Reflective Journal

My Stay In Ireland..
Reflective Journal.

I remember the day I had to leave home, I was too early (had the wrong time). It was a cold day and I was overweight with luggage, wondering if I had to pay much for the extra 15 kg. (Yes, I did). I didn’t want to let my boyfriend’s hands go, a bit scared of what was lying ahead of me. It was the very first time I had ever done such a bold thing. Going on the Erasmus experience was an experience of a lifetime. I was scared and filled with expectations of these 3 months. After a short farewell we had to go to our plane. The adventure was about to begin!

I can remember the flight, the bus drive and the first person who came to collect us, Mrs Ellis. I asked myself how I got into this. Now I have to cope with this kind of adventure and life because it’s there for 3 months. Time flies very quickly, soon I had classes, meetings with other Erasmus students (and there are a lot of them!) and suddenly I fell into practice as well.

Section A: Academic Study:

The 2 lectures I take where I have to go to class are the ‘Irish Film Studies’ and ‘Evolution of the Irish Cultural landscape’. The first classes are about Irish movies and we had the task to write down how we see Ireland through these movies. The second class was about changes in the Irish cultural Heritage. I find this utmost interesting for me! I learn about more Irish History, its story about Christianity, its inhabitants the Celts as best well known inhabitant of Ireland! I liked the lessons, varying from videos shown to fieldtrips. The other courses I took are more of the Self Study courses that I can do when and where I want. These are ‘Comparative education’, ‘Reflective journal’ and ‘Supervised Projects’.

Then after 2 weeks of classes we got the chance to go on practice in a Northern-Irish school. I was very enthusiastic and also curious about the education system.

Practice
The school of practice (St Clare’s Nursery Unit) was really fantastic. The week before we got a seminar with Mr. Rafferty (in addition to our course of comparative education) and he prepared us for going to school. He told us about the education system and the Government rules. This was interesting to know beforehand.

Observation
In school we firstly did some observation and we participated wherever and whenever. It was so great! The teachers and assistants really embraced us with open arms and accepted us in their midst. Sometimes we were appointed to some activities to do as well. The children were great and the
other St Mary’s students didn’t hesitate to help us where possible. It was great to see so much hospitality.

**The Practice**

The second, third and fourth week we could give some more lessons that we prepared. In the observation week we had the chance to see how the school was working and organised. It was nice to compare Belgian and Irish education as well. They were also very much interested in how our system worked and answered all of our questions.

The prepared lessons were in the theme of that month (**People who help us**) and varied from musical activities and physical activities to stories and help in guiding the children at the tables and corners. The methods of teaching aren’t that different between both countries! There were quite a few similarities that I saw!

So we could grow in experience from this practice and see ideas of the school. In the end I saw that both education systems has their good points and working points. But I have to say, the good points are very well thought through and some ideas I am taking with me back to Belgium!! This practice really opened my mind, to see for the first time something other then Belgium.

In the last 2 weeks we were asked to give some French lessons in a different school (**St John’s Baptist school for boys**) this was with 10 year old boys. This was a really challenge because we never did such kind of thing. But it was really nice to do it. It was another experience that we had, I enjoyed it and I think the children did too!

**Bachelor project:**

The last week of the practice we had to do a bachelor project as well. This meant that we had to do some research in the schools health education and in general the Irish Health education system. We had to observe the schools needs and in what place Health could be more worked on. We choose to set up a ‘movement’ project. We decided that the children and the school could use a bit more movement and physical activity. We integrated more ‘physical movement lessons’ (Like what we have to do in Belgium) and experimented with some of the working forms of Belgium (for examples tag games and movement rounds – translated from Dutch). The school was very interested and cooperative. The children were fabulous and enthusiast!

The bachelor project was finished as was our practice it selves. After a big farewell we unfortunately had to go. It was a very nice time. Very
interesting and I am happy that I did this kind of experience! It has enriched
my point of view, which makes me actually want to do and see more...

Section B: Cultural programme:

After our practice we had the international week filled with seminars and lectures from around the world! It was very interesting to meet them and follow the courses. We had a tight schedule to follow. The most seminars were mostly aimed for primary and secondary school. So it was sometimes difficult to see it in our perspective (As a kindergarten teacher) but in some cases we could link the contents back to the Nursery school! And some courses were off course intended for the general teacher that was interesting as well!

