for some students as it does for others. (<http://edglossary.org/equity/>). One of the aims of the learning group teachers was elimination of this instructional inequity. Thanks to the achieved results, the situation has improved, the teachers have perfected their pedagogical skills but the process is continuous; the learning process never ends, new challenges arise, new teachers are recruited and they come with their own issues.

The inner auditors of the teacher learning (investigation of own activity) group were the group members themselves. The objectivity level was reached by compiling, evaluating and sharing information about plans in the class and the achieved results. As the formation of the learning groups was voluntary, all participants were very interested in the work. The members of the group evaluated all relevant conditions and their conclusions were not influenced by any external interests. Objectivity was ensured by the work principles chosen by the group.

At the first workshops, the teachers chose an issue or a field that they would like to improve in their work. Each issue was checked according to the SMART criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bounded).

During the learning group work the attitude of the teachers towards lesson observation was changing. Before the learning group work started there used to be two kinds of lesson observation: 1) the deputy principal in education and the education methodologist observed lessons as a part of their tasks and 2) teachers prepared open lessons and had to lead them with the participation of other subject teachers from their our school or other schools. It must be admitted that in both cases most of the teachers considered open lessons as a not very pleasant task and experience.

Participation in the learning group changed their attitude towards participation of other colleagues at their lessons as they were organized with different purpose and in different atmosphere with open-minded discussions, self-confidence and opportunity to tackle problems

openly. Teachers often received suggestions for improvements or specific activities that could be useful during particular phases of the lesson. Observers did not have to be at a colleague's lesson for the whole time; it was possible to observe only a specific part of the lesson. Teachers were eager to invite their colleagues to come and observe how they succeed with innovations. The coordinators did not interfere at the observation of the parts of the lesson. They helped to substitute the colleagues-observers at their lessons what is very important during the busy school day schedule. Mutual observation of lessons decreased tension. As several colleagues observed in the same parts of the lesson lead by the same teacher, objectivity of conclusions was increased and ensured.

LEARNING

At the end of the first academic year since establishing learning groups involved teachers started to think how to continue the work. It has become clear that the teachers' ability to reflect about the work at lessons improves culture of the school; so managers of the project tried to involve as many teachers as possible in the learning groups. It was also decided to work with the issues that were most necessary for the school.

As representatives of the school admit, "we claim that in order to achieve the goals which we have put forward it is essential to think about school culture. In the initial stage we could talk about culture of separation, but our goal was to move towards the culture of integration as it is described in the theory (e.g., Day *et al* 1993; Fullan and Hargreaves 1992 etc.). We were ready to achieve strong personal and professional relationships, have commonly held social and moral intentions. We agreed that failure and uncertainty should not be protected or defended but shared and discussed and individual group work simultaneously and inherently valued."

Therefore since school year 2013/2014 learning groups of one subject teachers and a teacher learning (investigation of own activity) group of different subject teachers were established. One subject teacher learning groups are for the teachers of mathematics, Latvian and English languages.

Significant change in the work organization took place. It was decided that in the school timetable the lessons of Latvian and mathematics for all forms 7, 8 and 9 are held simultaneously. All five subject teachers involved in the particular class form a learning group. In each group, one of the colleagues works as a coordinator. Teachers of each subject plan their work differently. The teachers of mathematics regularly meet at a learning group of each class once a week. There are teachers who participate in the learning groups of all three class groups.

The teachers of Latvian meet once in 2 – 3 weeks. Each teacher chooses his/her own methods to be used at literature lessons. Each class group elaborates a joint thematic plan of the subject. All students of the same class group take tests simultaneously; tests are developed jointly by the teachers. Teachers have mentioned a positive example - that in the middle of the academic year, when due to objective reasons the teachers changed, the newcomer admitted that it was much easier for her to get involved in work because the workshops of the subject teachers made her adaptation process more successful.

The groups of the teachers of mathematics are the most united. The teachers jointly develop and choose teaching materials and they feel very unanimous about the main issues of education process. Since 2013/2014 three new teachers of mathematics have obtained their first work experience at the learning groups. It ensures that all teachers are involved, take responsibility and promotes a joint understanding of the main tasks of the school. Each of the teachers of mathematics is ready to be a coordinator at any of the learning groups; it enhances the development of leadership skills of the teachers.

