

PH Zug Final Report – Mieja Wood

Information and Support

A few months prior to my arrival I was informed of my host family, the school I would be completing my practicum in and the program for my time in Switzerland. We were also informed of a change in the program via email the week before our arrival. Upon arriving at the PH, I was handed a binder with information about my program for my time on practicum, PH Zug and Zug itself. We were also given a guided tour of Zug and the old town of Zug, which was a very good experience and it really helped being at the start of our stay. Our tour guide They was very knowledgeable and had a great sense of humor, which made the tour even better.

Monica has been very helpful when she is able to answer questions we have about lessons or the school in general. She informed us soon after we found out that we would be at Elementa what we would be teaching during our time there. We were also placed into many different classes, where each teacher was able to notify us of what they wanted us to teach. She has also been approachable during my time and willing to help out where possible.

Our buddy Larissa was able to make me feel welcome when I met her, and she was eager to help when purchasing the Zugerpass and a Swiss simcard. I also had my birthday on the first weekend and Larissa organized to take me out for a lovely day and show me around a little bit of Switzerland, for which I am very grateful. She made effort to see us and make time for us with her very busy schedule, and even took us to my first ice hockey game. She has also been available to speak to when I have needed advice.

Overall program/living situation

Going to Elementa has been an educative experience; I had the opportunity to observe different teachers and their style of teaching and different ways of how learning can be implemented. It has been different to my experiences in Australia in

many ways. We were told prior to coming that we would be teaching the history of the World from a European perspective, with a timeline display to grade 5/6 students. Which was at first quite daunting, as it is a very broad topic, with 2.5 million years of human history. However after discussion with Monica, we decided to slightly change the content of the history we were teaching to also include some Australian and Swiss history as well. We also taught sport and English from grade 1 to 6. Other classes we attended were in German, so we would help out where we could sometimes with mathematics. Even though I had learnt some German for 14 weeks before I came to Switzerland I found it a lot more difficult than I had expected to not be able to speak or understand German in the classroom. At times I missed out on understanding how the class was being run and how students were expected to behave, as well as the all over classroom dynamics. The teachers at Elementa left a lot of what content we were include in our lessons up to us, which was something different for me. A majority of the time was spent with the grade 5/6 classes, which was nice to be able to make connections with individual students even if I wasn't always in their class.

The program at the PH Zug included a range of different classes as well as a lecture. However most of these lessons were in German, making it difficult to understand a lot. At times, students at the PH would translate for us, which was very beneficial and considerate of them. I was able to attend some English methodology classes as well and got to see a little bit of how Swiss students learn how to teach English in their own schools. A German language class was also offered for free by a student at the PH, which for me helped refresh what I had already learnt, but did not build any new knowledge. Our German teacher Jeannine was very kind and easy to get along with, as well as helpful with questions about the language. I would have liked to have more than three classes to further improve my German. I think it was at times challenging to attend the full day of classes at the PH each week and the four days of practicum while also trying to plan for lessons somewhere in between. I think it would have been good to have a designated time to plan lessons somewhere in the program.

I have been lucky enough to have an amazing host family. They have been very generous and extremely welcoming. They said I did not have to pay for any food items, and told me that they would buy foods that I wanted to eat, for which I am very grateful. I did choose to cook for them one night while I was there and also bought my own snacks for school. The daughter of my hosts had just started teaching her own class in August, so it was really good to be able to talk to her about my experiences at Elementa and compare them to the public school system in Switzerland. They were always happy to help me and take me to different places throughout Switzerland and ensure I was having a positive and worthwhile experience during my stay. I paid 500 CHF for my five-week stay with them, which I think is a very good amount for how generous and caring my hosts were. This may not be the same for everyone though. I spent a lot less than I thought I would for day-to-day living expenses, although Switzerland can be quite expensive. I would definitely recommend getting a Zuggepass, which costs around 60 CHF for the month; it allowed me to travel around Zug making getting to the PH and the school very easy. Though I did have to purchase separate tickets when travelling to a different canton. Lunch at Elementa was provided which also helped with saving money during the day. As I lived an hour's public bus ride away from the school, I was able to get the school bus on the way home with the students' every day that took only about 15 minutes, this was much better than an hour on the bus at the end of the day.

I have gained a lot of different experiences throughout this practicum that have made me feel stronger and more confident in becoming a teacher in future. There were definitely challenges at times, but nothing I could not overcome or learn from. It was great to experience teaching English as a second language, and has made me want to continue doing this somewhere along my career path. I have also been inspired to continue with learning the German language, and hope to do so when I am at home.

Goals and Professional Benefit

One of my personal goals for the placement was to challenge myself and build confidence when teaching a class and speaking to students as a whole group. I also hope to develop strategies when working with students learning English as a second language. I would like to be able to communicate and make a connection with all students where possible. I aim to keep positive about all experiences, even when something may become very challenging. I would like to make the most of this opportunity.

I think that in different ways I was able to achieve all of my goals for the most part. I think I would have liked to have more time to learn German so that I could understand more of what was happening at the PH and Elementa during German speaking classes. I think I have improved my confidence when it comes to a challenging situation, I believe this will help me in my future teaching endeavors. Having the opportunity to teach English to such a wide range of ages has helped me to adapt from students who know more English to students who do not know much English at all, and try to navigate ways to help each individual. Overall I think keeping a positive mindset about everything has helped me to get the most out of this experience.

Achieving these goals will benefit my future studies in the way that I will be able to implement what I have learnt during my practicum into the classroom next year and when I finish my bachelor the year after. Building on my confidence will also help me in the professional world after university and my future job aspects and opportunities. This program has given me more of a different perspective on education and worldly experience in teaching. Having the opportunity to teach internationally has given insight to what it might be like if I choose to teach outside of Australia during my career, especially in a non English speaking country. I think I have also gained more independence, as I have had to do a lot more on my own than I normally would have and more of an ability to adapt to different situations. These are skills I believe will be beneficial later on in my career.

Personal Evaluation of the stay

I would recommend that future students coming over learn more than just basic German greetings, because even though Swiss German is spoken everywhere else, the schools and the PH are taught in High German. The app duolingo helps with learning different words and sayings, which is very beneficial when trying to understand. Even though it doesn't really help with grammar I would still keep using it frequently to learn as many words and sayings before coming to Switzerland. Also finding a Swiss adapter for laptop and phone chargers, as they are different to European adapters! Definitely download the SBB mobile app; it is a lifesaver when it comes to public transport throughout Switzerland. You just have to enter an address and it will show you your train and bus options from your location. As well as a map if there is walking involved. I also got my own prepaid simcard for the month that I was there, it had unlimited data, calls and SMS for only 40 CHF with the carrier 'Sunrise'. It certainly helped with navigating around by myself without having to find Wi-Fi. I would also advise that future students are always honest about when they do not understand what is expected of them and if they have any worries or issues, to deal with them straight away to ensure you have a positive experience.

3 Positives

- ⇒ Having such an amazing host family who made me feel extremely welcome and at home.
- ⇒ Experiencing some of the Swiss culture and food in this beautiful country.
- ⇒ I feel as though I have developed even more as a teacher, and look forward to what the future of my career holds.

3 Negatives

- ⇒ I would have liked to have more classes with our buddy at the PH; we only had one class with her.
- ⇒ The language barrier at both PH and Elementa. I wish I had of known that I would need to know a lot more German than expected prior to coming. As sometimes I found it hard to communicate and some things got lost in translation.
- ⇒ I would have liked to have more dedicated time in the program to plan lessons and use my time effectively during the week; with having very long days at the PH and Elementa it made it hard to plan, especially together.