



Baltic
Institute
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***CASE STUDY: VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IN
LATVIA***

Baltic Institute of Social Sciences

***Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is
education contributing to overcome or reproduce social
exclusion? /WP8***

2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

This preliminary report was written within the framework of the Include-ED Project 2: *European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion?* Project 2 aims to *analyse components from educational practices that are decreasing the rates of school failure and those practices that are increasing them* (Annex 1, p. 5). In order to study educational practices altogether 20 case studies were carried out in Latvia, Spain, Finland, UK, Cyprus, and Hungary. For each case study one educational institution from pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational or special education field was chosen. In Latvia, four case studies were carried out by the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences at different levels: pre-primary, primary, secondary and vocational educational institutions. This report is one of the four preliminary reports focused on vocational education.

The selection of schools was based upon two main criteria established in Annex 1 of the Includ-ED Project. The school had to have demonstrated contribution to school success (as defined by children's educational attainment) in relation to their specific context. Secondly, the school had to respond to a number of social characteristics, including low socio-economic status of students and students with a minority background.

For the case study in Latvia on vocational education the Riga Secondary school of construction trades¹ (RBV) was selected.

a) Contribution to school success in relation to context (as reflected by children's or adolescents' progress in educational attainment)

In the first half of school year 2007/2008 80% of all grades were satisfactory ('passed'). 35% of those who complete 3 year vocational courses stay at school for one additional year to obtain the certificate of general secondary education.

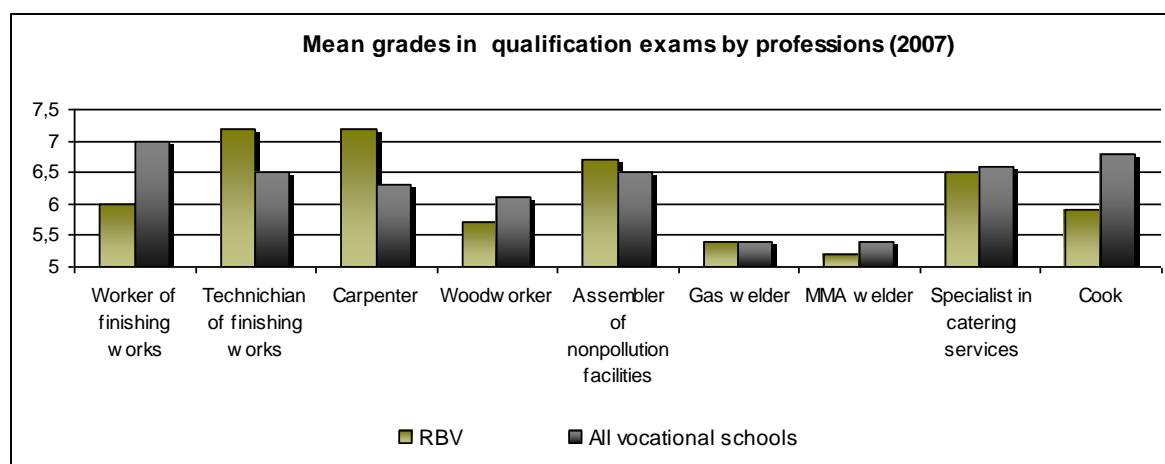
¹ Rīgas Būvamatniecības vidusskola

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24% of students continue to higher education after completing the secondary level. 45% enter the labour market and work according to the acquired profession. These data on further paths of students were obtained from the school. Unfortunately no corresponding data is available to compare the RBV to average of Latvian vocational training schools.

The students completing vocational programmes in the RBV show good results in the centralized exams for professional qualification. In some professions, especially carpenters and technicians they obtain on average better marks than students of the same profession from other vocational schools in Latvia (see Figure 1).

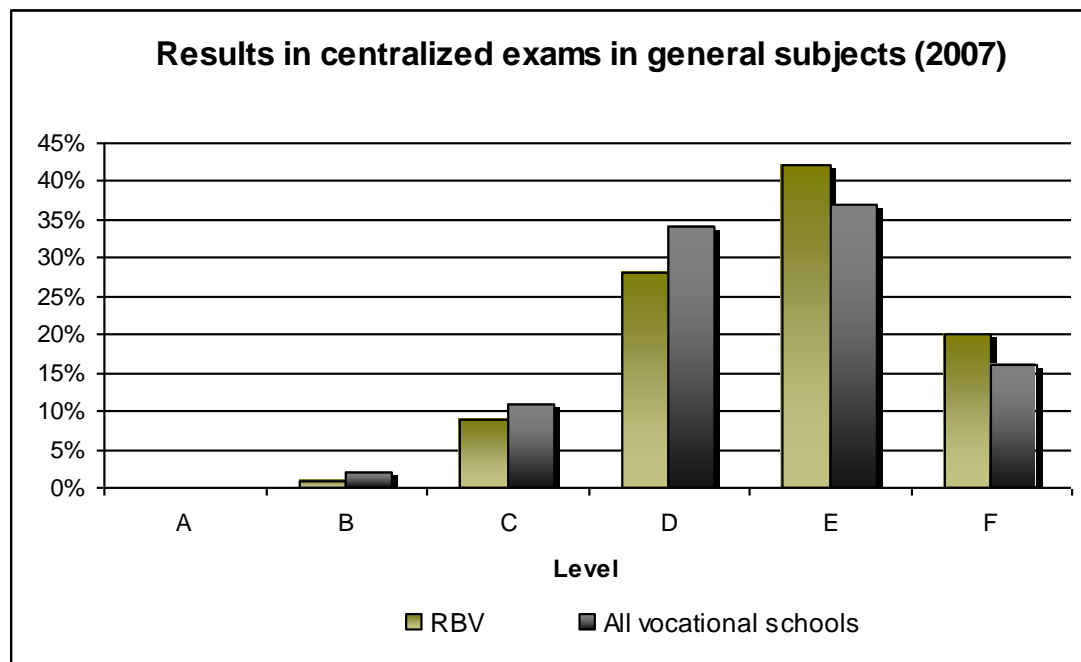
Figure 1.



Source: *Profesionālās Izglītības administrācija (Vocational Education Centre)*, <http://www.izmpia.gov.lv/index2.html>

Considering the general education subjects the academic achievements can be evaluated by the results of centralized national examinations. Figure 2 shows that students of the RBV obtain slightly less grades of the highest levels B, C, and D and slightly more grades corresponding to the lowest levels E and F (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.



Source: ISEC (The Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations), <http://isec.gov.lv/eksameni/statistika/2007/stat2007.shtml>

The students have outstanding results in professional competitions for students of vocational programmes. For example in national competition “Young professional 2008” the students obtained third place in two nominations – carpentry and decorative plastering. In an international competition for students of construction works in Estonia the team of the school came in the third place and one of students got the first place in individual nomination.

The school is very active in developing vocational training programmes, improving the learning conditions and providing all necessary equipment in collaboration with private enterprises. Various projects have been developed with the financial assistance of the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.

The school provides students with various options for extracurricular activities like sports clubs, choir, theatre and professional clubs. All these activities are free of charge. Students participating in these have gained good results in various national competitions.

b) Social characteristics of students: low SES and minority background

Students with basic general or vocational education are admitted to the school without any special selection procedures basing on the grades in their basic education certificates.

Over the past five years RBV has a stable number of students, in the school year 2007/2008 there were 845 students. From them 345 are first year students. 60% of the first year students come from Riga, 17% - from Riga district, and 25% - from other places in Latvia.