The teachers of English organise their work in a similar way. Despite of the fact that the same teaching materials are used for the particular class group, it is necessary to coordinate work, so that possible changes would be easier both for the students and the teachers.

Thanks to improved collaboration skills and willingness to use them, the teachers of English introduced new initiatives that turned out to be useful not only for their methodological committee, but also for the whole gymnasium, the town and the region. For several years Jelgava State Gymnasium has organised so called subject weeks; during this time, teachers are invited to present open lessons for their colleagues. This academic year the teachers planned open lessons conducted in pairs in those class groups where they work. The jointly planned lesson was presented by one teacher of the pair.

Collaboration in pairs was also successful when the teachers were involved in preparation of a language conference organised by the Jelgava State Gymnasium, which gathered 153 teachers from the whole country. At the conference theoretical and practical workshops were lead by six pairs of the teachers of English, Russian, German and Latvian. During the preparation process they had to revise theoretical knowledge for development of reading, writing and other skills as well as to find good practice examples to be shared with their colleagues.

Another good practice example related to the language teachers is the regional English competition of Zemgale organised by the Jelgava State Gymnasium. All the English teachers were involved in compiling tasks, organising activities and correcting competition papers.

Simultaneously, the work of the teacher learning (investigation of own activity) group of different subject teachers is continued. The teachers investigate such issues as students' motivation, use of formative evaluation practice at lessons and other relevant issues for education process. Since 2013/2014, every year, there is one teacher learning group at the school; it is organised in accordance with the same principles as described previously. There are 6 to 10 teachers in this group. The workshops are held after the lessons once a month. The coordinator of the learning group is the teacher Evija Slokenberga who is also the education methodologist of the Jelgava Stage Gymnasium since 2015/2016.

FACILITATORS

The teacher learning groups have contributed a lot to improve the school's work culture. At the learning groups teachers help one another emotionally to tackle difficult problems. The colleagues get to know one another better; they can understand a colleague's reaction in a

particular situation and can help to find a solution. The learning groups help the teachers fight with burn-out.

The colleagues also support one another in the fields of teaching subjects and class management. As it has been emphasized by participants, “at the learning groups of subject teachers we have no leaders. Each teacher can give his/her input. More experienced teachers can help others with different class management skills, teaching methods and advice how to use specific methods. The younger colleagues are better at technologies and love to use them at lessons. They support other colleagues in using voting devices, tablet PCs and mobile phones at the lessons. Most of the colleagues are ready to be leaders and successfully do it.”

One of the main achievements is elimination of tension during the mutual observation of lessons. The teachers have agreed that every teacher will invite a colleague to visit at least one of his/her lessons. Many teachers have invited others to at least 3 - 4 lessons. The situation improves year by year. In 2014/2015, the teachers led 16 open lessons for the teachers from the town and region, 2 open lessons for the gymnasium teachers and there were 12 mutually observed lessons. In 2015 /2016, these figures have significantly changed. Till April, 2016, there have been 12 open lessons for the teachers from other schools in the the town and region, 8 open lessons for the gymnasium teachers and 35 mutually observed and analyzed lessons. Skills mastered during the learning group workshops have developed understanding how to observe and analyse lessons. The learning groups also help to create a common understanding about evaluation.

This year all the learning groups focus on the expected results of the lesson and feedback.

BARRIERS

One of the main hindrances at the learning group work is the teachers' large workload. Some of the teachers work at several workplaces. It is difficult to find suitable time for all involved teachers simultaneously. It is easier for the subject teacher learning group as it comprises five teachers. At the learning group of the subject teachers they see a real benefit for their work as it facilitates preparation for lessons. These groups are almost always successful.

Sometimes at the learning group of different subjects (investigation of own activity), they even have to decline participation of the colleague. In the first year experience it was also understood that it was not good that the learning groups were led by the deputy principals who were supervisors at the same time as “we assume that in some cases it might be difficult for colleagues to separate the coordinator's functions in everyday work from the coordinator's functions at the learning group. In our case, there are teachers at our school who have sufficient knowledge and skills to support other colleagues and they ensure successful work at the learning groups. They can be entrusted the duties of the coordinators of the learning groups of different subject teachers”.

