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The Snow Town

Rantavitikka Comprehensive School's
Winter Art Project



1. Functional schoolyard.

Photo: Sanna Siirtola

WHAT

In the early spring of 2004, a town was constructed out of snow and ice in the Rantavitikka schoolyard.

WHO

The project was planned by art teacher Kristiina Ylinärä-Tikkala, Mirva Aalto, a Winter Art Education teacher for the and art education students Sanna Siirtola and Päivi Vertainen. This group planned the

project and made practical arrangements, and took care of the project's documentation and reports. The Rantavitikka Comprehensive School teachers participated actively and independently to carry out the project.



2. The scale of sculpting.

Photo: Mirva Aalto

WHERE

The Rantavitikka Comprehensive School is situated in Rovaniemi. In 2003, the school was made into one unified comprehensive school, and the pupil population is 360. The school has classes, which focus on visual arts, and the

University of Lapland's art education teaching practice is carried out there. In the early spring of 2003, one visual arts group from the school participated in the Jäässä (Frozen) pilot project, so the school already had some winter art experience before this project. At the Rantavitikka Comprehensive School, there are three separate schoolyard areas. The front yard is for grades seven to nine, the side yard is for grades one to six and the backyard is for the preschool children. A small pine forest and a pond are located along the edge of the yard.



New spaces and places.

Photo: Heikki Länkinen

GOALS

The Rantavitikka Comprehensive School's Winter Art Project had five main goals:

1. To make winter art part of the school programme and to add to the teachers' skills, so that they could in the future incorporate winter culture and art into their teaching plans.
2. To enliven the schoolyard both functionally and visually.
3. To provide the pupils with experience of winter art and information of the Snow Show.
4. To experiment how art and architecture can interact in school surroundings.
5. To involve the teachers of the school in the planning, and to take into account the needs and resources of the school.

METHODS AND WORK PROCESS

At the planning stages, discussions were held with the teachers on what they wanted to do in the Winter Art Project. From that base, a plan was made for the construction of the schoolyard. A winter art workshop consisting of lectures and snow and ice sculpture practice was arranged for the teachers. In addition, the teachers were given a *Luomaan lumesta* (Create from Snow) idea package. It contained ideas for

snow, ice and winter activities, for different subjects. A notice board in the teachers' room presented the yard plans and timetable, and listed the project workers' contact information. A winter art folder also containing transparencies and slides relating to architecture and winter art was left in the teachers' room.

In constructing the Snow Town, four different types of snow moulds were used. The pupils worked on the sculptures during class time under the leadership of their teachers and the art education students as assistants. Left over ice from The Snow Show was used in the ice sculptures, which were sculpted mostly during the visual arts classes. In addition to snow and ice sculpturing some of the snow construction was made using snow blocks. The four largest towers were made with the help of tractors over a period of four hours.

The tools used were on loan from the University of Lapland's Faculty of Art and Design and Rovaniemi Polytechnic. The Snow Show Winter Art Education Project arranged for the transportation of the snow to the school. Four different types of snow moulds were used: a wall mould (width 60cm, height 120cm and length 240cm), a small wall mould (width 50cm, length and height 120cm), a cube mould (120cm x

120cm) and a tower mould (width 120cm and height 240cm). Tools such as files, levels, chisels and saws were used to sculpt the snow and ice.



A sketch and a realization.

Photos: Mirva Aalto and Sanna Siirtola

PROGRESS DESCRIPTION

The planning for the project began in October 2003. The Winter Art Education Project's snow and ice construction training, in which Sanna Siirtola and Paula Vertainen participated, also began at the same time. The whole work group also took part in the Snow and Ice Dimensions

seminar. The first information session was arranged for the teachers in the beginning of November. The planning and sorting of practical matters continued into December. In January, the plans were finalised, and by the last week of January the actual construction began. The first snow blocks were constructed in the schoolyard, and the winter art workshop was arranged for the teachers. The work continued for the first three weeks of February.

