

Title of example of practice:	International Students' Research Conference as a Tool of the Development of Professional Action Researcher.
--------------------------------------	---

Author**(i.e. details of LanQua partner submitting example of practice):**

Name:	Dainuvite Bluma
LanQua sub project:	Teacher Education
Institution:	University of Latvia, Faculty of Education and Psychology
Tel:	+371 67034037
Email:	dainuvite.bluma@lu.lv

Contact details for example of practice:

Name:	Indra Odina
Tel:	371 29528472
Email:	indra.odina@lu.lv
Website:	www.ppf.lu.lv

Institution and initiating department/faculty**(i.e. where example of practice takes/took place):**

University of Latvia, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Teacher Education Department Faculty of Education and Psychology deals with pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. FLT Methodology Section offers foreign language (English/German) language teacher pre-service education programs and foreign language (English/German/French) programs to other specialities.

Departments/faculties in which initiative implemented/to be implemented:

University of Latvia, Faculty of Education and Psychology.

Faculty of Education and Psychology is the second largest of 13 faculties of the University of Latvia. Faculty of Education and Psychology is a leading academic institution in pedagogy, psychology, education management and teacher education. It is offering 34 full-time and part-time study programs for 3900 students in bachelor (3 years), integrated professional bachelor in teacher education (4 years), master (2 years) and doctoral programs (3 years). There are 123 staff members employed on regular basis.

There are 4 departments: Pedagogy, Psychology, Education Management and Teacher Education Department; 2 centers: Sports Center and Adult Pedagogical Education Center and Scientific Pedagogical and Education Research Institute.

Teacher Education Department is offering 10 study programs for prospective teachers of

- Latvian language and literature
- Latvian as a second language
- English language
- German language
- Applied informatics
- Home economics and history of culture
- Visual arts and history of arts
- Health education and sports
- Elementary education (grades 1- 4)
- Special education.

Abstract

(QA question: What are/were you trying to do?)

Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Latvia is annually organising **International Students' Research Conferences** that are the evidence of the first serious (reliable and valid) students' done research. The conference organisation is a tradition in the Teacher Education Department that has proved itself as a successful learning experience for 7 years already for students not only in Latvia, but also in Europe.

The aim of the conference initiative is to motivate students to carry out their research and present it in foreign language, thus, preparing and leading them in personal development as professional researchers and teachers and strengthening the collaboration between educational institutions in Latvia and in Europe. Alongside with research skills, communication skills, presentation skills students have an opportunity to develop intercultural communication skills in authentic settings.

Background – contextual issues giving rise to the initiative

(QA questions: Why are/were you trying to do it? / What are/were the aims and objectives?)

There were several reasons to initiate and continue supporting conference project for students – the would-be teachers.

One of the reasons was that practising teachers were not willing to do research, participate and present in the conferences. They lacked research skills and this caused lack of motivation. So far, they had not had experience of attending conferences during their study years. So students – the would-be teachers should acquire conference skills, get conference experience and get interested in research not just formally and academically during their study years.

Second, during four or five pre-service training years students write several research papers which are in better case very formally defended in the classroom and no one shows real interest in these papers, sometimes these papers have just been handed in and forgotten. The conference would give a chance to share one's research with others in non-threatening atmosphere.

Third, visiting students at their teaching practices at schools led to the conclusion that their as teachers' presentation skills were very important, but quite often they were missing, so the conference idea would give a chance to practise these skills.

Description of activity or initiative

(QA question: How is/was the activity/initiative implemented?)

The organizers of the conference are the 3rd year students of the Teacher Education (FLT Methodology) Department, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Latvia. The participants are the students doing research on education, culture, literature, teaching methods, modern information technologies, linguistics, etc., and presenting it in foreign language – English, German or French. The research can be presented as a 15 minute talk, 45 minute workshop, 30 minute discussion or 10 minute poster presentation.