In 2005 20% of the students had minority background, mostly Russian. Since 2006 the school does not maintain records on the ethnic background of students. However the school personnel estimate it to be approximately 20% in 2008 as well.

Students are mostly from average and low SES families. Half of the students have single parent families. In 2008 there were 19 students who have lost both parents.

The school operates in two distant buildings because in 1996 two vocational schools were united. In the main building there is administration, classes for general secondary subjects and facilities for departments of carpentry, catering and metalworking. The second site contains facilities for theoretical and practical classes in finishing works and tile stove construction. Both sites are located at the outskirts of the Riga city. The main building is in a rather industrial area, the second site – in a residential area containing apartment houses and family houses. The location of the school is not indicative of the student composition because in Riga there are only few schools offering similar vocational programmes and students travel from many distant parts of Riga. Moreover many students of the RBV come from other regions in Latvia.

In interviews it was noted that there are students from low-income families, they are especially attracted to vocational education by the possibility to receive

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stipends (depends on grades and participation in extracurricular activities) and to start employment early.

The academic achievements of RBV are average when compared to the average results of all vocational schools in Latvia. However we have no data on the SES and ethnic background of students in other schools to compare the results in the context. So in the selection of the school for the case study we had to rely on the recommendation of the governmental institution responsible for vocational schools in Latvia (head of the Vocational Education Centre). RBV was suggested for the case study after the selection criteria were explained in detail.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the case study will be described, including the fieldwork carried out: the techniques which were used, the number of techniques and people involved (teachers, families, students), as well as the analysis carried out based on the communicative methodology and the exclusionary and transformative dimensions.

The methodology for the case study corresponds to the methodological framework of INCLUD-ED established in Annex 1. The methods of data collection in the case study of the RBV included open-ended interviews, a communicative focus group and communicative observations.

Most of the research instruments were adapted to correspond better to the situation in Latvia. Many questions were reworded to make them meaningful for Latvian respondents.

Data collection

Empirical data collection was carried out from 1.04 to 15.05. 2008. Before that information on the educational process and students was received from the RBV.

In the case study following empirical data collection activities were carried out:

- a) three open-ended interviews with two teachers and the school principal;
- b) three open-ended interviews with family members of students;

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- c) four open-ended interviews with students of the RBV;
- d) communicative focus group (involved a group of six teachers (among them were 3 teachers of professional subjects and 3 teachers of general subjects, the teacher of ethics and psychology works also as a methodologist for cooperation between the school, students, teachers, and parents);
- e) the communicative observations (in classrooms during two different learning activities, in two different parent meetings and one during the play time of students).

For more information on respondents see the table below.

Code	Description
CIMB1	1 st year student in a 4 year carpentry programme
CIFB2	Student in a 1 year catch-up programme designed for students who have completed the 3 year programmes in order to obtain general secondary education.
CIMB3	2nd year student in a 3 year finishing work programme
CIMB4	1 st year student in a 4 year carpentry programme
RIMB1	Father, Latvian with Russian mother tongue, higher education, police officer
RIFB2	Mother, Latvian with Russian mother tongue, currently acquiring higher education, engineer
RIFB3	Mother, Latvian, secondary vocational education, manager in a warehouse
TIFB1	School principal
TIFB2	Teacher in catering
TIFB3	Teacher in finishing works
Omb1	Observation of meeting with parents
OcB2	Observation of practical classes in finishing works and tile stove construction
Omb3	Observation of meeting of the stipends commission
OcB4	Observation in Latvian language class
OcB5	Observation in chemistry class
TGB	Focus group discussion with 6 teachers
Participant 1	Teacher of professional subjects in carpentry, e.g., materials science, drawing (female, Latvian, 6 years at RBV)
Participant 2	Teacher of professional subjects in construction, also form tutor (male, Latvian, 6 years at RBV)
Participant 3	Teacher of sports and interpersonal communication, also form tutor and methodologist of educational programmes (female, Latvian, 1 year at RBV)
Participant 4	Teacher of Latvian language and literature, also coordinator of the educational process and form tutor (female, Latvian, 6 years at RBV)
Participant 5	Teacher of interpersonal communication, managerial psychology, ethics and etiquette, also methodologist for cooperation between the school, students, teachers, and parents (female, Latvian, 17 years at RBV)
Participant 6	Teacher of economics and of professional subjects in carpentry, e.g., materials science, technology, drawing, safety engineering, labour safety (male, Russian, 9 years at RBV)

Data analysis

The analysis of data was accomplished according to the hypothesis on inclusive educational practices and community involvement and along the exclusionary and transformative dimensions. Some chapters include analysis both in exclusionary dimension and transformative dimension, but for others the dimensions are not clearly separated as the information relates more to just one dimension.

3. INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

3.1. Grouping the students and use of human resources

a) Exclusionary

The school offers basically **3 year and 4 year programmes**. There are two fundamental differences between them: the first lies in the subjects of general education – in 4 year programmes there are more lessons in general subjects and when completing this programme, students receive in addition to the professional certificate also a certificate of general secondary education which gives the possibility to continue the studies and acquire higher education. The second is the difference in the level of vocational education – after 3 year programmes students obtain a professional qualification of the 2nd level, whereas after 4 year programmes – a professional qualification of the 3rd level.

The 4 year programme has higher enrolment requirements in terms of grades in the certificates of basic general education. There are also different requirements during the studies – in 4 year programmes the least sufficient mark is 4 points out of 10 whereas in 3 year programmes it is sufficient to receive 1 point. This is a practice indicating lower expectations towards students in 3 year programmes. In the focus group discussion teachers pointed out that the requirements in the 3 year programmes are too low and therefore do not motivate students to make more efforts.

We both with the colleague we know, how it is, that we can give marks 1, 2, 3. I think that these are reduced requirements. Well, in a way they

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cannot fit in and master this material. And because of this he should get lower marks? But in many cases this leads to an even worse outcome. If he thinks that if he does not speak rude, does not sleep on the desk, and has drawn two lines or something more. And indeed there is some kind of small work and attitude. And for this we have to mark it with a 1, as if we could not mark it with a "No mark". This will not awake his interest in working, because he knows that he can get this mark quite easily. (TGB)²

The graduates of the 3 year programmes have the opportunity to stay one more year in school and take a **catch-up course in general education** after which they receive a certificate of general secondary education. There are only two vocational schools in Latvia offering such catch-up courses. However another opportunity is to attend an evening or shift school. They provide primary and secondary general education to students of all ages and are quite flexible in terms of the necessary prior knowledge.

Although the division in 3 and 4 year programmes is an exclusionary practice based on **tracking** the catch-up course offered by the school can be evaluated positively as it gives actually a second chance and helps to overcome the initial differences in academic achievements. Regarding the further opportunities of the students from 4 year programmes and catch-up courses to continue to higher education and to enter the labour market there are no clear indications. The enrolment to higher education institutions is based on the results in the centralized examinations in some subjects determined by these institutions. No differences in results of centralized examinations between both groups were mentioned in interviews. Regarding access to the labour market students from the 3 year programmes might be disadvantaged because they obtain professional qualification of a lower level.

