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SHAPING THE MULTILINGUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: THE CASE OF MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT IN GEORGIA

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Abstract

The multicultural and multilingual nature of the environment creates a necessity to deal with the diversity and social integration, thus making minority education one of the leading themes almost in any education reform today. Georgia, like many other former Soviet republics, experiences the need for multicultural policies. To test the multilingual education model as a tool to respond to urgent needs of the Georgian society in the spheres of education and societal cohesion, an internationally designed and funded Multilingual Education Pilot Project was implemented during the school years 2006 – 2008 in 12 schools in Georgia. During the Pilot Project, 12 research methods and instruments have been devised and implemented. Conclusions from the data analysis have been drawn, and recommendations for a broader implementation of multilingual education in Georgia have been provided. The overall impact of the Project was evaluated as highly satisfactory. The article aims to reflect on project experience, track observable changes in the educational environment, and analyze the pedagogical factors involved in successful implementation of multilingual education and sustainability of the innovations.

Key words: multilingual education; teachers; learning environment; lesson observation; sustainable changes.

Introduction

In many former Soviet republics language policy and bilingual education have been intensely discussed. After a period of rigid language policies, these republics are gradually becoming aware of the need for multicultural and multilingual policies. Post-soviet countries aspiring to join the European Union (EU), particularly the Baltic states Estonia and Latvia, have been “required” to formulate minority policies in terms of Western values of pluralism, human rights, and tolerance, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity (Silova, 2006). Multilingual and multicultural education have been prescribed as a tool for tackling the problem.

The aim of the paper is to reflect on the pedagogical aspects of multilingual education implementation process in Georgia. The author’s educational background and profes-

sional experience determine that Georgian experience has been analyzed in comparison with the processes in other postsoviet republics – particularly the Baltic States as well as Middle Asia.

Similarly as in Latvia before the Minority Education Reform, the school system in Georgia has continued a tradition of running schools with minority languages as main languages of instruction. According to the Georgia Education Strategy (The Ministry of Education..., 2007), currently there are 423 so-called non-Georgian schools and non-Georgian sectors of instruction (123,745 students). Languages of instruction in these schools and sectors are Russian, Armenian, Azeri and Ossetian. Of these, 273 schools are located in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli – two regions densely populated by Armenian and Azeri populations respectively. It is estimated that about thirteen percent of the whole population do not speak the State (Georgian) language. The positive aspect of this system is that linguistic minorities have the opportunity to receive education in their mother tongue, which is crucial for linguistic and psycho-social development of children belonging to ethno-linguistic minority groups. On the other hand, the education system separates children along ethnic and linguistic lines, which does not help the development of a shared understanding of citizenship and feeling of belonging for members of different ethno-linguistic groups. Children end up having different linguistic capacities which, unfortunately, has an important impact on their professional and economic opportunities (Bachman, 2006).

Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 (1992) identifying four major thrusts of education to support a sustainable future has posed the improvement of the access to and quality of basic education as the first priority of education for sustainable development. Tracking student success by race, ethnicity or preferred learning style shows weaknesses within school systems' capabilities to serve youth from the diverse backgrounds.

In Latvia as well as in Georgia the reform of minority education was facilitated by the international organizations and accepted and announced by local policy according to the aims declared by the governing parties. In Latvia to address the minority education issue the Soros Foundation-Latvia (SFL) (1999–2003) launched the project "Open School" (Grigule, Catlaks, Silova, & Maslo, 1999). The goal of the project was to create an educational system that fosters the ethnic integration of society by developing common values and goals, promoting tolerance of diversity, and encouraging cooperation between Latvian and non-Latvian speakers. In Georgia two-year project (2006–2008) for multilingual program piloting was realized by Swiss non-governmental organization Cimera financially supported by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe / High Commissioner on National Minorities (OECE/HCNM). The *Multilingual Education in Georgia* (MLG) project aimed at developing and producing methodological tools and training teachers as to introduce multilingual education in primary schools of two regions in Georgia densely populated by ethno-linguistic minorities.

