
Three Erasmus students who joined the CU in the winter semester 2009/10

Mari Jännetyinen, Milla-Mari Naukkarinen and Minna Lappalainen are three LLP/Erasmus students who joined the Charles University in Prague in the winter semester 2009/10. They spent half a year studying art education at the Faculty of Education, which gave them a unique opportunity to compare the approach to teaching this discipline at Charles University to their home university in Finland, the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi.

During their studies in Prague they also participated in the complementary Erasmus programme Europe Meets School/ Europa Macht Schule run by the Erasmus Club at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, successfully teaching a total of 24 lessons [Inga1] in Olešská Basic Art School in Praha 10-Strašnice, at its premises on U Nových vil 3. We asked them for an interview on their Prague experience in regard to both their studies at Charles University and the previously mentioned voluntary Erasmus teaching programme.

Minna, Mari and Milla-Mari, ...

Your home university is the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, one of the only two Finnish universities which offer the study programme art education. This year you spent one semester at the Department of Art Education at the Faculty of Education at Charles University in Prague. How do the two universities differ in the way that they teach your subject?

Minna: One of the main differences is that the Department of Art Education is part of the Faculty of Education at Charles University, while the Department of Art Education is part of the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland. At the Faculty of Art and Design in Rovaniemi there are 5 departments: Art Education, Graphic Design, Industrial Design, Audiovisual Media Culture and Textile and Clothing Design. The degrees you can gain at our home faculty are Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts and Doctor of Arts (all in art and design). Our home faculty offers a different approach to teaching art to the Faculty of Education in Prague, but we have also cooperation with other faculties of our university. For example art education students in Rovaniemi have to attend some courses at our Faculty of Education as well.

Milla-Mari: In the field of arts as well as other disciplines, our home university focuses on northern and Arctic topics relating to the fact that the University of Lapland is the northernmost university in Europe. The university also cooperates with the tourism sector, since tourism is one of the most important businesses in Lapland.



What does the Faculty of Education in Prague offer Erasmus students of art education? Are there any special foreign language classes intended for Erasmus students as is the case with many other study programmes, or are the classes mixed with Czech students? Has your study visit at Charles University fulfilled your expectations?

Minna: There were courses just for Erasmus students but we also attended courses with Czech students. I think it was really important for us to also attend regular classes for Czechs, otherwise it would have been difficult for us to get to know local people. For me, a mix of Erasmus courses with regular courses worked out really well. Teachers were very nice to us and if there were any comprehension problems the Czech students helped us.

Milla-Mari: Our Erasmus coordinator in Prague, the Associate Professor Marie Fulková, put great effort into developing the programme for art education exchange students at Charles University. This year we had an instructor from Canada, Andrea Dancer, who guided us through the semester and helped us get the best out of our personal art projects and also took us to visit many galleries in Prague. So I would say that the programme and our stay in Prague definitely fulfilled our expectations.

Even before you were introduced to the Europe Meets School programme you were interested in arranging a teaching internship in the Czech Republic for yourself. How are the teaching practices organized at you home university?

Milla-Mari: The teaching practises are well set at our home university. There are several communal schools in Rovaniemi that cooperate directly with the University of Lapland. The internships there are organized for us by the university and we do not need to approach the schools ourselves. In these schools there are also trained instructors who mentor us during the practices. We have one teaching practice per year and the length of the practice depends on the level of the

practice. First practice is carried out in the first class of a primary school and takes 30 hours (teaching, mentoring and observing together) and the final, fifth practice, which is carried out in a high school, takes 70 hours.

Mari and Milla-Mari, you are now in your sixth year of studies and after your return to Finland you will start working on your Master thesis. Minna, you are in your third year. When you finish university do you plan to become teachers or do you have other plans?

Mari: I've enjoyed my stay in Prague so much that I have prolonged my stay here until the summer semester in order to work on my thesis. After I graduate I will most likely look for an art teacher's job, but I'm also interested in all kinds of projects concerning art. I hope I will have the chance to participate in some art or art education project in any case. I'm also thinking about looking for a job abroad, not only in Finland.

Minna: I'm not sure about my future plans yet, but of course I would like to work in the field of art. I'm interested in participating in any kind of art projects but I can also imagine myself working as a teacher. Time will tell. Luckily we have the possibility to choose minor subjects not connected to art in any way, so we can look for future jobs in different fields other than art. Some students study much different subjects as minors so that they can also for example teach different subjects at schools, should they choose to become teachers. As for myself, I am concentrating only on art studies at the moment.