In order to join the catch-up course the students in 3 year programmes need to achieve satisfactory results and attain a certain level in general education subjects. Teachers note that the possibility to obtain the certificate in general

² *Mēs ar kolēģi jau zinām, kā tas ir, ka drīkst it kā noteiktās grupās likt atzīmes 1, 2, 3. Es uzskatu, ka tās ir pazeminātas prasības. Labi, viņi kaut kādā ziņā nespēj iekļauties un pavilkt to mācību materiālu. Un tāpēc tagad viņš būs jānovērtē ar zemākām atzīmēm? Bet daudzos gadījumos tas noved pie pat vēl sliktāka rezultāta. Ja viņš uzskata, ka ja gluži rupjības nesaka un neguļ uz galda, un ja viņš ir uzvilcis divas līnijas vai vēl kaut ko. Un būtībā tiešām kaut kāds darbs un kaut kāda maza attieksme ir bijusi. Un viņam par to ir jāieliek vieninieks, it kā to „Nav vērtējuma” nevarētu tad likt. Tas arī neradīs viņam to interesi tālāk strādāt, jo viņš zina, ka var diezgan viegli dabūt to vērtējumu. (TGB)*

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secondary education after the catch-up course motivates students to make more efforts and meet the requirements for enrolment in the catch-up course after the 3 year programme.

During the focus group discussion one of the teachers told about his experience in a vocational school in Germany, RBV has cooperation with this school for several years. The teacher supports the German practice to teach all students of one profession together and after acquiring the professional qualification to continue with the general secondary education for those who choose it.

.. there is no 4 year programme with the general secondary education. They have 3 years for all professions, and if one wishes then there is the catch-up course as in our school. No 4 year programmes. Not to mix up the vocational education with the general secondary. I think this is very correct. In the beginning to guide into the profession and after that continue [with the general secondary education] if one wishes and has the possibility. (TGB)³

This practice would be more inclusive as it avoids the tracking practiced by RBV by teaching one profession separately in 3 year and 4 year programmes. In addition this practice would give the possibility for all students to acquire the same category of the professional certificate. On the other hand some teachers emphasized that the 3 year programme gives the opportunity to acquire professional skills to those students who have difficulties with the general secondary education.

b) Transformative

All students of one form follow **the same curriculum** and have most classes together. The only exceptions are English classes and some vocational subjects where the students are divided in two groups learning separately. Both groups are heterogeneous in all terms because the division is made according to the alphabetical list of students. Both groups follow the same curriculum. Sometimes students change the groups in order to learn together with their friends. This practice provides additional support to all students because the

³ .. tur nav 4 gadīgie ar vidējo izglītību. Viņiem ir trīs gadi visām profesijām, un ja grib, tad tālāk vispārīzglītojošais kurss kā pie mums. Nav 4 gadīgie. Nejaukt kopā vispārējo vidējo un profesionālo. Tas, man liekas, ir īpaši pareizi. Sākumā novirza uz profesiju, pēc tam, ja ir vēlme un iespēja, tad var tālāk. (TGB)

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groups are smaller and teachers can pay more attention to individual students and have more time to respond to their needs.

Some teachers work in teams of two and take care of one group together.

We take one group together with my colleague and work both together. We both work with all students. Theoretically they should divide into two groups, one works with one half of the group, the other – with the other half. But people complement each other. If I know something better or she knows something better, it would be insulting to students, if one is explaining differently than the other. Therefore we both take them all together. I will talk about this in this year, you will talk about this, and I will not interfere. (TIFB3) ⁴

Inside the classroom students are **seldom divided into groups**. In some practical classes students sometimes work together in small groups. The division into groups can happen according to different principles – sometimes teachers divide students, sometimes students themselves decide with whom they wish to work together. For example, it was mentioned in interviews that, in practical classes in cooking students themselves make up the groups. In an English lesson lots were drawn in order to form groups. In mathematics lesson groups were made according to places in the class – students sitting together or next to each other made up one group. The tasks given to the groups can be the same or different. However no differences in the level of difficulty were mentioned.

One of the support mechanisms established in the school is '**consultations**' – all teachers have a scheduled time every week (it varies between 0,5 and 2,5 hours per week for every teacher) when they are available for all students to ask questions, to go through some study material where they have difficulties or to write tests. This practice can be considered as **extending of the learning time** according to the Report 2 (p. 37). The consultations are quite popular among students but usually this time is used to write tests in which students have failed or which they have missed because of absence. In several interviews it was mentioned that teachers are actually available for work with individual students or small groups also at other times outside regular classes or consultations.

⁴ *Mēs ar kolēģīti ņemam kopā vienu grupu un divatā srādājam. Mēs ar visiem abas strādājam. It kā teorētiski jādalās uz pusēm, vienai jāstrādā ar vienu pusi grupas, otrai ar otru. Bet cilvēki jau viens otru papildina. Ja es kaut ko vairāk zinu vai viņa kaut ko vairāk zina, skolniekiem būs 'abidna', ja viens bišķiņ savādāk stāsta nekā otrs. Tāpēc mēs tā visus ņemam kopā. Es šo stāstīšu tagad, tu to stāstīsi, es neiejaucos. (TIFB3)*

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The school is supportive – they let one to improve the marks. And it does not expel right away those with insufficient marks. Because in fact now... During the parents meeting it was said that only some are allowed to take an examination [due to failure in previous tests] at that time but now all were allowed to take it. All were going and correcting marks. All got to the examination and took the first examination which goes to the final certificate. I think that the school is supportive. The teachers as well because it is always possible to correct the unsatisfactory marks, to write tests. I know that Jānis also has to go, even now he will go to correct something in history. Especially in the general subjects. I think, they are supportive. They could also say – you have failed, it's over, it's your own fault. No, no, I think they are supportive. (RIFB2)⁵

Some teachers mentioned that they sometimes give **additional and more complicated tasks** to students who learn fast while the rest is still doing the initial basic exercises. That means that the whole class is studying the same material but with different difficulty levels. Such practice is identified in the Report 2 (p. 29) as **streaming within classrooms by level** which does not facilitate inclusion. This practice indicates the different expectations towards different students.

In each class there are usually 3-4 students, where you feel, that they understand it without difficulties. Then I give them something more interesting, but a bit more complicated. And if he accomplishes it, then there appear marks like 9 and 10. Boys who have difficulties, they sit strained, listen, watch, ask questions and still have problems; I invite them personally to the consultations. In consultations I do not give the same book but another copied material or a material from Internet – a bit simpler. The idea is the same, for example, about the structure of wood, but in a more simple way. And then he sits for a while and then, I will say as he said: "Oh, am I stupid. It is so simple; I knew that but could not express it."(TGB)⁶

⁵ Skola nāk pretī – viņi atļauj arī labot. Nevis uzreiz tā, ka viņi izslēdz tās nepietiekamās atzīmes. Jo praktiski tagad.. Ja sapulcē teica, ka tikai daži tiek pielaisti pie eksāmena tai brīdī, tad tagad visi tika pielaisti. Visi gāja, laboja. Visi tika līdz eksāmenam un nolika to pirmo, kas viņiem bija jau atestātam. Es domāju, ka skola nāk pretī. Skolotāji arī, jo visu laiku ir iespējas aiziet izlabot nesekmīgas atzīmes, uzrakstīt kontroldarbus. Es zinu, ka Jānim arī jāiet, vēl tagad vēsturē ies kaut ko labot. Nu, tieši vidusskolas priekšmetos. Es domāju, ka nāk pretī. Varēja jau arī pateikt – viss, tev nesekmīga atzīme, cauri, pats vainīgs. Nē, nē, es domāju, ka nāk pretī. (RIFB2)

⁶ Kursā parasti ir 3-4 audzēkņi, par kuriem tu jūti, viņš to ņem, un viņš to ņem bez grūtībām. Nu tad viņam iedod kaut ko tādu interesantāku, bet bišķīt sarežģītāku. Un ja viņš to paveic, tad jau pa parādās pa atzīmei 9 un 10. Tiem puisiem, kam ir grūti, sasprindzinājies sēž, klausās, skatās, jautā, un tik un tā ir problēmas, tad es personīgi viņu uzaicinu uz konsultācijām. Konsultācijās es arī ne jau to pašu grāmatiņu nolieku priekšā, bet kopētu materiālu vai no Interneta izprintētu, bet nu tādu līmenīti zemāk. It kā tā ideja tur ir iekšā, par to pašu koksnes uzbūvi, bet tādā vienkāršotā veidā. Un tad viņš sēž, sēž,

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Teachers see this practice as a way to give additional challenges and keep the motivation of those students who learn fast. In interviews it was mentioned in relation to general subjects like Latvian language and literature, and also vocational subjects like materials science and drawing.

