

Õpetajate Leht
(Embassy's translation)
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By Victoria Parmas

**Seven Students and Two Teachers of Saku Municipality Visited
Usuda Junior High School and Nozawa Basic School in Saku Japan during their vacation**

First emotions voiced by those returning from Saku City located 8000 km away were „We had a royal welcome!“, „We were carried on hands!“, „We felt like celebrities!“, „We have never made so many speeches as during this week!“. Even before the Estonian students-teachers visited those two schools, they were welcomed by reporters of the local TV channel with two million viewers, who asked them about things they liked and disliked.

Kurtna and Saku students remembered the most art and music lessons from their visit to Usuda Elementary School. During the first one, students were studying photography by experimenting with taking of photos and could also try themselves how the shutter speed is later reflected on the photos. Students had brought with them photos that had fantasy elements on them that were created by a moving flashlight in a dark room, trying to create images of angels, random lines, etc.

Estonian students jointly agreed that they were glad to have been first to perform in the music lesson because they would not have wanted to open their mouths after such a high level singing by the Japanese. According to Kurtna School's teacher Merle Piik, all children in Japan sing and there's not a chance that someone cannot hold a tune.

Both Japanese schools welcomed Estonians with loud joint singing performed by a gym hall full of students. After the Estonian teacher had wondered how someone could possibly sound so good, it was later revealed that Japanese are actually very good in marketing themselves by using special “decoration” tools. Namely, the students singing received some support by the background recording and from students in the back room who were singing to the microphone as well.

A big contributor to the high level of singing skills at Usuda Elementary School was the enthusiastic teacher. This is evident also because this teacher will work at a different school after every few years. According to Kurtna School's English teacher, Japanese teachers will be assigned to different schools after every five-six years, where their specific area of talent will be used to develop students' skills there. The reason behind this is the wish to keep the level of schools equal. Kurtna School's English teacher received an offer to become an English teacher in Japan right away because both adults and children have a poor level of English ability. Estonian teacher explained that in Japan they prefer teachers who

don't know any Japanese because one of the reasons behind the poor English in Japan is that the teacher doesn't use much English in the class. Rather, Japanese is spoken, which is also true in other areas. They don't have English media either.

Although compared to Estonian teachers the Japanese teachers have a higher salary by six times together with other benefits (for example the 13th salary during Christmas and smaller tax burden compared to other professions) there are several negative aspects to it as Merle Piik sees it. In addition to having to change job locations, they also have very long working days.

She explained that although teachers receive a salary of 6000 euros, and they can live with 2000 euros at the countryside, their work days last until 6 – 7 pm because after school they also have to teach hobby classes. Each Japanese student must choose one hobby activity (if the student fails to choose one, school will do it for them) that they will engage in five times a week from year to year. Once at home, teachers start to prepare exam questions that students have to train for separately.

After having learnt Japanese culture, language and customs for a year before their trip to Japan, students were surprised by the free environment in the classroom. Teacher Piik said that they had expected to see much stricter order in classrooms in Japan with nobody talking, but it wasn't the case. Children fooled around and even talked. No teacher disciplined them. Children knew, whether to listen or not. If they had to do something else, they did so. Bad grades in Japan are the child's problem, not the teacher's and those who have problems with studying go to exam prep school that they must pay for, after their hobby classes. Japanese children study in enormous amounts!

At the same time, the order in schools are kept by the students, not teachers. Each morning started with the homeroom teacher's lesson where the teacher appointed each student with a specific role, such as the order keeper for the day, those responsible for distributing the food and cleaning. It's the responsibility of each student to clean their desk after lunch, because school lunches are eaten in the classrooms. At the end of the school day, students clean the floors and wash the classroom, as well as the hallway after the school day is over on all fours, and they even have competitions amongst each other.

However, everything in this world is in balance, because super eager students at school are not that eager at home. Estonian students heard about this from the local granny's club with whom they had the honor to plant flowers at the city's green area. Grannies, according to whom Japanese children don't help out with household chores, asked Estonian students whether they helped their moms and dads to pick apples or clean their room. They asked Estonian students to surely share their household chores' experience when visiting Japanese families.

Saku - Saku exchange will continue next July when Japanese students will visit Estonia and next fall when new Estonian students will go to Japan.