Next to the daily lectures we had some nice entertainment during the evenings of that week. Starting on Monday with a Euro quiz, on Tuesday we had the Historical Pub tour. Wednesday we spend the whole day touring around (see a bit further) and on Thursday we had the Euro song festival to do. That was great fun and was always accompanied by great laughter and a drink or two! Nice times..

With one of my lessons: “Evolution of the Irish Cultural landscape” I got the chance to go on the fieldtrip with them. Actually it was a 3day fieldtrip, but I could only attend the last day of the trip. We did a grand tour of Belfast to get to know Belfast even more; with the guide on our side we got some information as well. We went to the docks, where the Titanic was build and got to know about the Titanic building that has been build. (A project to promote the Belfast Tourism.) After that we went to the Belfast castle, where we did a tour and then afterwards we went to Stormont, the parliament buildings of Northern - Ireland. This is actually an old building, but has been closed for a long period in the pas and has been opened quite recently (in 1998 - Good Friday agreement). The tour in these huge buildings was just unique! We got a presentation about the different political parties and how they vote..
someone like me this was an extraordinary opportunity to get to know about the political part of Northern Ireland. (Because this can be quite confusing) But to me, the matters were explained on a very basic but simply level! After that presentation we got to go to the assembly hall where all the important people come and go! It was really beautiful! I really loved this day and I was happy I got this opportunity of the lecturer.

And of course, On the 17th of March, we took the bus to Dublin! We spend the whole day here in the occasion of St. Patrick’s Day! It was a superb green day! We got to see the parade and a lot of green spirited people. It was nice to see how this day is celebrated here. If you wanted to celebrate is, you just have to be in Dublin, Ireland! The atmosphere in Dublin was superb! We enjoyed the nice parade and the pub afterwards. After a bit more of sightseeing (especially to the Dublin tourism Centre) we went back home, still in the ‘St Patrick spirit’! It was a very nice day (we had some good luck with the weather as well), and I enjoyed it.

Section C: Social programme:

How I entertained myself in Northern Ireland:

I am feeling lucky to be here, even with my difficulties of finances it’s sometimes hard for me, though I still wanted to do something here and see something!

It was nice to have many Erasmus students as well, so we could hang out in groups and enjoying ourselves in the local pubs! I have to say that in the 3 months I spend here, I have never ever gone out so much and even ‘drink’ that much! (although I’m not a heavy drinker!) in my whole life! The atmosphere when going out was splendid! We don’t have this in Belgium, where I mostly entertain myself in front of the computer, and sometimes occasionally go out to a nearby party. But without my PC (It broke down mid February) and by influence from others I could go out more often.

I visited plenty of places in Belfast, on my own or in a small group. I visited some other places near Belfast such as Bangor, Newcastle, Dublin and I even organised a trip for 2 days to County Donegal! I have been to Downpatrick and it was very interesting to see how the story of St Patrick is so hugely celebrated there!
I also saw. I’ve climbed mountains and hills (something we have less of in Belgium). I loved the travelling! The visit to the Giants Causeway and Bushmills was fantastic! It was great to learn more about the Irish History by seeing so many historical places and finding out about them. Although Ireland is an interested land to be in, I think Belgium isn’t that interesting. Meeting other Erasmus students and other Irish students is just great, we get to know so many people in so little time. As our 3 months nearly is over, I see everyone leaving (what saddens me).

Luckily the internet is such a great thing to keep in touch with everyone! (See www.facebook.com) It wasn’t easy to make friends with everyone, I still struggle with it, but I expected some difficulties to arise. I’m happy that I adjusted to all the people a bit quicker than I usually do. But I liked meeting other people and getting to know them.

Section D: Guidelines for future students:

Tips on travel:
- Having a driver’s license is an extra advantage! If you want to travel a lot, you could even rent a car to go to the far off places! Also note, to travel in Rep. Ireland you can use bus companies.
- Look for travel agencies who accept your Erasmus certificate and get cheaper ‘extra’ luggage cost. (Not with Ryanair)
- There are the Black cabs and the busses that travel you around. Mind there are different kind of busses, search for the Translink Timetable, its handy! You can also look on their site and discover certain student discounts.
- There are a lot of bus company’s who travel to Ireland, look careful if they come to Northern Ireland or if they even go to Republic of Ireland.
- Look around in Belfast, but with caution. There is a lot to see, to do, to discover.

