

## American teachers discussed democracy at Rakvere



*Yesterday teachers from Denver schools visited Rakvere Gymnasium. The visit is a part of a world-wide school project in which students discuss burning issues of the world.*

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Purpose of a project "Deliberating in a Democracy" is to promote teaching history and social science with similar learning materials and discussions, and to increase awareness of students as citizens.

This time a topic was entering into an anti global warming contract. Students in groups discussed the topic and on April 24 a conference on the same topic will be held via satellite which students from both Denver and Rakvere will participate in.

According to Jackie Johnson who has worked in Denver as a teacher and is participating in the project now, a goal is to teach students to listen critically and to keep up

arguments. "It's the process that is essential, not that finally someone would win the debate," she said.

### **Different concerns**

According to Eve Raja, a geography teacher of Rakvere Gymnasium, a study that is based on discussions makes a student to think along more and to express his/her opinion. Instead of a traditional teacher-classroom relationship a discussion rises in smaller groups where everyone has chance to say a word.

Also, according to history teacher Heli Kirsi, during these discussions students have become much more open and they dare to say their opinion. In the opinion of Corey O'Hayre who works for the first year as a history teacher at Hinckley High School in Denver and his colleague Dan Jarvis, awareness of American students about global issues is different. "There are many kids at school whose economical situation and family relations are not such that they had time or a habit to discuss global issues at dinner table. And they are not even interested," O'Hayre gives an example. In his estimation, in some cases teachers are more as parents than parents themselves are, because they see kids more and they have bigger chances to influence student's development.

Also, Jackie Johnson stated that history and civics are not among subjects that are federally examined in America, wherefore also teaching these subjects is often insufficient. Dan Jarvis considers the situation being different from Estonia, since there are not several nations and cultures in Estonian schools. "In addition to teaching, you also need to deal with problems related to cultures and languages," he described the situation in America.

Eliza Hamrick from Overland High School drew a parallel that there are over a hundred nations and over fifty home languages in the school where she teaches.

### **Proud small nation**

As the next topic to discuss with students from partner schools, Dan Jarvis would see poverty, because that's a problem in American schools. Many students work and often support their families. Also, the system of private schools and federally financed schools has many influences.

All of the teachers that visited Estonia were pleasantly surprised by a good knowledge of English language among Estonians. They mentioned several differences between schools. For example, instead of our 45-minute classes there are either 100-minute or over 50-minute classes in some schools, and breaks last 5-6 minutes.

In addition, they noticed immediately that there are no lockboxes for every student's school supplies. "For us they are very essential and it is even a problem that students are at their lockboxes too much," Corey O'Hayre laughed.

Eve Raja told that the visitors emphasized several times how great it is that such a small nation has its own language and culture, and they are proud of that. Teachers from Denver will leave Estonia on Friday. Before that they will also visit the town of Narva.