Support is usually provided in the classroom, in interviews with teachers and students alike it was mentioned that teachers give additional explanations to students who have difficulties to follow the lesson or to do individual tasks.

For each class there is a '**form tutor**' who is responsible for all students in one class. His/her duties include among others contacts with parents, to reduce truancy, to have a regular overview about the learning progress and truancy. Each class also has one or two teachers of vocational subjects who are responsible for the vocational education part. In practice they also share the responsibility and tasks of the form tutors as they feel involved. They take care of students beyond their direct field of responsibilities. In one interview it was noted that they do it because formerly it was included in their duties.

Many of the students are combining the studies with employment (often in the branch of their studies) in order to have more pocket-money or to sustain themselves. Some of the students work full time and not to force them out of school in some exceptional cases the students obtain the permission to learn part of the programme individually but in close contact with the teachers of the subjects. This is a practice characterized by **individual approach to the needs of the students** which allows them to continue their education despite employment. This practice benefits especially the economically most disadvantaged students who have to sustain themselves and help their families.

These students are not particularly well-situated financially. Maybe one or two per class. They all are working somewhere – either at weekends or small gigs, or some auxiliary works. They all work. (TIFB3)⁷

un tad – es teikšu tā, kā viņš: „Ak, es muļķis, tas tak tik vienkārši, es taču to zināju, tikai nevarēju pateikt.”

⁷ *Nav šeit īpaši labi situēti audzēkņi. Principā varbūt grupā viens divi. Viņi visi kaut kur strādā – vai pa sestdienām, svētdienām, vai kādas haltūriņas maziņas, vai kaut kādi palīgdarbi. Viņi visi piepelnās. (TIFB3)*

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The staff is open and positive about working with heterogeneous classes

in terms of ethnic background, native languages, different ability levels and age. This is actually the reality of RBV – 20% of students have a minority background and Russian language as their mother tongue. Students have very different levels of prior knowledge when entering the school. It comes partly from the fact that some students have come to RBV with the aim to obtain a professional qualification in addition to general secondary education in order to continue studying in higher education establishments. Whereas some students have come to RBV because they were not able to continue learning in their secondary schools. The school principal noted the positive influence when students who are some years older than the rest of students join the class. Despite possible concerns that they would 'spoil' the group these students bring along their life experiences and the motivation to continue their education some years after obtaining the basic general education. Therefore other students can benefit from their experiences.

In the last years, although strange, there are some who enter the programmes in the age of 18. They have already tried something – in another school or elsewhere. But then they get the idea that they need a profession. And they are not at all the worst ones. And some say: How will that be, when such a big young man will sit here together with 15, 16 year olds, he is going to spoil my class. It is not like that! He has his own life experience, and he tries to share this life experience as much as he can with the others, with his class mates. (TIFB1) ⁸

Teachers mentioned that students come to RBV with very **different levels of knowledge of subjects**. In order to teach them successfully and to reduce the differences in knowledge the first months are used to revise the material of the basic general education. This is done, for example, in chemistry and Latvian language and literature.

I about the educational content, increasing the comprehension. This is in fact the main task of the school, if we are preparing professional individuals. As it was mentioned before, the content is realized through methods to a great extent. Watching the young colleague, he is using a

⁸ *Pēdējos gados 1. kursā, lai cik dīvaini, iestājas arī tādi, kuriem jau ir 18 gadi. Kas kaut ko ir pamēģinājuši – vai kādā citā skolā bijuši vai kaut kur citur viņi ir bijuši, bet tad viņi izdomā, ka viņiem vajag to profesiju. Un nemaz tie nav tie sliktākie. Un saka dažī tā: Kā tad tā, tāds liels jauns cilvēks sēdēs te man ar 16 gadīgiem, 15 gadīgiem, viņš taču to grupu man galīgi samaitās. Tā nav! Viņam ir sava dzīves pieredze, un viņš to savu dzīves pieredzi, cik viņš prot, viņš arī mēģina nodot tiem pārējiem, saviem grupas biedriem. (TIFB1)*

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computer. In my opinion, immediately the attitude of students is different. There we can see that students are more focused and sit. I didn't observe it before, my personal opinion was that that the 3 year classes, that they have a different level in comparison to other groups. But through more modern methods which are more acceptable and interesting for them, and which allow showing the material in a more concentrated way, it certainly gives a result. (TGB)⁹

The school experiences a permanent **lack of human resources** because it is hard to find teachers (this is a general problem in Latvian schools due to low salaries and low prestige of the teacher profession) especially in vocational subjects. The salaries of teachers are rather low therefore the teachers work up to two workloads or often combine teaching in two schools. The school principal noted that there is no institution in Latvia preparing teachers for vocational schools.

In order to make up the staff in RBV there is a practice to invite successful alumni to stay in the school as teachers. These scarce human resources in terms of teachers do not allow the school to have simultaneously two teachers working in one classroom to provide additional support.

Despite scarce human resources the school has **many experienced teachers** who are working there for many years already. The teachers are very motivated, creative and have a strong team spirit. In many interviews the staff with its experience and the attitude was mentioned as the biggest asset of the school allowing to achieve good educational results. Teachers try to find new teaching methods to raise the interest by the students, they also exchange their experience with, for example, by organising 'open lessons' when teachers observe the lessons of the others.

The teachers are interested in their work and they really do care for their students. The teachers are aware of their crucial role in the lives of the students. There is an individual approach to every student, especially when some problems

⁹ *Es par mācību saturu, izpratnes realizēšanos. Tas ir būtībā skolas galvenais uzdevums, ja mēs gatavojam profesionālus cilvēkus. Kā jau mēs te runājām, saturs realizējas caur metodēm lielā mērā. Tad arī uz samērā gados jauno kolēģi skatoties, viņš sāk izmantot datoru. Manuprāt, arī uzreiz tā attieksme audzēkņiem ir pavisam citādāka. Tur var redzēt, ka viņi ir „savākti” un sēž. To es agrāk tā nebiju ievērojis, mans personīgais viedoklis bija, ka tie trīsgadīgie, nu tas līmenis tomēr ir atšķirīgs pret citām grupām. Bet caur modernākām metodēm, kas viņiem ir pieņemamākas un interesantākas un kur arī daudz koncentrētāk var parādīt to materiālu, tas noteikti dod arī kaut kādu rezultātu. (TGB)*

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arise, the team of administration and teachers try to find the best solution for the individual student.

Some of the teachers in vocational subjects combine teaching with their own professional work. This was mentioned in several interviews with teachers, parents and students as a very positive practice increasing the quality of teaching because in this way the teachers know very well the real-life practice in their field.

Along the academic advancement school has an important role in the **development of the personalities** of the students. The latter aspect is regarded as very important in RBV and often prevails in decisions made by the staff.

3.2. Impact on disadvantaged groups

There are two main disadvantaged groups among students of RBV – students with Russian mother tongue and students who have been low-achieving in their previous schools. The practices and the results regarding the first group are discussed in the Chapter 4.3. Impact on overcoming cultural segregation.

