

Final Report

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Four-week teaching practice programme at the PH Zug

1. Information and support

- PH Zug / the International Office PH Zug: The excellent structure of the program and clear schedule meant that I did not require any significant support from the university support system during the placement. Though I felt comfortable that if I required further information from any of the support team I would have been well taken care of.
- Mentor teacher: My mentor teacher at the international school was amazing. It was such a privilege to work with her and learn from her experience. She was a phenomenal support to me as an educator and colleague who I could ask any question!
- Host buddy: My host buddy was very welcoming and kind. Although I feel the short length of the program limited the amount of time we could spend together the few activities we did do were very enjoyable and so fun to experience Switzerland with the guidance of a local. A real highlight of the trip was going to a local hockey game with our host buddy and some of the students from PH Zug and experiencing the local culture there.

2. Overall program / living situation

- *Teaching practice programme (school, subjects):* The international school was an interesting experience – to say the least! The primary teaching staff at the school was phenomenal to work with. The teachers were all highly experienced, motivated and passionate about teaching. They were welcoming to me as a pre-service teacher and kindly willing to share advice and knowledge reflecting on my and their own practise as a teacher. Being placed at an international school was exciting as the teaching staff were so diverse in their background and this diversity provided so much scope for learning and discussion. Also, although being placed in an international school provided an incredible experience in getting to work with teachers and students from all around the world, which was amazing! I didn't get to work with any students or teachers from Switzerland or anyone who spoke German. Something I was

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looking forward to was getting to know the Swiss culture through my interactions at school and navigating the language difference. However, being in the international school where the primary language spoken and taught was English limited my opportunity to engage with Swiss culture and practise using the language.

Ultimately though the individual teachers I worked with at the international school were incredible and inspirational, especially given the circumstances they were working in. And I loved my experience there despite the challenges.

- *Programme at the PH Zug (lectures etc.):* The program at PH Zug gave great insight into the life of pre-service teachers in Switzerland. It was interesting to see where our class structures and subjects overlapped and also to note the differences between our education experiences. In particular, it was exciting to see the range of subjects and extra-curricular activities students at the PH Zug are offered and encouraged to partake in.

All the students we spoke to on campus at the PH Zug were very friendly and willing to provide help where necessary, whether that is in translating instructions from a teacher into English or simply providing directions to a room on the campus.

The German language lessons provided by the PH Zug were great. I really enjoyed getting to work with the German tutors to cover some of the basics of understanding the language and learning useful phrases that would help me in my travels around Switzerland and with my host family. The most beneficial lessons were the ones that didn't cover too much content in one go, but focused on developing a few basic skills. I looked forward to going to my German classes and would have even preferred that they were more than 1-hour sessions at a time, as they seemed to fly so fast!

The observation of lessons at the PH Zug was interesting, but also a bit challenging at times. While some of the lecturers were very accommodating in wanting to translate some instructions and talk to us, others were quite distant. The program may have benefited from providing lecturers at the PH Zug with more clarity on whether or not we as Australian visitors were expected to formally complete work over the four weeks or just observe and enjoy the experience of seeing what the students do as part of their day to day life at the PH Zug, which would be my preference.

Finally, the tour with They was one of my greatest highlights of the whole trip! It was such a

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privilege to spend time with her and learn about the wonderful city of Zug and its history.

- *Living situation (accommodation, costs, etc.):* My host family were an amazing support to me during my stay and the experience of living with a local family was fantastic. So many of my fondest memories of this trip, in addition to travelling and seeing the landscape of Switzerland, have been the little funny moments around the dinner table with my host family. The language barrier, which was something I was quite nervous about before I arrived, was not an issue as my host family spoke English very well but has actually been a highlight of the trip. We have had so many funny moments miscommunicating with one another and trying to figure out the right words it has really been a great way to gain an insight into the Swiss culture and language. In terms of cost I think the accommodation in the host family was very suitable. I feel very grateful that the cost of accommodation included meals provided by the host family as given the demands of the study and teaching program on this trip I would have struggled personally to manage buying and cooking food for myself every day challenging. The room I was staying in was very decent and my host family were very welcoming and made me feel at home in their house. Even though staying with a host family was something I was most nervous about for this trip it has ended up being my favourite part.

3. Goals and professional benefit

- My personal goals for the placement were to increase my understanding of intercultural teaching practises and observe the educational experience of teachers and students from another country. While on placement in Switzerland I had the incredible opportunity to work with students from all around the world! In my class of 9 alone there were students from Belgium, Germany, Ukraine, India, France, Venezuela, Brazil and Peru. Although none of these students were locals from Switzerland originally and I did not get the opportunity to experience Swiss culture from them, I was very lucky to gain insight into the lives of children who came from such culturally diverse backgrounds all over the world.

As a teacher working with many students who spoke English as a second language and particularly some who only began learning English recently I developed an increased awareness and skills about how to approach this challenge in the classroom. For example, as a teacher I become highly attuned the way I was communicating with students. If my students did not understand the content of what I was saying, how else could I communicate with them? Using the pitch and volume of my voice alongside facial expressions and hand

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gestures were key tools I used to communicate in my teaching practise.

Also I developed my ability to be inclusive and accepting of all cultures in the classroom and to encourage an attitude of open-mindedness with my students. For example, when discussing a significant sporting event happening in Switzerland giving students the opportunity to share about their own experiences of sport from their life in other countries not only helps to make those individual students feel valued but also provides a fantastic learning opportunity for students and teacher to gain insight into our world through the daily experiences of people in our class. Moving forward I will endeavour to put what I have learnt about intercultural teaching practises into action back in my future teaching career.

4. Personal evaluation of the stay

Negative

- The travel time to my placement school was over an hour on public transport and included 3 buses and 1 train in the morning, with the first bus leaving at 6.26am to arrive in time for school. By the time I had attended staff meetings or school clubs in the afternoon I would often not arrive home until after 6pm in the evening. This amount of travel to and from school each day was extremely challenging, particularly on the days when I was expected to attend placement school in the morning and PH Zug class in the afternoon on Wednesday. By the time I returned home I would typically have been on a combination of 12 or more different buses and trains. I can see how perhaps this may have been overlooked as according to a GPS the practicum school was only a 15 minute drive in a car from my host family's house, however as a recommendation for future students who do the program and are trying to juggle attending classes at the PH Zug, practicum experience at a school, spending time with host family and host buddy the distance by public transport should be considered.
- Finally, my personal preference as previously mentioned would have been to work in a local Swiss school in order to have more opportunity to engage with the Swiss culture and language given I had travelled specifically to Switzerland. However, working with students from all around the world at the international school was also amazing!

Positive

- The host family experience was incredible and something I will never forget. My family has already talked of inviting me back to visit one day in the future or coming to visit me in Australia. Some of my greatest memories are of spending time with my Swiss family, getting

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to know them as people, how they live day to day and learning about their culture. They are also the greatest support in providing friendship, support and advice while away from home. I cannot recommend the experience enough!

- Getting to speak to students from the PH Zug about their teaching experiences, including their passions and the challenges they face here in Switzerland, and being able to discuss where we have similarities and differences and learn from one another. It is very comforting to know that even on the other side of the world there are people like me who feel just as unsure, but also excited about the prospect of being a teacher and how we can best succeed in our future careers.
- Although my progress was very minimal, I thoroughly enjoyed learning German and experiencing a culture where the primary language is not English. This was one of the biggest challenges when navigating around, speaking to shop workers and even communicating sometimes at PH Zug. Ultimately though I gained a deep insight into what it is like to feel on the outside and the challenges of navigating this experience.