

Karen Hall at Rejsby Europæiske Efterskole

Karen Hall, from Peterborough in England spent her language assistantship at Rejsby Europæiske Efterskole in Skærbæk. The language assistantship proved to be very rewarding and it convinced her about her plans for the future and her wishes to become a teacher. After the assistantship, she was accepted for a course at Cambridge University.

During my assistantship I had wonderful working conditions. The school was very modern and had all the resources I required. To begin with I assisted in a variety of classes either taking small groups, a part of the lesson or just being a source of information at appropriate moments. As the assistantship progressed I took on more responsibility including taking whole lessons by myself.

When I took a class myself I generally planned the lesson with the relevant teacher before hand. After lessons I usually spoke to the teacher to discuss how the lesson went etc, although not all teachers were as keen to do this as others. The teachers at my school all had very different teaching styles so the methodology would be different with each one.

I was involved in two foreign trips, to France and Czech Republic, as well as setting up and organising two trips to secondary schools in England. I also made a contact with a school inspector in Ealing with whom the school will hopefully form an exchange in the next academic year.

My grant was sufficient to live on. However I was lucky to be able to eat at the school for free and use their telephone. The grant did not allow much room for luxuries such as travel, shopping etc. It also did not extend to further trips home beyond the one paid by the British Council. Eight months without going home is too much, especially if your assistantship lasts over the Christmas period like mine did.

Living in Denmark

I have learnt a lot about the culture of Denmark. Although I had lived there before, the school I was at was very rural whereas before I had lived in the capital city. This really gave me an insight into the differences of urban/rural life in the country. Also before I was an exchange student surrounded by many nationalities whereas this time I was only with Danish people. This allowed me to really get to understand the Danish mentality and way of life. I don't think my attitudes have changed dramatically, rather I have just expanded upon and developed what I previously knew.

I have grown to have a greater understanding of European issues. Especially through trying to set up a school exchange with Britain. This took me to a number of different websites and organisations aimed at European integration. I have also learnt more about other European initiatives and aims of the Union.

Teaching methods and subjects

My teaching skills have greatly improved, from being almost none existent to being able to plan for, carry out and analyse a full lesson by myself. Particularly towards the end of my assistantship I really began to learn more and more about teaching methods. This was both through my own practical experience and through the observation of other teachers. I have learnt about how important it is to be flexible in your methods depending on the class, the subject and even the time of day. I have also learnt a lot from the Danish teaching styles, which are quite different from the British. They are much more informal and relaxed, placing the emphasis on the pupil taking ownership for their own learning rather than on the teacher telling them exactly what to do.

In addition to this, I feel that the students at my school have really gained a lot from having a native speaker. They were at a high enough level to be able to appreciate the subtleties of different words that I could teach them and were keen to learn how to use 'real' English rather than just being grammatically correct etc. The students also enjoyed being able to hear slang as this enabled them to feel that they could communicate with English speaking people of their own age better.

Though, the students already knew quite a lot about the English culture before I arrived, some of this was certainly stereotypes. Therefore, the teachers were very keen for me to give lessons on certain aspects of British culture. This was often linked to a project that they were doing. For example they read 'Bend it like Beckham' and watched the film so I gave them a lesson on the Indian culture in Britain. I also arranged and took part in two exchanges to schools in England, which was a wonderful way to really show the students the British culture.

The European Dimension

With regards to the European dimension, I tried to tell the students about the European opportunities for young people, for example the Comenius and also the Erasmus programme, which I did two years ago. I also took some European economics lessons, where I tried to explain the students about the links in Europe and particularly how this affects Britain.

Learning the Danish language

I have greatly improved my Danish. I only took a few lessons as I found that I learnt the most just from being at the school and with the pupils/teachers. The pupils in particular loved to try and teach me new Danish words. I also took a few French lessons at the school and learnt a little Czech on our trip!

Future plans

The assistantship has confirmed my desire to be a teacher. I have just been accepted for the Primary PGCE course at Cambridge University. Although my assistantship was with 14-16 year olds I have decided to teach younger children. Although, I enjoyed working with teenagers, my assistantship made me realise that I get much more out of working with children.