Although there is a segregating practice when dividing students in 3 year and 4 year programmes many teachers emphasize that for many students with poor marks in their basic education certificates 3 year programmes give an opportunity to continue their education and obtain a professional qualification. They state that for many of them this would not be possible and they would fail in the 4 year programmes.

There is one first year class, where there are put together students from 3 and 4 year programs, because the 3 year class was not large enough. It is very hard there. There are students with very different knowledge. There are some students for whom even the mark 1 is too much. And he is now in this 4 year programme, and this child is unhappy. Because if in the 3 year programme he could learn with the marks 1, 2, 3 and graduate satisfactory, then in the 4 year programme he need at least mark 4. It is hard for the teachers and for the class as well, because they are tied together in this way. And correspondingly in fact many students from this class are expelled only because they cannot accomplish this 4 year programme. Because the group itself is not bad. The students who were expelled were not the worst ones. They could

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study in the 3 year programme and obtain the education but the 4 year programme is not their level. (TGB)¹⁰

The RBV manages to teach them not only the profession but also to **motivate them to continue their education**. Many students continue their education in higher education establishments, and this applies not only to the students of the 4 year programmes but also to students who obtain the general secondary education in the catch-up course after completing a 3 year programme. This indicates the transformative and inclusive impact on disadvantaged students who have come to the school with poor marks in their basic education certificates and often without motivation and prospects to acquire higher education.

A practical matter helping disadvantaged students to obtain vocational education in RBV is the provision with a student **dormitory** for reasonable prices. This is especially important for students who come from other parts of the country and the students with disadvantaged economic background.

3.3. Impact on overcoming cultural segregation

The only group providing cultural differences are students of different nationalities who have Russian as their mother tongue. In most cases they have been born in Latvia and have obtained the previous - basic general education in schools with Russian as the main language of instruction. Besides some minor cultural differences the biggest difficulty they have in RBV is not sufficient proficiency in Latvian language.

The teachers are very **encouraging and flexible** regarding the language use, especially in the beginning of the studies. Usually they help students by simply **translating** into Russian the words or phrases they don't understand. Sometimes students speak Russian in the lesson. In some subjects the school provides students with small **dictionaries of special vocabulary** of the subject. If a

¹⁰ *Ir viena pirmā kursa grupa, kur ir salikti kopā 3 gadīgie ar 4 gadīgajiem, jo 3 gadīgajiem nesakomplektēja grupu. Nu tur ir smagi. Ir ar ļoti dažādām zināšanām. Tur ir tādi, kuriem tas vieninieks jau ir daudz. Un viņš tagad ir 4 gadīgajā grupā, un tas bērns ir nelaimīgs. Jo ja viņš 3 gadīgajā grupā ar to 1, 2, 3 varētu mācīties un varētu sekmīgi pabeigt, tad 4 gadīgajā grupā viņam ir jābūt tam 4. Skolotājiem ir grūti un pašai grupai arī, jo viņi ir saistīti šādā te veidā. Un attiecīgi arī, reāli no tās grupas ir liels skaits atskaitīto jauniešu, tikai tāpēc, ka viņi nevar šo te 4 gadīgās grupas programmu pacelt. Jo grupa jau nav slikta. Tie jaunieši, kurus atskaitīja, nebija tie sliktākie. Viņi varētu mācīties 3 gadīgajā grupā un iegūt to izglītību, bet 4 gadīgajā grupā tas nav viņu līmenis. (TGB)*

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student has serious difficulties with Latvian they are allowed to write tests in Russian.

The teachers underline that their main task is to teach the subject not to inspect the knowledge of Latvian. Therefore teachers do not put very strict requirements regarding the language. Teachers always take the position that the main goal is to learn the respective subject and do not take into account the language mistakes, for example, in tests. However teachers inform students that the final exams will be in Latvian which motivates them to put more effort and learn the needed vocabulary. In this way students feel understanding and support from teachers and are motivated to make progress.

I cannot teach him the profession, if he does not know this terminology, if he does not understand what I am talking about. Of course I can come to the lesson and speak only Latvian and no matter if he understands or not. Then he will not learn anything. And therefore I allow in some particular cases to write a test in Russian. So that I can understand, if he has understood what he is learning about. But he knows that he will take the exam in Latvian. And in this way maybe he has a kind of feeling of security. When he knows that he can use Russian in the beginning. And he has the goal. Because if he will have a negative attitude towards this he may relax and say: Ah, I don't want to study here, I get no support. No, in my opinion there is no such problem. (TIFB2)¹¹

Teachers are not beasts and they will repeat if necessary. Especially the history teacher, she has a wonderful, elaborated system, how she explains in Latvian all she wants to tell. And then she notes some sentences in Russian so that they can memorize the material better. Also we have bought special dictionaries of the vocabulary; they have it in Latvian and Russian. If they need to take a look, everybody has it on the desk. (TIFB1)¹²

¹¹ *Es viņam nevaru iemācīt profesiju, ja viņš nezina šo terminoloģiju, ja viņš nesaprot, par ko es runāju. Es varu, protams, atnākt klasē un runāt tikai latviski, un man vienalga, vai viņš saprot vai nesaprot. Tad viņš neiemācīsies. Un tāpēc es arī pieļauju ar ļoti atsevišķiem gadījumiem, lai viņi uzraksta šo pārbaudes darbu krievu valodā, lai es varētu saprast, vai viņš vispārībā ir sapratis, par ko viņš mācās. Bet viņš zina, ka viņš kārtos eksāmenu latviešu valodā. Un tad viņam varbūt kaut kādā mērā drošības sajūta rodas. Nu, ka viņš zina, ka viņš var sākotnēji krievu valodā. Viņam ir tas mērķis. Jo ja viņam visu laiku būs tā negatīvā attieksme pret to, tad viņš varbūt arī atslābināsies un pateiks: Ai, es negribu te mācīties, man nenāk pretī. Nē, šī problēma manā skatījumā nav. (TIFB2)*

¹² *Skolotāji nav nekādi zvēri un atkārtos, ja vajadzēs. Īpaši vēstures skolotāja. Viņai ir lieliski izstrādāta sistēma, kā viņa izstāsta latviski visu to, ko viņa viņiem grib stāstīt. Un pēc tam viņa pieraksta varbūt arī dažus teikumus krievu valodā, lai viņiem tā viela paliek atmiņā. Tāpat ir nopirkta specialās terminu vārdnīcas, uzreiz latviski, krieviski; ja kaut ko vajag paskatīties, katram stundā ir uz sola. (TIFB1)*

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In vocational subjects there are no appropriate textbooks and students usually learn from notes taken of lectures. When some students have difficulties understanding the lecture they cannot note it properly and later learn the material from their notes.

One of teachers mentioned that the specific terminology in vocational subjects is equally new to all students irrespective of their native language therefore all students experience similar problems.

Teachers and students alike noted that students have difficulties with Latvian language only in the beginning of their studies. Being fully immersed in Latvian language environment they learn Latvian very fast and soon do not experience any more difficulties with the language of instruction. Teachers noted that some students have a barrier to start speaking Latvian especially if their Latvian is poor but they overcome it quickly because of the open and friendly atmosphere where nobody is laughing at language mistakes. Teachers, students and parents alike underline that there are no conflicts on ethnic basis between students of the school. The ethnic origin is not an issue in the school; the educational goal unites all students and teachers in a common work.

