

REFLECTION ON MY DEVELOPMENT DURING THE FINNISH PROGRAMME

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL Gaëlle EPALLE

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12 different countries are represented in this English Matters' Erasmus + programme in Finland : Germany, Latvia, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, Spain, Slovakia, Portugal, Lithuania, Croatia and France.

History and culture



The second official language at school is Swedish. The Finnish currency dated from the domination of the Russians under Alexander II, who was much appreciated. Even though due to its strong identity, Finland gained its autonomy in 1917. But this will also marks the beginning of the civil war.

The Finns are divided about their intervention during the Second World War II : at once the pride of hard fighting during the winter and their intervention alongside Hitler.

Women took a big part in political decision and gained early the voted right in 1906.

The country has 10% water surface. The wood industry because of the resources is very developed. The Finns are pride of their preserved nature and is aware of preventing it against pollution.

- ⇒ Finnish people find their own way through western and eastern conquests and their own philosophy and collaborative democracy in a cold and contrasted country from Northern Europe.
- ⇒ A recent survey shows Finnish people are the happiest people in the world. How could it be explained ? Nature, Education, politics, philosophy... Maybe all at once and more. Thrilled to experiment it !

Date : 01/04/19

Helsinki city

The guide insisted on the Swedish and Russian influences in the Finnish society. We had an interesting and global overview of the main buildings and places of the old city center.



Finnish educational system

Finnish educational system is free (school, lunch, transport, care) and inclusive (special needs, disabled, allophone). This explains the high tax rate. Primary schools are compulsory for children from 7 to 15. They are usually big schools : 500 pupils per school in the cities.

The rhythm of lesson is as following : 45 minutes of classwork and 15 minutes of break. Smaller pupils have less lessons (20 hours) per week than older ones (28 hours).

There is no assessment towards teachers. They are recruited by the principals.

Date : 02/04/19

First school's visit : Nittykummun koulu (Espoo)

What strikes me most was the trust in between adults and children and the well-being of the pupils at school. Teachers are really caring and not so strict we used to be. They empower their students in class or during the breaks. For example the pupils can propose an activity and their mates can subscribe.



All spaces are dedicated to learning even in the wide corridor, on the floor or on training bikes. It seems the pupils are not under pressure. I noticed that in general the schools are very well equipped with ITC, for example 12 tablets per class.

There are special Montessori classes included in that school.

Finnish and Swedish are not languages widely spoken in the world, so two foreign languages are learned at primary school. Specialized teachers deal with foreign language. But there are bilingual classes in that Espoo school.

Team works

My French teammates and I had plenty of time of analysing our observations, rethinking our practices and thinking about new school projects while walking and visiting Suomenlinna, an inhabited maritime stronghold, built on six islands of Helsinki.



Sauna experience :



We experienced the sauna near the old market place : the heated outdoor pool and the 1°C degree seawater pool are exceptional. More than wellness for health it is also a different way to visit the city; especially the evening when the view of the port is extraordinary with all the illuminations of the city. A great place and time to socialize with the Finns.

Date : 03/04/19

Second school's visit : Lintulaakson koulu (Espoo)



There are special handcrafts classrooms. The skills taught are not centered on oral, written or mathematical languages. Other forms of intelligence are deepened : artistic expression, manual work, awareness of nature and

environment. The school we visited are beautifully decorated by the pupils productions.

A special class for each grade includes 10 special needs children. I observed again the the large ratio of supervising adults in these classes.

Team works



We met at Oodi (the new central library in Helsinki with open spaces) with our European group in order to work on our portfolio presentation. I was really impressed by the exterior architecture of this modern building, the interior comfort and well-being. All generations meet in this place. Its philosophy is “equality, respect, comfort and promise”. This motto could be applied to the atmosphere felt in the visited schools. The exchanges and our computer work on our observations have been rich and dense.

Date : 04/04/19

Third school’s visit : Sorrilan koulu (Valkeoski, 2 hours north from Helsinki by bus and near Tampere)

School teams have got more flexibility to organise the time table of the classes due to the free canteen integrated into each school grounds.

The parents are not very present inside the schools, but they are very present in the education of their children. The link between school and family is facilitated by a specific software.

Lessons of religion or ethic are integrated in the pupils' timetable.

The playgrounds are very big and open to the nature any way. Even in cold weather many students come by bike to school.

Tampere’s visit

The visit of Tampere, a rich industrial city, also known as the Manchester of Finland (Tampere is home to the first artificial ice hockey rink in Finland as well as the Moomin museum), allowed us to discover something other than the seafront : the region of frozen lakes.



Date: 05/04/19

Talinn 's visit



Talinn is a city open to the Baltic sea steeped in history. Despite its many years under communism and its recent independence, it has taken a profitable economic turn.

The long travel by boat allowed us to share about our desire for change regarding our teaching and learning practices and our school project.

Date : 06/04/19

Seminar and portfolio presentation

Thinking of dissemination is required, because our experience in this structured courses is worth to be shared with our colleagues.

Due to my English presentation of our portfolio I realised it was really hard to resume such a weekly experience in a foreign language. I was out of my comfort area but I'm happy to have achieved it. It was a rewarding professional experience.

A final overview of my experience in this European training programme:

- improvement of my professional English speaking and listening
- opening up to Northern European societies
- sharing of good practices between European teachers, even with my French colleagues because there were no rush.
- awareness of different educational systems. None is better than the other, but each gives ideas to improve our skills in our school : between students, between colleagues and between schools and our administration
- possibilities of European corresponding exchanges (pupils and teachers)

I were aware of the chance living such a professional adventure abroad. But experiment with a group of French colleagues an European training is a catalyst of improvement ! I recommend it !