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## Sisse Elling Sørensens assistent-ophold i Italien i efteråret 2008.

**Sisse er uddannet fra JCVU / Århus Lærerseminarium med linjefag i bl.a. dansk og engelsk.**

I was in Venice for 16 weeks and on average, I taught 12 hours per week, which is 192 hours total. I primarily taught Primary School but I also taught Secondary students. I got the chance to meet all classes, which meant that in Primary School I taught 15 different classes, and I spent 8 hours in each class. In Secondary School I taught 8 different classes, and spent 3 hours in each class.

The rest of the hours were spent in December, where I helped some of the classes prepare for the Christmas Show.

Extracurricular activities include an A.C.L.E course that took place on the 20th September. My school had been kind enough to offer me a chance to attend a workshop about "English teaching and Drama in the classroom" for free.

I also joined my contact teacher in the Nursery School to see how English is taught to young beginners. I spent 4 hours in the nursery school.

### **How did you prepare for the assistantship?**

First of all, I read "[A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR HOST SCHOOLS AND LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS](#)" to see what was expected of me and what I could expect from my host institution.

Then, I contacted my host institution, and we quickly started emailing about the specific details of my stay. We arranged my time schedule, accommodation, start and end date of my stay.

I also looked up information about my host country's educational system, I read about Venice, my host city, and I talked to a former assistant about her experiences.

Then, I started collecting brochures about my country, Denmark, and my city, Århus. I prepared a Power Point show about myself, Århus and Denmark.

I bought a couple of books about communicative activities that I used in my teaching preparation.

I also participated in the induction meeting in Copenhagen a couple of days before I left. At the meeting I learned a lot about Lifelong Learning Programme.

### **What concrete measures were undertaken upon your arrival?**

I was picked up at the airport by the Head Principal of the school. She was also the one I'd been emailing with, because my contact teacher didn't have E-mail.

We drove to the school, and I was introduced to the teachers, caretakers and secretaries. This was before school start so only a few members of the staff were at work. My contact teacher showed me around the school.

Later on, when school started, I was introduced to all the teachers, especially the English teachers, and I felt as if all teachers were happy to have me there. Everybody was very friendly and I never felt that I was left on my own.

The Head Principal had arranged for my accommodation, and after we'd had lunch at her place, she took me to the studio where I was going to stay and introduced me to her sister, who was the owner of the studio.

When school started 15 days later, I started assisting my contact teacher in her English lessons. She only taught English. I told the students about myself and Denmark and explained why I was at their school.

### **What tasks (curricular and extracurricular) did you undertake?**

I worked with 6 different teachers, and I had different tasks. But in almost every class I did Total Physical Response games. A lot of the time the students were just listening and not really doing anything, so I tried to involve all of them in games, where they didn't always have to speak, but could participate just by reacting to mine or fellow students' orders.

This was something that was used as a warming-up activity in the beginning of the lesson, but also in the end when the students could be tired and noisy. (For instance, the youngest students liked a game, where I put up pictures of different items in the class. I then asked two students to step forward, counted to three and said: "Go and find the \_\_\_\_\_. We also played this game with colours: "Find

me something \_\_\_\_, etc. The students then had to run to the item/ colour etc. and the winner got to choose a new challenger.)

I also assisted with the pronunciation. I took out a group of students and practised their lines in a play, focusing on the correct pronunciation and intonation.

Sometimes I just used the exercise book like the teacher would have done, if I hadn't been there.

And other times, I used the English lessons to teach the students about Denmark. I showed them my Power Point show and made them prepare a presentation of themselves and their countries. All in English of course.

In one class, 2. grade, we taught the students about Denmark by working with HC. Andersens "Thumbelina". I read the story, while showing pictures of the important people and things to the children. We played games that focused on vocabulary acquisition, and we made sheets with exercises.

I also went on an A.C.L.E. course in Padova with one of the English teachers. The course lasted 8 hours, and I was taught about "Drama and English in the classroom". The course gave me a lot of ideas of how to incorporate drama into English lessons.

## **Did you evaluate the progress of the assistantship with your mentor? How?**

I had meetings with my contact teacher, where we talked about the different classes and what we were going to do with them. But we didn't really evaluate my teaching. It was more of a loose talk about how things went in general.