Tips on accommodation:
- Don’t expect many luxuries, all the houses are different. But if you are lucky you get a nice house.
- It is a good idea to bring an extra pair of bed sheets with you. (or you can buy them here for not that much money)
- If you are a bit coldly it could be a good idea to bring a small but warm blanket with you, the nights can get very cold.
- Don’t expect you will be able to heat your house all of the time, because gas is expensive.
General do's:

**DO:**
- Visit different places, don’t stay in Belfast.
- Go to Rep. Ireland by bus, by feet, by hired car.
- Go to the shops and shop till you drop.
- Visit pubs and have a drink of the local famous beer Guinness. If you prefer whisky I would recommend you Bushmills.
- Get to know people.
- Get an umbrella, but it will break eventually after approximately 1 month.
- Get good shoes, preferable the ones that don’t let water through.
- Get a good coat (see before)
- Use the public transportation (it is very nice, and you can get some good deals if you get to know it)
- Go to Newcastle, Carrickfergus, Bangor.
- Climb a mountain or 2 or 3.
- Chat with Irish People.
- Get a telephone card from O2, a telephone company. They have some great deals on texting and phoning to other countries.
- If there is no possible internet connection in your house get information about having internet broadband on your laptop or a skype phone.
- Bring your laptop with you 😊
- Bring music. There will be moments were you will be bored a little.
- Buy your food at cheap shops like Asda, Curly’s or Liddl. Shops as Centra and Tesco are a bit expensiver.
- Have a good bank account (with lots of money), you unfortunately spend money quickly (mostly even on food)
- Definitely go to the Belfast Tourism centre in the City Center, a bit further down the street there is another big souvenir shop and the ‘church’ that lies close to the school is a souvenir shop as well! Happy spending ;)

General don’ts

**DON’TS**
- Don’t wander alone at night (or even in group) in certain area’s.. The Falls can be a bit scary at some times.
- Know that black cabs are very scarce when you want to go home at 1 am. (Most pubs close at that time!!) You better leave a bit earlier if you want to take a cab home. Also note, the black cabs will now drive you home!
- Don’t think you will have everything in your house, most houses are equipped with basic stuff like cooker, fridge, washing machine (sometimes even a toaster and microwave)
- Don’t be scared by the bad weather, if you’re hoping on good weather you can wait almost forever!
- Don’t heat your house the whole day – because heating is very expensive. (you can heat the house with the cooker, that is less expensive)

Section E: Overall reflection on the experience:

About the Erasmus experience:
A whole new experience this was for me, I was anxious and scared at the same time. I wondered at the beginning what I was doing here, I had to be home with my mother and boyfriend! But on the other hand I wanted to learn, I was curious, to see, to know Ireland! I have been wanting to go on the Erasmus Experience for 4 years, ever since I saw in my first year that such things were organised in my university. It was a long way to go to my final year and get to apply for the Erasmus. It was only in my second year which country I wanted to go! I wanted to come to Ireland because I was fascinated by the places, the people, the music, the culture.
I had a couple of expectations of course, I wanted to see and meet places and most of all places.

The day I arrived here was a bit of a mess! The house we were put in, wasn’t really what I expected. Well I kind of did, but that it was going to be like this? Soon I accepted what we had though, this had to be. We got to spend 3 months here, and the sooner you got used to it, the better. The people living there were absolutely great. Wouter from my class was in the same house, another Polish girl and Slovakian girl too. Katarina had some difficulties in her stay here and she left earlier than planned. Also Joanna moved away in the beginning of April, so it’s only Wouter and me now. Yesterday both of us were reminiscing about our final day and about closing the door behind us. I was already getting emotional about it.

Our stay here was absolutely great, although the timing was not that good. Most lessons did start already and most of the other Erasmus students arrived before us. We had to jump into practice very soon and were there for 4 weeks! Also it was mid winter and this meant that it was very cold! We didn’t have the luxury to heat our house all of the time so it was sometimes very cold in our little house. And there were plenty of cold nights as well. Luckily I brought a blanket with me! Although the room was okay it was really small. But in the end I really loved my room here.