The study aims to reflect on the project experience, to track observable changes in the learning environment; to analyze the pedagogical factors involved in successful implementation of multilingual education, and to evaluate the necessary support for teachers to ensure sustainability of the innovations.

Background

The conceptual context of minority education has been based on social transformation theory of Dewey (1916) and Vygotsky (1978) as well as on the theoretical foundations and research on bilingual and intercultural education (Baker, 2001; Cummins, 1996; Banks & McGee Banks, 1997; Batelaan, 2002). The conceptual context of minority education is also formed by the comparative research (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Silova, 2006), notions of educational change (Hargreaves, 2003; Fullan, 2005a; Levin, 2008; Sugrue, 2008), education for sustainable development (Clark, 1997; Salite, 2002; Grabovska, 2006; UNESCO, 2005) and EU and other internationally recognized documents and declarations.

The majority of comparative research examining the politics of education transfer focuses on mapping the transfer process by tracing what aspects of “borrowed” education models have been modified, omitted, or accepted as a result of the transfer process. Another research aspect is the differentiation between rhetorical and practical borrowing. Tyack and Cuban (1995) suggest that it is important to distinguish between “policy talk”, which is the current rhetoric in media; “policy action,” which means that programs and innovations are adopted; and “policy implementation,” which relates to what actually happens in the classroom. Silova (2006) summarizes that an examination of the *process* of education borrowing could show that new innovations may exist rhetorically and even be approved on the school level. According to Steiner-Khamsi (2002), this dual transfer process – from policy talk to action and from policy action to implementation – provides ample room for modification, reinterpretation, and resistance by various actors involved at each level of the borrowing process. Change where it counts the most – in the daily interactions of teachers and students – is the hardest to achieve, and to do this requires not only political will and commitment but also an accurate understanding of schools as institutions (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Recent research has acknowledged an increased emphasis on capacity-building as central to school and system improvement. Fullan defines capacity building as

... the development and use of policies, strategies, and actions that increase the collective power of efficacy of whole groups, organizations, or systems to engage in continuous improvement for ongoing student learning. Typically, capacity-building synergizes three powerful collective phenomena:

- *New skills and dispositions,*
- *More focused and enhanced resources,*
- *Greater shared commitment, cohesion, and motivation* (Fullan, 2005b, p. 213).

Capacity-building, as it is considered by Levin (2008), is something much more extensive than training, it implies a developmental process that changes settings as well as the people working in them.

A further important international development concerns the growing recognition of respect for diversity and of finding new ways to reach minority and immigrant populations (Joshee, 2004).

The legitimacy and value of linguistic diversity is underlined in a growing number of international treaties and other documents that come from the number of sources: the United Nations and its associated agencies, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Particularly, the *United Nations*

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UN, 1992), the *Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE* (Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1990), the *Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (Council of Europe, 1995) and the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (Council of Europe, 1992) should be mentioned. The latest of the Commission of the European Communities' documents and activities are aimed at the implementation of concept of multilingualism as an asset for Europe and a shared commitment (Commission of the European Communities, 2008).

The present study draws on several sets of criteria developed by international practice. Cuban (1998) has suggested three common criteria used by policymaking elites (effectiveness, popularity, and fidelity) and two less common ones used by practitioners (adaptability and longevity). The Estonian Language Immersion Centre has provided *Characteristics of Good Immersion Schools* (Language Immersion Centre, 2000), which deal with school climate and school staff. The Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (2002) has set up standards for effective pedagogy in multilingual settings emphasizing teacher and students joint productive and challenging activities, communication, contextualization, and language development across the curriculum.

Focusing on the classroom and the teachers as change agents, the hypothesis can be put forward that successful implementation and sustainability of innovations in the field of multicultural education can be linked to:

- Applicability and flexibility of the introduced model and project participants' active engagement and shared responsibility;
- Learning environment oriented to active learning, creativity, cooperation, and reflectivity.