Milla-Mari: At the moment, I plan to gain real experience in the profession of art teaching in Finland after I graduate. As my minor subject I studied "class teacher studies", so I will most likely apply to teach young children in a primary school. Another option would be to go abroad to get more international experience, either in further studies or while applying for an internship.



Your teaching project in the framework of the Europe Meets School programme took place at a Basic Art School in Prague. Do you have similar institutions in Finland? How is art education structured there?

Milla-Mari: Basic art education in Finland is provided by municipal or private institutions who receive statutory government grants based on the number of inhabitants in each town. The art education providers may also receive government grants based on the confirmed number of lesson hours given. Basic art education differs from compulsory basic education, because participation is voluntary, takes place during free time and the education providers may charge moderate fees. The objectives and core contents are determined in a national core curriculum devised by the Finnish National Board of Education. Basic education in the arts should be goal-oriented and progress from one level to another based on it. In the first years the children are to explore different art fields, techniques and materials. Later the pupils are to engage in diverse longer workshops and project studies. Overall, the aim is to develop children's skills in self-expression and capabilities needed for later education in their chosen art form.

Your first project in the partner school Olešská Basic Art School focused on Christmas in Finland. What made you choose this topic and what have the different groups of children painted or drawn?

Mari: Our first lessons in the Basic Art School were scheduled for December and this inspired us to hold classes about Christmas in Finland. Rovaniemi, the city where we study, is situated just 5 km from the Arctic Circle, where Santa Claus

has his office, according to legend. We thought it would be nice to introduce ourselves to the children while presenting our city and our ways of celebrating Christmas. The best way to bring the Finnish Christmas to the class was to bake some Finnish Christmas cookies and dress up as Santa's elves of course. The classes also got us teachers into the Christmas spirit!

The five groups of children we were working with were to paint or draw pictures of Santa's reindeer, who escaped Rovaniemi and came to Prague. Some of the children were asked to paint Rovaniemi, some Prague and some the reindeer's journey there. In the end all the groups were to take a potato stamp and mark the footprints of their own reindeer on a big hand-drawn map of Europe. In this way the five groups produced besides the individual drawings one big art piece together.

Milla-Mari: The topic and task seemed engaging, especially for the younger children, who really embraced the story world and the Christmas spirit. There were many pictures created with touching stories behind them.



How did the children like the Finnish Christmas? Did you learn something about Czech Christmas from them in return?

Mari: Through the interaction with the children we noticed that the Finnish and Czech Christmases have lots of similarities, but also some differences. The important thing in both countries is to spend time with your family, enjoy the peaceful time and good food. Small children in the class were of course excited about getting presents, and while the Czech children's presents are brought by the baby Jesus, in Finland it's Santa Claus who's got this important job. Santa Claus was familiar to the children through international movies and book production already.

We were also talking about food, and how in Finland the traditional Christmas dishes are ham, different kinds of casseroles, potatoes and beetroot carrot salad called rosolli. As in the Czech Republic, in Finland we also bring a tree into the house and decorate it. An important part of Finnish Christmas however is going to the sauna and visiting the cemetery to bring candles to the relatives who have passed away.



Your second project in the Olešská Basic Art School was on Kalevala, the national Finnish epic. Can you introduce it briefly to our readers?

Mari: Kalevala is a Finnish national epic. It was compiled and edited by Elias Lönnrot based on folklore stories he collected from common folk when travelling around Finland and Karelia in the 19th century. Kalevala (the name means "Lands of Kaleva") includes stories of people living in the North. It begins with a story of how the world was created from eggs of a golden-eye bird, and continues with stories about disputes between different tribes and quests of love. The main character is a man called Väinämöinen, who is described as an old and wise man possessing a magical voice and a zither made of the jaw of a pike.

In the Kalevala part of the project you asked the pupils in the art school to paint, draw or build a "Sampo". What is this mystic object and what techniques did the children use to depict it?

Mari: Sampo is a pivotal element in the plot of Kalevala. This magical artefact is described as a mill or a machine that can produce anything you wished for and that brings good fortune to its holder. It was made by the blacksmith Ilmarinen as a gift for the Mistress of Pohjola, the Queen of the North. Sampo was a present for the Queen so that she would agree to give her daughter away for marriage. However Sampo was stolen at the end of this story and Kalevala fell upon hard times. An expedition was sent to retrieve it later on, but in the ensuing battle it was smashed and lost in the sea.