In each group there are at least five or six, depends on the group. I think that they integrate very wonderful. Those who maybe have some difficulties with the language in the beginning for those it is harder. But all in all we can say that there are no serious problems. And not because I am now praising myself. But we try together during the lesson to find the translation of the terminology. And it is not that it is not difficult for me. It is difficult for me, but we find solutions and all in all I could not say that because of language they could not study. Definitely not. If they are not able to study then it is in addition some kind of laziness, being loath to do something and so forth, but not the language difficulties. (TIFB2) ¹³

The **staff is also multinational** and includes teachers with Russian mother tongue. Some years ago a training course for teachers was organised by the

¹³ *Katrā grupā ir vismaz pieci, seši, kā kurā grupiņā. Es uzskatu, ka viņi iekļaujas ļoti brīnišķīgi. Tie, kuriem sākotnēji varbūt ir problēmas ar valodu, viņiem ir smagāk, bet principā var teikt, ka ļoti lielas problēmas nav. Un turklāt arī nevis tāpēc, ka es tagad slavētu sevi, bet mēs mēģinām stundā kopīgi atrast tai terminoloģijai tulkojumu. Un tas nav tā, ka man tas nesagādā grūtības. Man tas sagādā grūtības, bet mēs atrodam risinājumus un principā es nevarētu teikt, ka valodas dēļ viņi nevarētu mācīties. Noteikti nē. Ja viņi nevar mācīties, tad tas ir papildus kaut kāds slinkums, negribēšana un tā tālāk, bet ne valodas šķērslis. (TIFB2)*

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school administration in order to learn the methods of bilingual teaching. This shows the flexibility of the administration and the staff in adapting to new situations and willingness to provide the best education to all students.

3.4. High expectations

a) Exclusionary

Several teachers noted that students in RBV have failed in their previous schools, and that most of them are 'problematic' in some ways. They say that these are not the best students. Some teachers also told that the material is taught in a very simple way so that everyone can follow and understand it. There is only limited homework, hence teachers say that if one is present in most of the classes he/she can usually pass the tests.

If students attend the school regularly and work in lessons, they cannot fail. They get everything spoon fed. It is only not possible to teach if one does not have notes and has not been in school. So encouraging teachers... They will not give a mark just like that, it is not like that. But teachers offer additional assignments and something, they give the possibility to improve marks. (TIFB3)¹⁴

Some teachers noted that not everyone is equally smart which indicates different expectations. Teachers also mentioned that they give additional, more complicated tasks to students who learn faster. This kind of practice when students study similar material but on different level of difficulty is described in the Report 2 as 'streaming within classrooms by level' (p. 29).

Concerning continuing education after students complete their programmes in RBV teachers say that many of the students really do it. At the same time they remark that it is very hard for the students and that they in most cases are not able to compete for the small number of study places which are financed by the state.

¹⁴ Ja audzēknis regulāri nāk uz skolu un strādā stundas laikā, viņš noteikti būs sekmīgs. Viņiem tiek viss ar karotīti ieliets mutē, pasniegts. Nevar iemācīt tikai tad, ja viņam nav pierakstu un ja nav bijis skolā. Tik pretimnākoši pasniedzēji... Nav tā, ka par velti ieliks kādam atzīmi, tā arī nav. Bet skolotāji vēl dod darbus papildus un vēl kaut ko, dod iespēju labot. (TIFB3)

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b) Transformative

Despite low expectations regarding the overall level of the students teachers are strong in the **opinion that all students are able to study** and finish RBV. Teachers, students and parents alike underline that all students are able to study successfully in RBV. The decisive factor is the motivation of students to do it. The expectations and requirements from the school are clear and are consistently implemented. For example, there are obligatory tests which everyone has to pass. If someone fails he/she has to rewrite it.

We do not have the possibility to choose either to work with those who understand or with those who do not understand. We have to find methods how to achieve the implementation of requirements set in the professional standards. Because he is obtaining the profession here. And the requirements in the standards are the same for everybody, what they have to know. One will know with a higher, another maybe with lower mark, but on the whole they have to know. The tasks are individual, but these requirements motivate them and us to work differently as in the primary school. The individual consultations are also a possibility. (TGB)¹⁵

One of the teachers pointed out that insistence and high expectations towards students, for example giving homework and checking it regularly causes respect towards the teacher and his subject, improves the behaviour of students and consequently their motivation to study it.

Several teachers noted that their students often had bad marks in their previous schools and in addition to that many of them have been told that they would not have any good prospects; that they are not intelligent and are bad persons. Teachers in RBV see as one of their first tasks to 'open up' the students as personalities and **make them believe in themselves** and in their abilities to be clever, to achieve something.

Teachers believe that many of the students are able to continue their education in universities. Therefore they are **providing students with information** on the

¹⁵ *Mums nav tās iespējas īpaši izvēlēties, vai strādāt ar tiem, kas saprot, vai ar tiem, kas nesaprot. Mums ir jāatrod metodes, lai mēs panāktu profesionālā standarta prasību izpildi. Jo viņš jau iegūst profesiju pie mums. Un standarta prasības visiem ir vienādas, kas viņiem ir jāzina, kas ir jāprot. Viens zinās ar augstāku, viens varbūt ar neredz zemāku vērtējumu, bet kopumā viņiem ir jāzina. Individuāli ir uzdevumi, bet tās prasības motivē mūs un viņus citādi strādāt nekā pamatskolā. Tās individuālās konsultācijas arī ir tā iespēja. (TGB)*

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possible study programmes, conditions of enrolment etc. These high expectations let the administration of the school to open the new catch-up program which allows students to obtain general secondary education after completing 3 year programmes.

Yes, to us come from colleges and universities once a month or every two months. They come to the assembly hall, gather the corresponding professional classes and show, what are the further possibilities, they show and explain everything. (CIMB3)¹⁶

All of the interviewed parents and students from 3 and 4 year programmes alike have **high expectations** regarding further studies; they expressed a strong belief and confidence about going later to university.

The school is constantly working on the motivation of students to continue their education establishments. This is accomplished in different ways, e.g., by inviting representatives from universities offering study programmes in similar branches. The form tutors are also discussing these topics with their students. In some programmes students visit corresponding research institutes in order to gain an insight in further opportunities.

Concerning expectations towards vulnerable groups like minority students no significant difference was found. It was noted by teachers and students that some students with Russian mother tongue have initial difficulties with studies in Latvian language but they would disappear fast.

3.5. Others

One of the practices in RBV is to ensure **control** of the educational process and conduct of the students. This control is implemented in several ways. Teachers and one student in each class are responsible for noting the presence or absence in every lesson. Form tutors follow constantly the marks and attendance of the students. They often come to the lessons especially during the first and the last lessons of the day to check the attendance.

¹⁶ *Jā, mums brauc no citām koledžām vai augstskolām. Vienu reizi mēnesī vai reizi divos mēnešos. Atnāk uz aktu zāli, sapulcina visas tās profesijas visas grupas un rāda, kādas ir tālākās iespējas, rāda un stāsta visu. (CIMB3)*

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The school can decide how to divide the monthly stipends among the students so it has developed a special regulation on this. It is an elaborated **system of rewards and sanctions**. Every month there is meeting when the administration meets the form tutors and the students responsible for attendance register to decide on the amount of the stipend for each individual student. For this meeting the form tutors prepare overviews of the grades. The basis for the calculation of the stipend is the mean value of marks which is increased by extracurricular activities like taking part in student competitions, singing in the choir and other activities. On the other hand the amount of the stipend is decreased by a small sum for every lesson the student has not attended without justified reasons. If a student has good grades, is active in extracurricular activities and does not miss lessons the stipend can be considerably higher.