The way to this conference is not a day journey; the whole study process is important and should step by step lead to the implementation of this initiative. The students have to be prepared for this in several ways:

- first, their language skills should be developed so they are able to carry out the research in foreign language;
- second, their knowledge and skills in modern information technologies should be updated;
- third, their academic writing skills should be improved;
- fourth, they should have some real world experience – practice where to find the problem to be solved later on in the research;
- fifth, they should the didactics of their professional field;
- and, finally, they need to acquire research methods, data collection methods and receive support in the research process.

The biggest preparation is taking place during the third study year course: Research Language of

English, in semesters 5 and 6. The students acquire:

1. Introduction into research
2. Work with resources
3. References and plagiarism
4. Research methods: case study, action research, ethnography, survey, experiment
5. Data collection methods: observation, questionnaires, interviews, documents, etc.
6. Introduction of the Paper
7. Statistical writing
8. Description of graphs, tables, figures and diagrams
9. Abstract writing
10. Techniques of public speaking
11. Presentation skills
12. Talks, discussions, workshops, poster presentations
13. Conference organisation skills
14. Chairing, organizing, etc, conferences
15. Facilitation skills
16. Reflection and evaluation skills

Evaluative comments

(QA questions: What are/were the outcomes? What is/was the impact? Is/was the activity/initiative successful? How do you know whether or not it works/worked?)

The participants of the previous seven conferences have been students from universities and schools in Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Russia, Austria, Poland, Germany, Slovakia, Turkey, Romania, Serbia and Belgium.

Conference	Date	Presentations	Participants	Countries
1.	23.05.2002.	47	163	Latvia, Poland, Lithuania Russia
2.	21.–22. 05.03.	105	250	Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Hungary, Austria
3.	19.–20. 05.04.	89	289	Latvia, Lithuania (Vilnus, Kaunas, Sauli), Poland, (Warsaw, Gdansk) Hungary, Austria
4.	18.–20. 05.05.	90	286	Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Belgium, Austria
5.	17.–19. 05.06.	97	200	Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Hungary, Poland,
6.	16.–18. 05.07.	140	312	Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Hungary
7.	14.–16. 05.08.	108	198	Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Austria, Slovakia, Turkey, Romania, Serbia

As the gains from the initiative mentioned by students are:

- a chance to share one's research with others in non-threatening atmosphere;
- a chance to improve foreign language skills and practise presentation skills;
- a possibility to meet peers from other universities in Latvia and Europe and exchange the experience of language acquisition and practise development of intercultural communication skills in authentic settings and situations;
- an opportunity for the language teacher education institutions to evaluate, compare and improve their students' skills.

On May 23, 2002, the 1st International Students' Research Conference was awarded the *European Label on Language Acquisition* as it had proved itself as a successful learning experience for students not only in Latvia, but also in Europe.

Advice to others

This annual event promotes students' interest in doing research and participating in conferences. Doing research, writing the presentation and participating in the conference is an intermediate step towards work on the Diploma Paper. It was proved that it is important to include the conference as integral part in teacher education programme. The more so that research skills and the ability to work in international community are among core skills of the teacher for tomorrow. It is also advisable to delegate to the students as much responsibility as possible in all steps in organizing the conference. Students themselves can be involved in peer evaluation which greatly helps them later when working on their Diploma paper which includes a strong research element.

Reflection/any other comments

QA question: Is/was that the best way to do it? Why/why not? What improvements or adjustments are needed?

The students have good opportunities to practise how to carry out research on linguistics, stylistics, language teaching methods, literature, culture, modern information technologies, thus, improving their receptive and productive foreign language skills and developing their presentation skills.

The conference gives a possibility for the students to meet their peers from other universities in Latvia and Europe and exchange their experience of language acquisition. The various activities during the conference days help students practice intercultural communication skills with peers from other countries.

It is an opportunity for the language teacher education institutions to evaluate, compare and improve their students' skills. The students' presentations are analysed and evaluated both by peers and lecturers and the feedback is given how to proceed towards working on the Diploma paper.

From the participants' feedback it is clear that both home students and guests highly appreciate the conference as activity on their way of becoming a teacher. It has also been noticed that the organizers students from previous years after graduating are very active in continuing their studies in Master degree programmes, in participating in various EU activities for teachers in other countries: projects, mobilities, etc.