Implementation and adaptation of MLE models in the project schools

The introduction of multilingual education (MLE) in Georgia implies (1) the theoretical foundation of the appropriate program, and the practical design of the model for particular school, (2) the training of teachers in interactive methodology and design of the teaching materials, (3) parents' involvement and (4) monitoring and evaluation of the results.

For the implementation of the MLE project, the strong form of bilingual education namely the *Developmental Maintenance and Heritage Language Bilingual Education Program* has been selected, adapted to the reality and possibilities of Georgian education system. The model is generally applied when the language of instruction at school is the native or home language of minority children and the goal is full bilingualism (Baker, 2001). Examples include Catalan in Spain, Ukrainian in Canada, Finnish in Sweden. Schools with Azeri, Armenian, Georgian, and Russian language for instruction were selected to pilot the multilingual education. In three schools, the language of instruction was Russian or Georgian, whereas, the home language of majority of the children was Armenian. This meant that parents of these pupils had already chosen a type of bilingual education, the full immersion model. The implementation of a multilingual education model, by providing lessons in the mother tongue Armenian, in reality softened this "swim or sink" model. The pilot sample included bilingual models with Georgian

language allocation of 17-29% and trilingual models with Georgian language allocation of 15-17% and third language allocation of 2-5%. During the second project year, two schools increased the proportion of lessons conducted in the Georgian language from 19 to 33%.

The main criterion for subject selection was their potential to create a second language environment. Schools were recommended to select subjects where demonstration, visualization, gestures and body language could be used as a communication medium. Art (Handicraft and Drawing), Sports and Natural Sciences were identified as corresponding to this criterion in the best way.

The next important criterion was the teacher's qualification. Practically none of the class teachers had the appropriate level of second language proficiency necessary for teaching. Also hardly any of the subject teachers in minority schools were capable of conducting his/her subject in a second language. Three subject teachers had been found for teaching Natural Science, Sports and Drawing. In other cases the subject teaching was assigned to language teachers. Some schools initiated the model of two teachers' presence in the classroom during the lessons in second language. It had a particularly positive effect in situations where Georgian teachers did not know the pupils' first language.

In this way the models were adapted to the reality and possibilities of Georgian education system and piloted during the school year 2006/2007 in 18 first grade classes. During the school year 2007/2008 MLE had expanded vertically and took place in 17 first grade classes and 18 second grade classes, involving a total of 580 children.

Teachers' professional development in the context of sustainability

Education for sustainable development can be seen as an overall perspective and ongoing process in a changeable world. Attainment of sustainable development and related educational processes will vary from context to context since they can be implemented in many culturally appropriate forms. The project *Multilingual Education in the Georgia* shares the principles and values that underlie quality education and sustainable development: it addresses content, taking into account context, global issues and local priorities; uses a variety of pedagogical techniques that promote participatory learning and higher-order thinking skills; upholds and conveys the ideals of a sustainable world – a world that is just, equitable, and peaceable, in which individuals care for the environment to contribute to intergenerational equity, etc. Multilingual education reform and MLG particularly, required teachers to learn new skills and knowledge, to think about their profession from a different perspective, develop critical thinking and responsibility. In this way we can consider the participation in the project as a driving force.

