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## **Ounasrinne Snow Park**

Winter Art in the Schoolyard



1, The Ounasrinne Snow Park.

Photo: Heikki Länkinen

### WHAT

In the late winter of 2004, a Snow Park was constructed in the yard of Ounasrinne Comprehensive School, as a collaborative school effort.

### WHO

In the autumn of 2003, Ounasrinne Comprehensive School joined the Winter Art Education Project. During the previous winter, two teachers along with their pupils had taken part in the Jäissä Project and the snow sculpting workshop. Earlier, some

sculpting had also been done in the schoolyard, and a few snow sculpting tools had been made.

There are 30 teachers and 490 pupils from 1st grade to 6th grade. The school is located in Rovaniemi, about five kilometres from the centre. The school building is low. It has a large, nearly flat rectangular shaped front yard. In the winter, the snow is shovelled into banks around the perimeter of the yard.

### WHO

The project was carried out in cooperation with the Winter Art Education Project and the University of Lapland's Art Education Programme. Heikki Länkinen took part in the project, as a teacher for the Winter Art Education Project. Emilia Saarenpää and Sonja Tolvanen completed project studies for their program in art education via the project. Teachers, Kaija Törmänen and Aili Sääskilahti from the Ounasrinne Comprehensive School were a part of the planning team. All of the pupils took part in carrying out the project, and their parents were invited to the opening.



## 2. Animal tales as a theme.

Photos: Emilia Saarenpää and Sonja Tolvanen

### GOALS

The main objective of the project was to increase knowledge of winter art at Ounasrinne Comprehensive School. The goal was to train the school's teachers in snow and ice sculpting, and to show them how they could use winter art as part of the school's lessons. A goal was also to develop a model of how a winter art project was adapted to the culture of Ounasrinne Comprehensive School. The central aim was that the school could in the future construct large snow sculpture works on its own.

The goal for the Snow Park was to plan easy and safe snow constructions in the schoolyard. These constructions formed a model of a schoolyard that was planned by the school's teachers and pupils, and could be built using the schools own resources. No massive, complicated or load bearing structures were considered in the plans at all.

In the process of planning the content for the winter artwork, the goals were to integrate the work with school subjects and teamwork. The most important goal within the school community was the collaborative function of activities. When planning the activities it was pointed out that all of the pupils were to participate in the project. The main objective was also that the schoolyard will change into a unified social space and that the works would make the yard feel more enjoyable.

### METHODS AND WORKING PRACTICES

The content and timetable for the project was planned by the planning team, consisting of Heikki Länkinen, the project students, teachers Kaija Törmänen and Aili Säaskilahti, as well as the school's janitor.



### 3. Snow construction.

Photos: Sonja Tolvanen

Heikki Länkinen planned the location and size of the snow construction. The snow construction was placed into the yard in the shape of reindeer antlers, so that an open space took form in the center. The project students prepared background material, helped and led some of the classes, and systematically documented the activities of two classes. To start off the

snow sculpting week, a snow and ice sculpting workshop was held for the teachers in which they made a sign for the Snow Park, and a small bear sculpture to go along side it.

Northern animal tales which relate to winter, snow and ice were chosen as the themes for the Snow Park. The subject was easy enough for the comprehensive school pupils to relate to but also challenging. Some classes also wrote their own winter animal tales.

Clay was used to get a sense of the snow reliefs and sculptures. Some reliefs were made with the help of stencils made from pictures and paintings. The main emphasis of the activities was on snow sculpting. Ice was used only for decoration, since ice sculpting was considered difficult to perform in large groups, especially with the younger pupils.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A base for the project was formed already in the spring and early autumn of 2003, when winter art and snow sculpting was presented to the teachers at a teachers' meetings. From October to January the planning team took part in meetings and email discussions.

On January 12, 2004 the art education students gave a lecture on winter art, snow sculpting, and wintery animal tales for the whole school. Next, ideas, sketches and small scale models were made in small groups in the classes. The aim, due to the tight schedule was to make the planning and sculpting processes continuous.

