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# Looking Back on Our Summer Semester

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We are Marta Bravo Pérez and Maria Castro Maquieira, two Erasmus students from Spain. We study Childhood Education at University of Santiago de Compostela and this academic year we were required to do our practical work.

### **The beginning - 24th February 2013:**

We are really nervous. Today, we are going to find out if we can stay for the full year in Prague; whether or not our winter semester Erasmus study stay can be extended for an extra term. The past 6 months (since September 2012) at Faculty of Arts of Charles University have been wonderful. The Erasmus program has allowed us to meet a lot of new people and also develop our skills in our field of study which is Education. However we now have to arrange a placement in a local school which is proving to be very difficult.

Finally! Our Erasmus coordinator has given us the possibility to do the practical in Prague. Therefore we are allowed to stay in Prague for four extra months. A great opportunity to learn about the education system of a foreign country!

### **Four months later - 24th Juny 2013:**

How Was Your Experience?

After looking for suitable schools in Prague to do our practical we found a good one. The headteacher was Spanish and he allowed us to complete the practical in his school for a time of 2 months. The school is called "Škola svatého Augustina" (St. Augustin School). It is a private school with a religious character. The centre is open for young children and offers early childhood and primary education (it's composed of a kindergarten and a primary school). One of the unique aspects of the centre is that children have the opportunity to learn 3 languages (Czech, English and Spanish) since their early childhood education.



In the beginning we were quite afraid and didn't know what exactly to expect. For example, we didn't know if we would be able to participate in the school activities as much as we would like to due to the language barrier as Czech is a very difficult language and so far we know only the basics!

Fortunately, the things went very well. On the first day of our placement, the headteacher showed us the whole school building. It is a new building, with large and light classrooms and nice decorations. Then, each of us joined a different class (Maria worked with the 3rd years and Marta with the 4th years).

All the teachers were very nice and they helped us to integrate into the school life.

First, some children were a little confused due to the presence of one more teacher in the class, but slowly they grew familiar with us. We helped and participated in the life of the school as much as we could. We were always present in the class and we also had the opportunity to teach the children some Spanish, which was a great experience although the first class was a bit difficult, but eventually we were successful. Sometimes, we felt disheartened because we weren't able to understand what the children were telling us. However, they quickly realised that we did not speak Czech and they learnt to communicate with us through gestures and also with easy words such as "finished" (in English) when they completed a task or "gracias" (thank you in Spanish).

They were not the only ones who were able to learn something new as we also learnt some Czech! Thanks to them, now we know words like maminka (mummy), slunce (sun), snih (snow), had (snake) and srdce (heart).



Although we would have liked to communicate more directly with the children, we gave and received something much more universal: affection.

This was an awesome experience. We knew from our courses at Charles University what the main focus of the education in Czech Republic was; we studied the different methodologies and ways of the education. Here, at the school we learnt directly from the teachers and also, of course, from the children. The practical also helped us in our professional improvement because we were able to learn how a school is run and how people work. We really recommend it, if you have the opportunity, to go on exchange and to do the practical in another country.

We are now packing our things to go back to Spain. We have luggage full of notes from our classes at the university, great memories and of course, beautiful drawings by the children from the school!