In the plans, the school's resources were taken into consideration. The Rantavitikka Comprehensive School had just been unified into one comprehensive school, so a project involving the entire school was very much welcomed. Different grades and subject teachers worked together. During the physical education classes, the pupils made the snow blocks, which were sculpted during the art classes. Since the teachers took part in the planning and carrying out of the project, the work could be divided up for different groups, and the plans could be integrated into the rest of the curriculum. For example the sculpture themes for the lower grades came from Kalevala and from Lapland's nature, which were also current themes in their other subjects. The project gave the school the resources to make winter art a yearly tradition.

Activities related to architectural education were carried out during art classes. The town had a gate, guards welcoming the visitors, lanterns made from snow and ice and windows in the walls. The sixth graders built an oven from snow bricks, on which cats made from ice rested. A Fairy Tale-like castle on the edge of the town was built from snow bricks. A separate collection including animal snow sculptures, colourful ice paintings and a much-used slide, could also be found in the younger pupils' yard.

The Schools' Winter Art and Outdoors Day concluded the project. All the pupils and teachers visited the Snow Show on February 21, 2004, where winter art was presented on a larger scale than in the schoolyard. Within seconds, a group of 400 pupils dispersed into the exhibition area. Even the monumental works seemed to interest the pupils.



Warm drinks serve up by parents.

Photo: Mirva Aalto

The opening for the Snow Town was scheduled for the same day. However, the warm temperatures preceding the opening were a reminder of the momentary nature of snow and ice, and changed the opening into a closing ceremony. Some of the works had melted before the opening, but this did not put a damper on the celebration.

The final report for the project was made during the first two weeks of March.



The schoolyard in use.

Photos: Sanna Siirtola

RESULTS AND EFFECTS

The project was a success. The original plan was carried out nearly unaltered and the project's goals were achieved. Winter art became a part of the school's programme, and the teachers participated in the planning and carrying out of the project. The school's teachers as well as the project's students gained knowledge in snow and ice construction. The Snow Town brought life to the schoolyard and break times. The children were able to experience winter art, and they became familiar with the Snow Show.

The project had a large group of participants. Seventeen teachers from first grade to subject teachers, and from class teachers to special education teachers, participated in the project. Of those teachers, at least ten had pupil groups that participated in the building of the Snow Town, and the rest participated in the workshop for teachers as well as the Winter Art and Outdoors Day. The number of pupils that participated in the project was not documented exactly, however each pupil from the school was in some kind of contact with the Snow Town, at the least during their breaks and during the Winter Art and Outdoors Day.

From the perspective of winter art and schoolyard snow architecture, the Snow Town was a success. The architectural and Northern themes, along with other current issues, formed the whole picture. The Snow Town's walls were labyrinth-like and were decorated with reliefs and ice windows. Even before the walls were built, the snow blocks attracted the pupils to play during their breaks.

When creating the Snow Town, architectural education methods were developed for a winter atmosphere. The Rantavitikka Comprehensive School teachers can use the *Luomaan lumesta* (Create from Snow) idea package to develop activities for further projects. In her Master's thesis, Mirva Aalto evaluated the adaptation of winter art to architectural education, and in that way extends the experience a larger audience.

The documentation of the project was completed successfully. About 170 digital photos were accumulated, but the project was not documented on video. From the project, a Power Point presentation, an article and a binder of material were made.

SUCSESSES AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

- + The project worked on developing and experimenting with winter art, the starting point being architectural education.
- + The project reinforced the unity of the comprehensive school.
- + The Snow Town brought together different pupil groups and mixed up the social boundaries in the schoolyard.
- + The schoolyard became the location for the activities during and after the project, as the snow constructions attracted the pupils.
- + The documentation and photos give valuable information on adapting winter art methods to school education.
- The weather posed some problems and the works were nearly melted by the time of the Winter Art Day. Thus, the winter art was not at its best when it was presented to the pupils' parents.
- Most of the snow moulds and tools were on loan from the University of Lapland, and the school does not have its own tools for future projects.

Translated by Aurora Nieminen