The start of the project implementation has indicated a very low level of qualification of the teachers working in minority schools in terms of teaching methodology. Regarding the professional profile, only 36% of project teachers from Kvemo Kartli region hold higher pedagogical education certification. The project concept foresaw the need for teachers' initial training and preparation for multilingual education implementation. During the first year of the project, a 64 hours training course consisting of 3 modules (40/16/8 hours) was designed and conducted. During the second school year, project teachers received 24 hours (3 modules) of training and 4 seminars were held for local trainers. The overall aims of the methodological training were: for the first training – to

raise awareness; for the second – to build skills; for the third – to reflect on the experience and plan for the future implementation of multilingual education. In order to monitor how teachers applied the interactive tools acquired during the training and to secure the progress, regular observation of lessons, individual consultations and exchange seminars were taking place in all pilot schools. During the second pilot year the training focused on specific issues: second language literacy development, introduction of pupils' language portfolio as a tool for the language skills' assessment, lesson observation and self-evaluation skills. The project strategy had been based on the involvement of local specialists into the trainings and increased emphasis on capacity building and development of school as a social institution (space for social relations). The "training" and "train the trainer" models that were widely used in the initial project stage were replaced by an approach that relies more on school and regional leadership teams.

Method

The project evaluation was conducted to measure, analyze and draw some conclusions on the impact of MLE on pupils, teachers and community, parents in particular, and to provide the donor, the MES and other decision makers and stakeholders the information on the effectiveness of the Pilot Project and MLE. During the Pilot Project 12 research methods and instruments had been devised and implemented (Grigule & Perrin, 2008). The development of the pupils' language skills was monitored and evaluated organizing initial individual language skills assessment, The 1st and the 2nd Grade Pupils' Georgian Language Test, and introducing The Pupil's Language Portfolio. The data about parents' opinion on multilingual education and language acquisition, their acceptance of the project, and information on their children experience in the school were received through the survey conducted at the end of the first pilot year (N=222) and informal interviews at the open lessons during the second year.

To study the teachers and school principals' professional development and acceptance of the project, a questionnaire was designed and conducted during the project first phase evaluation seminar in June 2007 (N=38). Overall, on a 5 points scale, the school principals and the teachers gave a positive evaluation of the project and its inputs (4.52 and 4.50 points respectively). For the final evaluation to obtain qualitative, in-depth data four focus group discussions were prepared and organized – one for school principals, one for class teachers and two for subject teachers. The discussions were moderated by local experts, a *rapporteur* took the minutes and discussions were also tape-recorded and a transcript has been done. The discussion was about the results of the project, practices that helped to reach these results, the main constraints and problems identified during the practice and local solutions found for these problems. The school principals were asked to discuss these topics focusing on human resources, cooperation on school level and society/parents involvement. The teachers discussed the methodology, teaching resources, cooperation and working with parents.

One of the main techniques explored for both teacher capacity building and research purposes was classroom observation. During the initial project phase emphasis was put on participant observation. During the second phase the local experts, project regional coordinators and pilot school teachers were introduced to observation purposes, techniques and instruments, and involved in the structured observational data collection (Bowers, 1987). The observations aimed to investigate teacher/pupil interaction patterns,

students' learning activity and language use, and evaluate the conformity of learning environment to the multilingual and cooperative learning criteria. Observation instruments developed during The Open School (*Atvērtā skola*, n.d.) and Latvia Education Pilot Projects (*Izmēģinājuma...*, 2006) were translated, introduced and approved for project purposes. The extracts from the completed questionnaires, group discussions recordings, lesson observation protocols and researcher field notes are presented below. Complying with confidentiality issues, the project schools' identity is divulged by region, teachers are described by subject.

Results

The overall impact of the *Multilingual Education in Georgia Project* was highly satisfactory. It demonstrated that *Developmental Maintenance and Heritage Language Bilingual Education* program had worked successfully in pilot schools and developed pupils' language skills. Already at the end of the first year, as the assessment showed, the pupils had acquired, both in Georgian and in their mother tongue, sufficient language skills, their understanding and listening skills were better than their counterparts, as well as their learning skills were improved. The project had also familiarized teachers with interactive teaching methods. The second year had shown a change in schools' approach to the project. From a rather reserved attitude, schools had become actors in the field of multilingual education: they were participating financially in the project, school principals were actively engaged in the meetings with parents, and schools were looking for solutions to continue the implementation of MLE on their own (Grigule & Perrin, 2008).