Also the stipend. The better you learn, the better results you have, the higher stipend you have. I think it is quite high – 50, 60 lats. In secondary school. It is, in case if everything is satisfactory and you have participated in additional activities at school. I think yes [it motivates]. At least my son, he is even calculating, how much will he get. (RIFB2)¹⁷

The teachers and students noted during the interviews that this practice has a positive impact on the motivation by many students. This is especially effective for the students who do not work or have only small jobs. Students who work full time earn much more therefore the stipend is not playing an important role in their motivation.

From the observation of the stipends commission (OmB3) the individual approach to every student, flexibility, and the caring attitude of the personnel must be emphasized. The lists of students and their marks and attendance sheets were checked by the school administration form by form. In case of massive non-attendance or bad marks the form tutors had to give additional explanations on individual students and what they as form tutors have done to improve it, e.g., contacted the parents. Many students and their individual situations were discussed in order to decide on possible solutions or further actions by the form

¹⁷ *Arī stipendija. Jo tu labāk mācies, jo tev labākas sekmes, jo tev stipendija ir lielāka. Es domāju, tā ir diezgan liela – 50, 60 latu stipendija. Vidusskolā. Tas ir, ja viss ir sekmīgs, un ja tu vel esi piedalījies papildu tur kaut kādos pasākumos. Es domāju, ka jā [tas motivē]. Vismaz manam dēlam noteikti, jo viņš pat rēķina līdzī, cik viņam par to pienāksies. (RIFB2)*

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tutor or the administration of the school. This practice indicates the motivation and care by the school personnel for every student in order to keep all students at the school and to ensure that they manage to finish the school with success. Often families are not able to take proper care of the students and the teachers partly take over their role and are solving problems of the students in very diverse spheres of life, like health, security, shelter and others. This approach is crucial in providing individual help to students to continue their education, especially from disadvantageous backgrounds; therefore it can be considered an inclusive practice.

The close and continuous observation and registration of the educational work and conduct of the students is mentioned as motivating for many students. Several teachers noted during the interviews that this increases the self-esteem of many students because they have the feeling of being important to somebody. This is especially important for students who have poor relationships to their families.

Another practice identified by several teachers is **clear definition of requirements** and rules and strict **implementation** of them. Students must be informed about their duties and the positive and negative consequences. The clarity of requirements and the implementation of rules shows to students that teachers take their work seriously, consequently students develop more respect towards the teachers and are more motivated and disciplined.

The educational process in each subject is divided in larger periods of time. After learning one topic for approximately one month the students have to write a test covering the whole topic. There is not lot of homework and often they are not checked. This practice lets students to learn only shortly before tests instead of doing it regularly. One mother suggested during the interview (RIFB2) that there should be more homework which must be checked regularly **to ensure that students learn more regularly.**

As an important aspect for the development of the personalities and **independence** of students in many interviews it was mentioned that students have relative freedom but they are also kept responsible for their decisions. For example, students are allowed to write or rewrite tests during the consultations but they themselves are responsible for choosing the time they will do it.

During many interviews teachers, students and parents alike emphasized that RBV has a **positive atmosphere** which is based on good relationships among the staff and the students, between the personnel, students and their parents. These relationships can be characterised as open, cooperative, respectful. This could also be observed during the data collection in the school.

It was mentioned during the interviews that diligence and hard work is appreciated a lot. Teachers mentioned that they often take this into account when giving marks. This encourages students to make more efforts. Another motivating attitude among teachers is that mistakes are part of the educational process therefore not only the result but also the process of accomplishing a task is evaluated. This practice encourages students to do their assignments without unnecessary fear.

4. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

4.1. Community participation in decision making processes and in student's learning processes

Teachers place emphasis on involvement of families in the schooling of their children. They underline that the support of parents is essential for successful studies. On the other hand teachers note that many parents are not willing to engage actively in the school. They explain it with the big workload of parents, poor relationships and lack of communication between parents and children. In some cases students live separately from their families together with their girlfriends or boyfriends and are earning their own living. Many families live outside Riga and do not have the time or resources to come to the parents meeting in Riga. In order to improve the communication and cooperation between the teachers, students and their families the school has introduced a new staff position.

The biggest problem is that parents of many children are very unresponsive. If there is no collaboration with parents the school alone is rather powerless. This problem nowadays is related to the fact that parents work a lot. They have several jobs. They do not have time. And

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very often one can hear from parents something like: he or she is 18, has his/ her own head and has to understand. (TIFB2)¹⁸

In order to meet the family and to increase their responsibility for the schooling the newly enrolled students are coming to the school together with parents and a triangular agreement signed between the school, the student and his/her parents.

There are three main forms of cooperation with parents: 1) parent meetings, 2) E-class, 3) phone calls. **Parent meetings** are organized several times per school year for each class. They are organized separately for every class by the form tutor. Sometimes joint meetings with parents and students are organized. The responsible vocational teachers are also present at these meetings. Form tutors prepare for every parent information on the grades and attendance of their child. In the observed meeting (OmB1) an open and warm discussion developed between the parents (mostly mothers) and teachers. Parents took the chance to ask them about the results and conduct of their child and the teachers responded openly about the difficulties but also emphasized the positive points.

Unfortunately these meetings are not very well attended – usually less than half of the families are represented. Teachers develop diverse strategies to motivate parents to come. One is to send registered letters with invitations; sometimes teachers include sentences saying that according to some regulations in case of failure to appear the school can decide on further studies of their child. Teachers admit that this is a kind of threatening without any real basis but this trick helps to increase the attendance rate considerably at least for the first meeting.

Some teachers try to develop a warm atmosphere by offering coffee and small snacks to parents. Sometimes form tutors send parents cards with Christmas greetings and thank for taking good care of their children. This lets the parents feel welcomed at school and gives positive associations with the school. This is especially important because many of parents have made bad experiences in

¹⁸ *Lielākā problēma ir tas, ka lielai daļai bērnu vecāki ir diezgan neatsaucīgi. Ja nav sadarbība ar vecākiem, tad skola viena pati ir diezgan bezspēcīga. Tā problēma šobrīd ir saistīta ar to, ka vecāki ļoti daudz strādā. Strādā vairākās darba vietās. Viņiem nav laika. Un ļoti bieži ir dzirdami no vecākiem tādi teksti: viņam vai viņai ir 18, ir sava galva un ir jādomā. (TIFB2)*

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previous schools where they were contacted only if there were some troubles with their children.

E-class is an Internet based system to inform parents about the grades and absence of their child. It has already been introduced in many schools in Latvia. E-class is based on an electronic register of grades, attendance and other information. Parents can see on Internet the data on their children or they can choose to receive SMS with the type of information they are interested, for example, all grades, grades below certain level, absence etc.

E-class has been introduced in the school in the school year 2007/2008 and many parents have joined this system. Some parents do not use Internet and some are not ready to pay for the SMS although there is a limit set for the maximum payment (EUR 3) regardless the number of SMS which are actually sent. The school sees plans the e-class as an important and efficient way of communication with parents and plans to involve all parents in it in the next school year.

Individual **phone calls** are made very often, especially when there are some problems. Form tutors call parents every time when the student has been absent for a longer period of time. The aim is to inform the parents and make joint efforts to return students to studies and to make sure the students are not in any kind of danger. In the interviews teachers complained that some parents are not interested in the contact with teachers. Some parents admit that they cannot influence the behaviour of their children.

The main aim of the aforementioned ways of communication is informing parents about success and problems in the schooling of their children. Teachers emphasize the role of parental involvement to support the motivation and ensure regular attendance. But often the school stands alone in this work. Teachers have not noted any differences between parents of different ethnic origin.