Building the snow construction took two days. The work was done with the help of the school's janitor, a tractor and the fifth and sixth graders. The work moved ahead of schedule, and seven additional parts were added to the walls. The corner areas were sealed up. Initially, there were to be ten snow blocks for sculpting, but during the making process the number was reduced to three.

Snow sculpting began on the second day of construction, while the other side of the reindeer antlers were still being built. The teachers chose the best sculpting times for their own classes. At most, there were four classes working in the yard at once. The groups were divided into two, and pupils took turns working. Some of the time the project students were helping the pupils.

The school prepared for vandalism by setting up a video surveillance camera in the Snow Park, but regardless, some of the works were damaged the night before the

opening. However, the damaged sculptures and reliefs were fixed on the day of the opening.

A delightfully large group showed up at the opening of the Snow Park. For the opening, the works were lit up by colourful lights and this was done by attaching colour films in front of construction lights. The program included speeches by Antero Hatakka, the principal, and Heikki Länkinen, as well as singing and performances by the pupils. The event gave the parents the opportunity to become familiar with their children's work. At the same time, the project received an impressive and dignified ending.

Feedback on the project was collected from the teachers, and it was discussed during the evaluation seminar at the University of Lapland.



4. Teamwork in sculpting.

Photo: Emilia Saarenpää

## RESULTS AND EFFECTS



### 5. Attractive sculptures.

Photo: Emilia Saarenpää

After the completion of a project, it is important to consider the goals that were set at the beginning. 490 pupils, 30 teachers and other staff from the school took part in the project. The teachers brought their classes to make reliefs and sculpt on their own. The project students were available when help was needed regarding technical questions. A few hundred people showed up for the opening. The project was successful in stimulating the school community into participating. Many of the pupils sculpted snow for the first time. During the making of the sketches and the small scale models, the focus was on removing the extra details from the work. Simplifying the work and adding more dimension could have been stressed more, especially for the reliefs. For the most part however, the snow reliefs were successfully made. The works displayed a kind of spontaneous roughness

and expression that cannot be achieved by an adult's hand.

In its entirety, the Snow Park was a unified work. The yard area became more densely packed, and the work was successful in uniting the lower and upper grade areas. Some of the sculptures rose above the knolls, and this added variety to the visual expression, as it contrasted with the horizontal lines of the snow walls.

The integration of the project with the subjects worked out well. The subject matter of the sculptures, the planning, and the making of the work was linked to Finnish language studies, biology and physical education. The goals of art education were also interlinked in the project, such as the pupils' artistic planning ability, three-dimensional perception and their development in using the materials and sculpting tools.

The project achieved its goal as a collaborative project. It felt as though it was the school's own and common project, since everyone was involved in its making. A new social space and meeting place was created in the yard. For many of the teachers, the project was their first experience with snow sculpting and leading the work process. This proved to be a valuable and good experience. It will

be easier to take the step, to carry out a similar project in the future.

Most of the feedback from the teachers was positive. At first the teachers had felt reluctant, and constructing from snow seemed difficult. However, their negative thoughts were gone by the time they took part in the workshop for the teachers: “At first everyone said that we would only try out sculpting, but when we got started, we would have liked to do all the sculpting ourselves.” Many of the teachers mentioned that the pupils had enjoyed the work and were proud their pieces.



The opening of the Snow Park.

Photo: Emilia Saarenpää

## SUCCESSES AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

+ The Ounasrinne Comprehensive School’s yard area was made more enjoyable, and the works created a new social meeting place for the pupils.

- + The project made an interesting change from the school’s routine.
- + The pupils were able to become familiar with winter art through hands-on experience
- + The art education students gained experience in snow sculpture instruction.
- + The school has gained knowledge and skills in snow construction and sculpting, and has its own snow moulds and tools for the future.
- + With the help of the documentation and presentations, the school project acts as one example of what can be done in a schoolyard.

- The groups were large in size and there was little time.
- There were not enough tools that were suitable for small and detailed work.
- The Ounasrinne Comprehensive School teachers felt that a similar project could be carried out without motivation from the outside, and without the participation of art education students. In the bigger school’s large projects, the hope was to have even more art education students take part.
- Vandalism was a problem. How could it be better prevented?

Translated by Aurora Nieminen