Nurturing students' non-cognitive competences and a power of self-reflection in Salduves progymnasium

About our school

- ♦ **Location**: Siaulai
- ♦ **Established**: 1958
- ♦ **Status**: Public school that provides primary and lower secondary education (grades 1 – 8)
- ♦ **Number of pupils:** 514 (in 2016)
- ♦ **Website:** www.salduve.lt
- ♦ **Contact person:** Natalija Kaunickiene

Why did we innovate?

- To make each student a successful learner. Traditional academic education (focusing on predominantly cognitive competences) was perceived as not sufficient for children's holistic development. The school decided to bring education closer to the real-life context, creating space for children with different capabilities to discover themselves and experience success.
- To improve overall school climate and image. Before 2007 (when the new school leader was appointed) the school had a negative image, with lots pupils underperforming (140 out of 353). The working environment was not supportive: lack of collaboration and sharing among teachers. Some experienced teachers left the school.

What were our innovations?

To help students overcome learning difficulties at an early stage, the school has introduced Individual Achievement Tracking (IAT) system developed by the school. The implementation process started in 2008 with consultation and training of teachers and development of working plans. Since 2011, it has been embedded into school culture. IAT system focuses not only on grades but also on other aspects

of learning, such as social interactions and helps pupils improve in all these areas. The elements of IAT are:

- mentoring, during which a pupil is assigned a teacher to supervise him/her;
- pupils' self-assessment in special diary-books (for students of 5th-8th grades). Each pupil self-assesses her/his performance over the previous month by assigning scores according to criteria in three blocs: learning; non-formal learning; and social skills. Once a month, she/he writes a reflection on what worked, what didn't work and why. They also set a goal they seek to achieve in each subject by the end of the academic year. Each month they monitor this goal and plan further steps to achieve it. Parents are also encouraged to contribute to this monitoring process and motivate their children to achieve the stated goals. IAT forms a comprehensive system (implementation, learning, improving), and involves all relevant actors: teachers, pupils and their parents.

The IAT system inspired the school staff to introduce a system focusing on social competence development (SCD) (in 2012), focusing on three components: social activities (volunteering), self-reflection, and the acknowledgement of gained competences. The most important component of the model is self-reflection. Each pupil thinks about the social project they could participate in, and what benefits this can bring. Pupils engage into social activities on the school campus, or work with organisations outside school (e.g., kindergartens, animal homes, elderly care homes).

As a follow-up to SCD, the school began an educational project with social partners (in 2013), the goal of which is to nurture pupils' non-cognitive skills and competences (both personal and social). The project involves pupils of 1st-8th grades. Four days per academic year, the learning is organised in alternative environments: art galleries, theatres, university laboratories, botanical gardens, pastoral centres, libraries etc. For instance, in 2016, as a recognition of growing attention to STEM, the topic of the project was 'Growing and Exploring'. Activities centred on natural science laboratories, robotics, design, and so on. A separate working group coordinates all project activities. At the end of each day, pupils reflect on what they learnt during the project activities and set new goals, which are further discussed with the teacher.

⭐ What have we achieved?

Pupils
- Teachers observe that pupils' academic results have improved
- No grade/course repetition, no problems with systematic school absenteeism
- Pupils feel more confident in participating in various competitions outside school
- Teachers, parents and pupils themselves notice improvements in pupils' social skills and increased sense of responsibility
- Parents and pupils themselves feel better prepared for entering upper secondary schools

Teachers
- Boosted self-confidence, they feel empowered to take further initiatives
- Increased motivation and collaboration among teaching staff and between teachers and other stakeholders

Parents
- More parents choose to bring their children to this school
- They actively participate in parents' meetings and in IAT system (as they can easily follow their children's learning process)

School as a whole
- School community feels improved social climate at school
- Better school image outside school community, and more intense collaboration with social partners

✅ The process of change: what helped us succeed?

School level
- Initial poor image of the school was a strong motivator to change and create "a distinctive school culture"
- Strong, motivated school leader (came to school in 2007), who promoted positive thinking, was a critical factor for change. The school leader was inspired by her previous working experience at Šiauliai "Didždvario" gymnasium (which is implementing an International Baccalaureate programme), where they were already working with the SCD system. The school leader was also a part of national programme aiming at improving leadership at schools, which helped her to strengthen the school community and promote change
- School community (teachers, pupils and their parents) felt a sense of ownership through being involved in performance analysis, planning of activities and decision making.
- The school's openness to, and interest in, external information sources (e.g. success stories from various other schools about embedded practices) helped to succeed
- Peer-learning among teachers (e.g., teachers participating in each other lessons and share their reflections and observations) helped creating professional learning communities
- Active involvement of social partners, business and NGOs into educational projects helped making the learning more exciting and engaging