A student noted that parents engage in preparing the final celebration when their children graduate from the school.

Having so many difficulties to involve parents in the schooling process of their own children the school is not considering the participation of family members in

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decision making processes, the learning activities and their evaluation. The interviewed parents were rather puzzled because they do not see ways and necessity for parental involvement in the educational processes. The parents emphasized that they are fully satisfied with the current organization of the educational process.

I even don't know. Because this school is different from the basic school, from an ordinary basic school, where teachers more... Here more, as it was said, that here they are more like students, that they have free choice, what they are doing and what not. I think that here it is possible, and in fact it is like that – they are organizing everything themselves, they are doing it themselves. I even don't know if it is necessary. I cannot even imagine that... (RIFB2)¹⁹

For example, when we had to prepare 'the last bell' for other classes, parents helped. Classmates, friends and also parents helped us when we prepared 'confirmation'. Many teachers and parents helped us as much as they could. (CIMB3)²⁰

Another way of involving the community in the school is to invite representatives from police, NGOs or other institutions to talk to students about different topics, for example, sexual education, drug abuse and others.

There are no **community education programmes** in the school. This can be explained in different ways. First of all this practice is almost nonexistent in Latvian schools. Schools complain about the lack of interest on parent side regarding the schooling of their own children; many parents work long hours to maintain the family. Therefore they do not expect parents to be interested in educational programmes. On the other hand schools lack human and financial resources to organize community education programmes.

Including multiculturalism into planning instrumental subjects is not an issue in RBV. Again – it must be noted that for the most part Latvian society is not aware of multiculturalism and does not regard it as an enriching asset. Regarding the educational system schools with Latvian as language of instruction

¹⁹ *Es pat nezinu. Jo tomēr tā skola atšķiras no pamatskolas, no parastās pamatskolas, kur vairāk skolotāji... Tur jau vairāk, kā teica, ka te jau vairāk kā studenti viņi ir. Ka viņiem pašiem brīva izvēle, ko viņi dara un ko nedara. Man tā liekas, ka tur var tā, tā tas arī ir, ka viņi paši visu tur organizē tie bērni, paši darbojas. Es pat nezinu, vai vajadzētu. Es īsti nestādos priekšā... (RIFB2)*

²⁰ *Piemēram, kad par pēdējo zvanu jāpadomā, kad citām grupām, kad mēs gatavojām 'pēdējo zvanu', arī vecāki nāk palīgā. Kurša biedri, draugi, arī vecāki nāca palīgā, kad mēs iesvētības taisījām. Daudzi skolotāji un vecāki mums palīdzēja, kā varēja. (CIMB3)*

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have been almost only Latvian until 15 years ago. In RBV the most important minority are students with Russian mother tongue. They have been born and have lived their lives in Latvia therefore the cultural differences are not very large.

4.2. Overcoming gender stereotypes

In this section the overall situation regarding gender equality will be characterized including the aspects of community participation. In RBV most of the vocational programmes offered are in traditionally male dominated professions, e.g., construction, metal works, finishing works etc. Hence most of the students are male. In the programme of finishing works 2-3 girls are enrolled every year.

Catering is a comparatively new programme and has more female students than other programmes. But corresponding to changing public opinion on cook as a female occupation more male students are applying and are enrolled in the catering programme. A teacher of catering mentioned that boys are often very talented cooks and achieve better results.

Teachers emphasize that they do not have different attitudes towards students depending on their gender; all students have the same requirements. They emphasize that girls are often very smart and talented. A girl studying finishing works was mentioned in several interviews as an example for this. She is in the first year of studies and has already won several competitions among students of finishing works. One teacher mentioned that some male students in this group could also take part in such competitions but teachers decided to send her because it is unusual.

*Now there will be another international competition. Somehow we could also send others, but we have never sent girls nowhere before, because we never had them. **Because it is a girl?** Yes, because it is a girl, yes. But she also wants it and she likes it a lot. Also during the practical classes, she is always the first. And she will even boss around the boys, explain, what is correct, because she has calculated everything and calculated it correctly. (TIFB3)²¹*

²¹ Tagad būs vel viens starptautiskais konkurss. It kā varētu jau arī citus sūtīt, bet mēs nekad neesam meitenes nekur sūtījuši, jo mums viņas nav bijušas. **Tāpēc, ka meitene?** Jā, tāpēc, ka meitene, jā. Bet viņa arī ļoti vēlas un viņai tas ļoti patīk. Arī tad, kad

The teacher staff is mostly female, women teach general and professional subjects in study programs of traditionally male professions like carpentry and finishing works. Many of them have been working in the RBV for many years already and are in leading positions like head of department. The administrative personnel are mostly female. This composition of the teaching staff and administration provides students and their families with diverse role models and thereby contributes to overcoming gender stereotypes.

Non-academic women are involved in practical positions like catering and cleaning.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The case study carried out in the Riga Secondary school of construction trades has given a profound insight in the various practices of this school. The findings partly confirm some of the hypotheses at the core of this study. On the other hand the results suggest additional factors which can be substantial for an inclusive education.

As the main disadvantaged groups in the context of RBV could be identified 1) students with Russian mother tongue and 2) students with poor previous knowledge in general subjects. The economic status of their families does not play a significant role in the educational success. A more important factor is the quality of the relationship with the parents and parental care.

Students with Russian as their native language sometimes experienced difficulties because of poor proficiency in Latvian language. They receive **inclusive support during lessons** because teachers translate some words, sentences into Russian. Students with Russian mother tongue are provided with special dictionaries containing special vocabulary of the subjects. The immersion in the Latvian speaking classes and the encouraging atmosphere allows improving the

praktiskās nodarbības notiek, viņa ir vienmēr pirmā. Viņa vēl puišus izkomandēs, pastāstīs, kā pareizi, jo viņa ir visu sarēķinājusi un pareizi sarēķinājusi. (TIFB3)

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proficiency of the Latvian language. Teachers do not place emphasis on the language and see as their main task to teach the respective subjects.

Several transformative elements fostering inclusion and educational success for all students were identified. In order to reduce the differences in previous knowledge in general subjects the first year students work on **revision on the material** in the beginning of the school year.

Consultation hours of teachers provide an opportunity to extend the learning time for the students who have some difficulties. Most often the consultations are used to write or rewrite some tests. Sometimes teachers invite individual students to their consultation hours to give a better understanding of some material.

Although the **division of students in 4 year and 3 year programmes** with differences in content of curricula and level of difficulty can be regarded as tracking it is also an opportunity to obtain vocational education for students with poor previous knowledge of general subjects. Therefore inclusive and segregated practices cannot be evaluated in a simplified way as their educational effect is often ambiguous.

A very successful inclusionary practice is **the catch-up course** which allows to obtain general secondary education after completing a 3 year vocational programme and to continue the studies in higher educational institutions. This is an import mechanism providing a second chance to students with poor marks on the general basic education certificate.

In order to control and motivate students their **educational success and attendance is analysed regularly**. One of the instruments is the regulation on **monthly stipends**. In the RBV there is an elaborated **system of rewards and sanctions** which determine the amount of the stipend. This is an efficient mechanism for students who do not work full time.

Parental interest and involvement in the education of their children is crucial for the motivation of students. The main practices of the parental involvement are parents meetings, communication of marks and attendance via Internet or SMS,

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and phone calls. Unfortunately the parents usually take a very passive role despite the efforts of teachers. Direct parental support in the educational process or participation in the decision making on it is almost non-existent in Latvia. According to the interview data teachers, students, and parents alike can hardly imagine how and why parents could participate more directly in the educational process.