Nevertheless, every year there is only one learning group of different subject teachers (investigation of own activity). There are 6 – 10 participants in it. An active participation the learning group requires much time and strength. You have to look at yourself critically from

aside, to evaluate your strong and weak points. Additional work is necessary to compile data, to analyse them and to make conclusions. Some of the teachers prefer attending courses because they are not given additional tasks there.

One of the main preconditions for further development of the school culture is interested and motivated teachers. Inner motivation is created by faithful relations. Teachers in Jelgava State Gymnasium have come to the conclusion that the best school for mutual trust is the teacher learning groups both the groups of one subject teachers and the groups of different subject teachers. They agree that the teacher learning groups will be successful if the teachers

- are willing to learn and acquire new knowledge,
- are ready to share their experience and ideas with other teachers of the learning group, as well as to invite colleagues to their lessons and to lead open lessons,
- are ready to share their knowledge with other teachers who are not involved in the learning group,
- are ready to devote their time to participate at the work of the learning group.

The school administration should support and recognize teachers' contribution to mastering new knowledge and using it at their work at school.

Change happens whether we encourage and welcome it or not. To direct it and ensure it is positive progress, it is vital to have vision, a strategy and a proven, structured and adaptable process for managing change in place, supported by appropriate skills and tools (e.g., <http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/managingchange/remodellingprocess/process.aspx>).

My topic:

If after each lesson (double lesson) I ask students to evaluate the results, using precise criteria, then the students will be able to ask precise questions about the issues they did not understand at the lesson or consultation (it will increase motivation to study).

Task/activity for the student (precise tasks, questions, formulations given to the students)	My activity (what and how I do when I give a task)	Students' activity (what and how will they do? How it can help them?)	Instruments/measurements (where and what is recorded?)
Filling in a questionnaire	The teacher asks the students to fill in the questionnaire: Are we satisfied with the results of term 1? (NOOO – say the students) I offer to think over together how to improve the situation	The students fill in the questionnaire. It is amazing that all of them evaluate their abilities much higher than their grades are. Nobody is satisfied with the evaluation. The students admit that before the final tests they study a little or not at all.	The initial position is recorded. At the end of the academic year, the students will fill in the same questionnaire. Then we will compare the results.
Expected result – Prove theorems using demonstration through the opposite , being recorded during several lessons in turn.	One and the same type of a task on demonstration through the opposite will be given to the students several times. Every time we discuss the main mistakes and inaccuracies.	The students compile demonstration on notepaper several times in turn. They compare the results of each time. Together with the teacher, they help each other to understand where mistakes come from and which the most important phases of demonstration are. They have to realise that it is not so complicated to demonstrate through the opposite.	For the first time, the results are 20% - 40%. For the final time, the results are 60% - 100%. At the final test on this topic, nobody from this class received weak evaluation.

To evaluate the collaboration of the teachers at our school, please, fill in the table by ticking the most suitable answer!

How often do you communicate with other teachers?	Never or almost never	2 – 3 times a month	1 – 3 times a week	Almost every day
Discussions on how to teach particular topics				
Compiling teaching materials				
Visiting other teachers to observe their open lessons				
Other teacher informally observes your lessons				

Please, finish the sentence by expressing your attitude towards collaboration of teachers!

I am interested / am not interested to collaborate with other colleagues because

.....

Thank you for sharing your opinion!

It is interesting to study at Jelgava State Gymnasium!

Agenda of the study day for students of Form 9 at the Vilce ravine

May 16, 2013

9:30 – departure from the school

10:00 – arrival at Vilce, Jelgava municipality, and a walk to the Zaķu meadow of the Vilce ravine

10:30 - opening, welcome by the School Principal

10:35 – departure of classes with maps to the study stations:

- Courageous **chemists**
- Do you know the plants that grow by the riverside? (**biology**)
- How to estimate the height of a tree? (**mathematics**)
- The most precise measurers (**physics**)
- **Historical** evidences at the Vilce castle mound
- How to tell where you are? (**geography**)

12:00 – joint lunch at the fireplace (grilling sausages)

13:00 – mini football game between the teams of the classes

14:00 - 16:00 free time, singing at the fireplace, activities organised by the Students' Council

16:30 – departure by buses from Vilce

17:00 – arrival at the school