Municipal level
- Šiauliai city regional education centre supported creation of the SCD system, by providing space and plaforms for schools developing SCD to collaborate and share knowledge. the municipality has also facilitated the contacts with social partners to be involved into education projects
- The school cooperates with external partners: Šiauliai University, a number of local museums and galleries, a kindergarten and several private enterprises. All of these institutions welcome and provide classes for pupils four times per year

National level
- Inspiration for innovations came from the Master's degree studies in educational leadership, as a part of the national project "Time for Leaders 2". The project was initiated by Ministry of Education and helped schools and municipalities develop a unique model promoting leadership (in 2012-2014).
- National education priorities helped the school recognise trends and plan the directions of further actions
- The development of the IAT system was based on the national standard "Development of key competences of students (grades 5-8) in basic education"
- The Ministry of Education and Science (MoE) supported school's implemented innovations (e.g. invitations to join various working groups, speak in conferences and ad hoc training sessions)

🖥️ The process of change: what limited us?

School level
- It took time for teachers to learn how to recognise each student's individual achievements, and become acquainted with their learning specificities and difficulties
- Furthermore, opening school to external stakeholders was challenging. The school leader supported this process of change by constant consultation and internal trainings to teachers, which helped changing their perceptions
- The limited ability of some teachers to reflect on their own activities during lessons burdened the process
- Learning practices within the school were unsystematic and inconsistent (in the beginning, innovations were adopted on a more ad hoc basis)
- It was a challenge to convince teachers and parents to support the SCD system, and to motivate pupils. It was mitigated by appointing a person working full-time as a SCD coordinator. She was in charge of communication with all involved parties.

Municipal level
- It has been difficult to attract social partners and convince them to engage into school activities (especially the private sector)
- School felt a lack of interest and support from local policy makers for innovative activities implemented

National level
- There is a lack of practical trainings for pedagogues in Lithuania (qualification ndevelopment events are rather theoretical), which is a barrier for all schools to innovate.

∞ Sustainability of change

- School practises management through working groups (e.g. school performance monitoring group, parents' informing group, pupils' progress group). Accountability mechanisms exist where each group reports interim 6-month results, creates a product at the end of the year, and passes through anonymous assessment. It also includes self-reflection. At the end, a product overview is published on the school's website. The school leader sets strategic directions but then it is up to working groups to decide on implementation issues
- Periodical meetings of school staff (twice per year) are organised where performance and overall well-being of each pupil are discussed. Groups of teachers exchange their experiences and impressions, and come up with solutions on how to further support each pupil, which methods work best for each child individually
- Once per week, teachers organise a 'class hour' where they ask pupils (5-8th grades) to reflect on their improvement done in the areas of formal, non-formal education and social competence development. This exercise provides a very useful feedback for the school staff
- In each class, there are 'thermometers' to measure the temperature in the class – anonymous pupils' surveys to assess how positive is school environment (e.g. issues of abuses or bullying)

- Yearly Pupils' Forums and Parents' Forums are organised with the aim to mutually learn about different themes, e.g. how parents encourage their children to study, what a concept 'Good School' means, what is an added value of the SCD system
- The school has still limited knowledge of how far its innovations have spread. It does not collect regular feedback from the school managers and teachers it has trained. To date, only ad hoc activities have been undertaken to spread knowledge about the innovative practices that have been implemented beyond the school community
- Ways the school used to spread innovations to other schools are: seminars; conferences mostly organised by the Ministry; visits to other schools; staff mobility to other schools, School Forum (2015) during which good practices were shared with other school leaders and teachers from all over Lithuania; contributing to a handbook of methodological guidelines and recommendations in which the school shared its own experience; participation in the ministerial and municipal working groups (e.g. a model to describe the growth of a child's personality)

🔑 What did we learn in the process? Key messages

- Innovations have contributed to children's holistic development, and have brought positive benefits for teachers, the whole school community, and especially parents
- The school has witnessed a power of self-reflection and benefits of experiential learning
- A strong school manager practising distributive leadership is one of the keys to enable change
- Including school community (teachers, pupils and their parents) into performance analysis, planning of activities and decision making is crucial for the success of innovation
- Monitoring, evaluation, self-assessment, internal learning, systemic planning, set priorities and established accountability mechanisms were an integral part of successful school organisation practices
- It is more difficult to transfer 'soft' elements – those that relate to school culture and values. It is equally difficult to transfer innovation if no deep understanding exists as to what changes are necessary for the school community, and why
- Innovations are more likely to be sustainable when they become an integral part of the school's culture

Further reading

- **A full report** 'Supporting School Innovation across Europe' explores the conditions in the school education system that can enable or constrain positive change in schools.
- **12 case studies** explore the national approaches and individual school innovations. They include the perspectives of key national education experts and stakeholders who were interviewed and took part in workshops.
- **24 individual profiles** give a quick view of the changes and experiences in each school.

Available here:
www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation

- The school profiles also feature as part of the European Toolkit for Schools, alongside a range of materials and many other inspiring examples of practice from European countries.