Changes in learning environment

It has to be mentioned that the physical and visual school environment in Georgia's rural and mountain areas was and still is extremely poor. In cold weather pupils sit in the classrooms dressed in overcoats as iron stoves produce no or very little warmth. There are several schools where the walls are decorated with the posters from Soviet times or symbols of an ethnic country. The first changes, forced by the pilot, in some cases brought also some fun:

The project bought and gave visual aids to schools. During a school visit one principal proudly demonstrated the visual aids that were now all placed on the walls ... even table games! (School visit, Kvemo Kartli, 2006).

Positive changes in teaching style had been noticed during lesson observation: teachers moved away from a frontal, teacher-centered teaching, to designing tasks and creating learning environment for group work, tried to stimulate dialogue among pupils; they were learning how to conduct the whole lesson in the second language. Instead of translating when pupils had not understood, they had started to use various means to ensure comprehension, in particular, visualization, started to look for and bring to the classroom objects, pictures and books with illustrations as visual aids and even made some themselves. Schools had also started to create pupil-friendly learning environment, by displaying pupils' works, visual materials and providing access to learning aids.

The following observations exemplify the introduction of active learning.

- Meaningful learning versus memorizing mechanically:

A teacher distributes pencils to pupils and asks them to name the colours. One of the boys says that his pencil is black. The teacher corrects him and says that the pencil is green. The pupil disagrees, repeats once again that his pencil is black and draws some lines on the paper to show that the point is black and only the wooden part of a pencil is coloured green. The teacher agrees and approves that the boy has been right because he has named the colour according to function, i.e., what colour he would get by using the pencil. During the post lesson discussion the teacher as well as observers recognized this situation as a good example of pupils' active learning. It demonstrated that the pupil had understood the meaning of words, he had been thinking actively and his language usage was meaningful. And the pupil felt confident to express his opinion and support it (Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2006).

- Using visualization, modeling and practical activities versus teacher's verbal information:

In a science lesson teaching about the organs of sense, a teacher asks pupils to put their hands in a bag, touch and guess the objects (Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2007).

- Pupils were given choice, possibility to substantiate their choice and share experience with their peers:

A teacher pins pictures of vessels on the board, every pupil chooses the vessel he/she wants to draw (Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2007).

- Contents of studies was personalized, connected with pupils' environment and culture:

While preparing for a traditional Muslim spring festival, pupils couch grain and bring traditional sweets. The teacher updates the information about this festival, asks pupils to draw and comment on the pictures (Kvemo Kartli, 2007).

- Creative learning, learning by discovering and problem solving were stimulated versus ready-made recipes:

To familiarize pupils with the concepts: alive and inanimate – a teacher brings a bag with a toy dog in it and asks whether it would be as simple to bring alive dog to the classroom (Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2007).

- A majority of teachers started using the group work method instead of frontal instruction:

As for group work, at the beginning (addresses to the colleague) we thought that it would be noisy, something awful, but in fact children know that it is possible to do things quietly, without shouting. If we give some task, usually we divide pupils into groups. There are team and captain of the team. Usually, we take part in this process.

Even if somebody lacks something, others help him/her, since they are working in group. If someone lacks something and the other has it, they began working together (Teachers' group discussion, 2008).

- Relationship between a teacher and a pupil – pupils started treating and perceiving teacher as a friend and a study partner instead of fearing her or seeing her as a controller:

During the open lesson the teachers-observers noticed that pupils were allowed to address the teacher by her first name (Open lesson, Kvemo Kartli, 2007).