I had most of my lessons with my contact teacher, and she told me that I was free to do whatever I wanted to in her lessons. Our working relationship was really good, and she continuously gave me feedback on my teaching. We followed the exercise book, and I played communicative and TPR games with the children.

Afterwards, I've come to think that it would have been a good idea with actual meetings concerning my teaching (as opposed to the children, the school system etc.) But at the time I didn't think that I needed it.

## **What did you learn about methods and teaching practices?**

In Italy, a lot of things are done differently, and I must admit that I rarely agreed with the methods and teachings practices that I saw.

The children spend most of their time sitting down, listening to the teacher. Or they did exercises that didn't involve any communication or required their opinion.

Another thing that I noticed was the lack of teaching differentiation. No special effort was made for those who didn't do as well as the majority – at least not in the lessons that I was in.

## **What did you learn about the educational system of the host country?**

In Italy, primary school lasts five years, and then the students are moved to secondary school where they spend three years. After that they attend high school. All of that is obligatory.

## **What did you learn about the culture and the language of the host country?**

I attended language school for two months and learned the basic grammar. But more importantly, I baby-sitted two twins about 15 hours a week, and because they didn't speak English, I quickly learned the basic Italian. The children were excellent teachers, and they did more for my language than the language school could've done.

As to the culture, it would be too far-reaching to go into details with everything, I've learned.

But one thing that I noticed about the Italian culture is the amazing network. I hadn't been in Venice for more than a couple of days before I started making friends. Everybody's eager to introduce you to family members, friends etc., and I ended up with a big circle of friends and acquaintances. Before going to Venice, I was a bit nervous that I would get lonely, but luckily the Italian hospitality prevented that from happening.

Another noticeable thing about the Italian culture is the lack of efficiency. A lot of things took forever and were done in complicated ways. I learned about patience as I had to wait almost every time I wanted something done. For instance, getting enrolled for my Italian course was quite an accomplishment as it involved several trips to the bank, the copy centre and the University.

I lived with a family, and that is definitely an advantage if you want to learn about the culture. They took me to birthdays, showed me how religious holidays are celebrated, etc. They showed me how daily life in an Italian family can be, and made sure that I was not just a tourist during my four months stay.

### **What was the impact of the assistantship on your language competences and teaching skills?**

I've definitely improved my English, not because of the teaching, but because I spoke English every day with my friends.

One of the best things has been the impact on my teaching skills. Because I couldn't speak Italian, I was forced to make English the "classroom language" – always. And that has taught me that it is possible to teach English only by using the target language without the use of the student's mother tongue. I've become better at using body language in the class and at finding lots of different ways to explain the same thing.

And, whether I agree with their methods or not, I've learned a lot from teaching alongside more experienced teachers. Even when I disagreed with a method, I learned something new, because I realised how I would've done it differently.

### **In your opinion, what did the pupils and the host school learn from you in terms of:**

A) Mother tongue

In some of the classes I taught the student a few basic sentences in Danish or I taught them a nursery rhyme, but I don't think that they will be able to remember a lot in a couple of months.

B) The culture of your home country

I showed the students a power point show about Denmark. We talked about the climate, the political system, the royal family, the currency, the capital, the flag, the population, H.C. Andersen, Legoland, sports, young people in Denmark and Århus.

I think that they've got an idea of what Denmark is like, but it's difficult to say how much they've learned. Especially in the Secondary School, the students were very interested in hearing about my country and me. Sometimes, entire lessons were spent on that subject. I tried to point out both similarities and differences.

### C) Methods and teaching practices

I hope that the teachers have learned from my methods and teaching practices. Especially, it would be good for them to see that it is actually possible to play games with the students or do things that you as a teacher cannot control 100 percent. I tried to give the students some of the responsibility, like letting them conduct a game, ask their fellow students questions etc.

### **In your opinion, what did the community learn from you?**

I lived about 3 km away from my school. It was situated in Campalto and I lived in Venice. But in Venice I rented a studio, owned by an Italian family. I think both the kids and the mother in that family benefited from speaking English with me on a daily basis. Also, I told them about Denmark, and they might be visiting me this summer.

I'm not sure that the community in Campalto learned anything from me.