Milla-Mari: As there are no traditional pictures of Sampo, no one knows what it looks like. In my class the children's task was to imagine Sampo and depict it in a three-dimensional way. They could either build a model of it or make a relief of scraps such as fabrics, cartons, plastic etc. I think that the task was an intriguing one, because some of the children were really thinking hard about what a Sampo would look like nowadays and they were building it in such a way that it would be able to produce something they wished from it.

Minna: In my class we made a collography which is an easy printmaking technique where you first glue your picture to a board using different materials. Then you ink the plate and print the final picture to another paper. The children created Sampos using materials like fabrics, strings, board and papers. Then we put colours on to the plate and printed pictures on to a thin and transparent paper using a printing machine.

Mari: My class was to paint a picture of Sampo falling to the bottom of the sea after the final battle over it. The children used watercolours, because I felt it would be a natural technique to visualize water. I was really happy with the results, the paintings turned out really beautiful.



You worked in the Basic Art School with children of different ages. Which did you prefer and why?

Mari: I usually feel natural working with smaller children and that's how it was this time as well. The classes we had in the art school were of a kind that worked best with this age group in my opinion. The magic of Christmas is real for the small children and they can also pass it on to the adults. The story of Santa's run-away reindeer seemed to be most exciting for the youngest and also the story of Sampo was most rewarding to share with them, because small children have much enthusiasm and imagination and it's easier for them to get into the mythical world of legends.

Minna: I like to work with children of different ages but I also think that our topics worked best with the small children, even though we changed the assignments a little for the older classes.

Milla-Mari: As with Mari I also prefer working with young children, because they usually don't have any inhibitions. They start to work immediately when they hear the topic and their exhilaration is very authentic! They never stop amazing me with their genius ideas and unconfined imagination. Sometimes I feel that older students need more encouragement and push, and also more discussions before they are ready to create their artwork. In this case this was hard, because it is a little problematic to really communicate with the students because of the language differences.

Since you don't speak Czech and the children in the art school as well as the teacher are not fluent in English, you had to work via interpreters (Faculty of Philosophy and Arts students Veronika Víšková and Kamila Mádrová). Was it difficult for you?

Mari: Working with an interpreter was difficult sometimes. The problem was that it was hard to talk to the pupils during the lessons, ask questions, or comment and compliment them on their work. The children also seemed to find it confusing at times, as they would bring their finished drawings to the interpreters, instead of us, the teachers. It was still a really good experience and a great chance to get to know a Czech art school. I don't think there were misunderstandings between the pupils and us, we just had to work a bit harder to engage with the students, which can be difficult in such a short period of time even if you speak the same language. All in all the co-operation with the interpreters ran really well and it taught us also a lot about the art of interpreting.

Minna: It was an interesting opportunity to work with interpreters and I think our cooperation worked out well. Usually, when I'm using the same language as the children, I like to talk to them quite a lot and create a personal connection in that way. This time it was more difficult but I think we managed to create a good atmosphere during the lessons even without having a common language.

Milla-Mari: Teaching via interpreters was a new experience for all of us, but the cooperation with the interpreters was successful and the atmosphere in the class was jovial despite this obstacle.

However there were some things we had to take into consideration: we had to articulate more carefully, speak clearly and make short sentences, so that it was easier for the interpreter to translate our instructions. The amount of information was to be cut in half because it took twice as much time to transfer the knowledge to the children.

The most difficult thing for myself was that I couldn't communicate straight with the children. I've always thought it's important to create a trustful and open relationship with the students by talking to them in person but in this situation

I sometimes felt distant and helpless. But on the whole I think we had a good cooperation with the interpreters and it created a good atmosphere in class.



Did you like the concept of a Basic Art School and have you had good cooperation with the participating teacher (Mrs Hana Horká)?

Mari: Teaching in a Basic Art School is very rewarding I think, because pupils are usually in the class out of their own interest in art. It is a great opportunity for children and youth to bring out and develop their talents, when there aren't that many art classes available at standard schools. The cooperation with the teacher was really good. We had conversations about the classes and Mrs Horká shared with us the experience she gained through her years of teaching in the art school.

Milla-Mari: I am pleased to have had this experience as I had never taught in an institution like the Olešská Basic Art School before and I had also never taught in a foreign language abroad. The cooperation with the participating teacher was successful. We were warmly welcomed in to the school and the teacher offered us any help we needed. We had some instructive conversations after the classes and I think both us and the teacher learnt a lot from each others countries, education and culture.

Thank you for the interview.

Ivana Herglová

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