Development of teachers and school principals' perception on the project

The situation at the beginning of the project indicated to project teachers' diverse educational background and professional skills. Furthermore, teachers had more questions concerning their professional future within the project than the pedagogical aspects of multilingual education. Teachers' feelings of insecurity became evident in parents' reporting of arguments. Most frequently mentioned "arguments" were: the threat that a school could become "georgianised"; the fear that quality of the Armenian language would decline if teaching hours in the mother tongue were reduced; and concerns about second language acquisition in elementary school. Teachers were afraid that reforms in minority education could endanger their employment in future. This feeling of insecurity about the future was expressed by one Armenian history teacher regarding the Education Law that anticipates that history should be taught in Georgian by 2011:

I would be left jobless while some - shvili would teach history in Georgian! But me, what would happen to me? How could I support my family?

The perception that the language for teachers is, first of all, the symbol of identity not a means of communication can be characterized by this situation:

After the workshop that was conducted by international experts (there was an agreement that the working language will be Russian) half of feedback questionnaires had been filled out in Armenian (Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2006).

As teachers received more and more information and training on multilingual education methodology and experienced it in the class, they started to give up myths and stereotypes, and their understanding and acceptance of the project increased. In the final conference on the question, what would you recommend to schools which decide to implement the program of multilingual education, 38 out of 39 participants evaluated the project positively and recommended to others to join the process of the multilingual education. In addition, 11 participants directly expressed willingness to share the acquired experience and provided practical suggestions on the most important aspects.

At the beginning of the pilot project, teachers had very limited reflective skills, and were not ready to analyze and evaluate their work openly, to identify their difficulties and training needs. Asked during meetings and trainings about their needs for further support, most common answer was "additional teaching materials". During the second training teachers were asked to reflect on project experience. Few responses were given

to the item: *I still find difficult....* and even in those responses teachers evaluated their pupils' learning instead of analyzing their own teaching process. International consultants reported:

The participants – teachers demonstrate teaching skills that are seemingly determined by their culture: orientation to reproductive activities and authoritative initiatives, shortcomings of economical thinking about the use of educational materials, etc. (Grigule & Perrin, 2007).

During the first project year, it was a challenge for the observer to convince teachers not to demonstrate pupils' achievements, but to conduct a regular lesson, in order to see the real teaching/learning process and analyze the planning and performance of lessons. During the second project year, teachers got used to lesson observation and started to consider the observer as a partner rather than an inspector and in presence of observer conducted ordinary lessons. However, during the testing at the end of each school year it was observed that the paradigm shift had not taken place completely and in challenging situations the teacher-centered approach was prevailing:

The class teacher, asked why she had been pointing at the correct answers to pupils during the test, answered that she was sorry for children (Kvemo Kartli, 2008).

Final testing of pupils' language skills at the end of the first and unfortunately also second year showed that pupils had a very slight experience and little skills of working independently. It could be observed in the following situation:

During the test the pupils were choosing the answer, but they were not circling it waiting for the teacher to check and confirm it. In several observed situations teachers wanting the pupils to work and make decisions independently answered they did not know the right answer. In one class the teacher, recognizing her own absurd answer to the pupil started to laugh, hugged the girl who also smiled at her knowingly: how could not her beloved teacher know this (Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2008).

Individual consultations and training had also identified the initial problems of cooperation between the teachers due to a lack of cooperative skills and experience. In a situation when teachers of the Georgian language had to start teaching subject content it was natural for a class teacher to be the first adviser. Mutual cooperation for teachers was something new:

In one of the schools art lessons were conducted in Armenian, Georgian and Russian languages. Answering the question how the teachers coordinated the subject content, a teacher of Georgian said that she looked into pupils' notebooks and saw what had been done in the native language and then adapted herself. A teacher of Russian answered with a question "Is it really necessary?" She would rather plan the content together with a subject teacher from the neighboring town (Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2006).

Evaluating the project, teachers and principals acknowledged the importance of the teachers' cooperation and reported on creative solutions they had found during the project:

They (Georgian language teachers) have been working already for the second year and they work together with the class teacher – this is a keystone of success (Teachers' group discussion, 2008).