About the practice: I just loved the practice weeks! There were so nice! I enjoyed myself very much. The children were so nice and the teachers are so great! The teaching practice ended too soon of course, but in the end I learned a lot about the Teaching in Northern-Ireland. This was one of my expectations, to get to learn about the education system. I’m really happy to now about it and get a couple of ideas back with me to Belgium. In some
ways the education system was not that different with the Belgium one, but there were area’s what was more thought of than with us and vice versa. It was very good to get to know a school, get experience in teaching and get experience in improving our language. It wasn’t always easy to understand each other though.

About the other class/lessons: I just loved my lesson: ‘Evolution of the Irish cultural landscape’ It was about everything I wanted to know, so I’m really happy I chose this course to follow. I learned about many things of ancient Ireland, about the mythical part of Ireland. (and it was quite enchanting!) The other assignments I’ve got where mostly self studying subjects so I could work on these in my own time. Unfortunately my computer broke down in February so I had to rely on the computers on school, this also meant I didn’t had much to do in the weekends without my computer, and I got quite bored sometimes. But after I time I got used to not having a computer. And I realised it was not the end of the world.

I have seen places, I visited other places but in one way I wanted more.. It wasn’t that easy to get people going with me to other places, most of because they didn’t really wanted to go, or they didn’t had the ‘need’ to go visit places.. In one way I’m a bit disappointed that I didn’t have the change so see a lot more! Due to some bad weather (again bad timing) most of our days were spend at home. But sometimes we did some nice things. Because we had more communication with other Erasmus students (because of our Polish roommate Joanna) it was nice to get to know other people from everywhere. Unfortunately they left quickly and now were left with other Belgians that we actually don’t know much about.. The only sad thing as well is that many of the Erasmus students planned trips with each other but never asked others if they wanted to come along.. So it was also a particular group who went on trips and excluding most of the others.. In one way that was off course quite understandable, but still it would be nice if all people got the chance to go on a trip, so that opens more opportunities to get to know and meet each other. It was nice of the school to organise a trip as well, but it would have been great if there were more opportunities to go sightseeing on more places that was organised by school. In the end I could entertain myself okay, there were meetings in pubs and went out together and so on..

After all, I would recommend everyone to go on this experience, if you want to learn something about another country. If you want to get to know every aspect of Ireland that you don’t see when you just travel here as a tourist, than you have to do the Erasmus experience!

Most of my expectations were realised, but it would help if you don’t set your priorities to high, otherwise you could be very easily disappointed.
This means mostly to me, if you want to travel but the others don’t want, 
you could sit at home and moan about it, or just go on your own. 
This happened a lot. I wasn’t really here to make really good friends with 
everyone, but if I get to know a few people where I could talk too, was that 
plenty enough for me. I have to say the academic side of the Erasmus 
experience interested me the most, also the travelling around (and finding a 
companion to come along with me..) 
Unfortunately I didn’t really find one, so I this means I have to come back 
more often to Ireland with my own friends and travel around!

I enjoyed my stay here, I learned about education, I met people, (Irish and 
other Erasmus), I visited places, I worked and lived in Belfast. 
In an area that was well known for it’s troubles. Sometimes that did scared 
me, when you saw the TV news, .. but in the end, I survived West - Belfast.. 
(Do they have any T-shirts with that line?) And to know that only 3 years 
ago there still was some political mumbo jumbo going on, to the area of Falls 
road! In the end, you just got a bit used to it. 
I lived in a house with not much of the luxuries I got at home. So I really had 
to adjust to that. But in the end that paid of as well, I got more experience, 
financial balancing around, what to buy what not, and so on... I learned a 
lot. I doubt I’ll be the same when I get back home. 

This was an unforgettable experience, which I will think of with joy and 
happiness in my heart! I don’t think I will ever forget about it. 
‘Now I’m going to enjoy my last week here.. and relax myself a little, all 
assignments through, I can just sit back and enjoy.. 

Many thanks go to everyone who gave me this opportunity to come here, 
such as my Mother, Mrs Callens (KATHO) and Mr Anthony (St Mary’s 
University College). I am grateful to have been here and I will surely return 
in the future.