I teach Georgian and Handicraft. During Handicraft we prepare materials for the language lesson. Children bring plasticine figures from home and then we learn words using these figures (Teachers' group discussion, 2008).

During the pilot new relationships had emerged between teachers and parents, who became interested in multilingual program. Parents used to come to the lessons and became involved in learning; teachers told stories how parents had started to learn language together with their children:

Children use new words at home and parents ask them to repeat in order to learn these new words. Parents come to me telling that they have learnt these words, too (Shvilisi School, 2006).

Parents have asked teacher to write a Georgian poem in Cyrillic to understand it better in order to be able to help their children (Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2006).

At the end of the pilot in March 2008, the participants gave a positive evaluation of the project's input to their professional development. During the discussion teachers described how teaching and learning process in classes had changed using the new methodology:

This program has given a lot both to my pupils and me. Pupils like lessons delivered by us. They, so to say, slept during the lessons and now they are more cheerful, more active. Now we pay more attention to game elements. Children remember things better, when playing; they remember new words better and memorize them longer (Teachers' questionnaire, 2007).

Our communication with children has improved. They are pleased, they like it and it is easier to work with them (Teachers' questionnaire, 2007).

Children from bilingual classes are more self-confident (Teachers' questionnaire, 2007).

The positive results of the project may be attributed to an impact on the civic integration process in Georgia. Knowing about the ethnic conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, also international organizations take it into consideration when organizing the projects in Georgia separately for each nationality, for example, in Cimera project at the beginning it was planned to publish two versions of the Game Book – separately for Azeri and Armenian teachers. After consulting with the Ministry of Education the project decided to publish one version of the book (*We are Learning by Playing. 111 Games for Multilingual Education*, 2006) with all four languages included (Georgian-Azeri-Armenian-Russian) considering its symbolic value of fostering equality and peaceful co-existence among languages in Georgia. Disregarding the warnings that Azeri and Armenian teachers would not sit at one table, the seminars in project final stage had been organized for all together in geographically most convenient place. For the majority of participants it was their first experience that they could work together and share in a positive environment. An international expert from Finland, Ekaterina Protassova reported (Grigule & Perrin, 2007):

When people meet together to learn something new and from examples provided by other people and countries, they start to cooperate. One of the greatest successes of the project was the contacts created between representatives of the Azeri and Armenian ethnic groups.

Conclusions

Based on lesson observation, teachers' surveys, school principals, parents, and experts' reports, there were observed changes in learning environment oriented towards active learning, creativity, cooperation, and reflectivity. Teachers and school principals' description of the project benefits could be summarized as follows:

- Understanding and acceptance of the multilingual education methodology by teachers and local community;
- Invention of pupils' friendly learning environment;
- The growth of education quality and wherewith school's authority;
- The development of teachers' professional competencies;
- Higher self-esteem, self-awareness, and civic consciousness for teachers;
- Development of teachers' cooperation and networking;
- Increase of parents' interest in school activities and Georgian language acquisition.

One of the main objectives of the project was, together with the local agencies, to develop possible strategies for a broader implementation of MLE in Georgia. It means, firstly, institutionalization of the pilot initiatives and results and, secondly, development of relevant policies that would ensure their wider dissemination and implementation. Early in the year 2008, the Ministry of Education and Science has made an important steps towards the development of the language policy and strategy, working on the national minority education policy (The Ministry of Education..., 2008), thereby acknowledging the state intentions and providing the legal basis and conceptual framework for multilingual education. Unfortunately the political *force majeure* has blocked the progress of the plans and the intended introduction of multilingual education on the state level in school year 2008 – 2009. Despite the above there is reliable information that a part of the project schools are continuing the MLE on their own. From one side it could be evaluated as a positive evidence of the project impact to sustainable education, on the other hand the international organizations and international education community should be in the position of responsibility. In the current situation schools need to be supported to sustain and not to give up with the started process of transformation and so that there would not be discreditation of the integration policies in the eyes of community.

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