

Experience of a language assistant in Karlsruhe

My time in Germany is being very good. It is an experience I will never forget. I am constantly pushed beyond my own personal boundaries, forced to expand my horizons and learn about a foreign culture and share parts of my own culture that are foreign to German high school students. Although it is difficult and at times frustrating, I would definitely do it again and feel this experience has enriched me as a person and fostered the understanding of two distinct cultures, that of the Germany and Spain.

While many of my friends have been placed in bilingual elementary or adult language schools, my role in my school differs somewhat and includes many discussions of Spanish culture because as teenagers, the students in our school are interested in what Spanish do on a daily basis, more so than the younger elementary school students and older adults. They want to know what I do with my friends, what my house looks like, what a typical day is like for me in my region and even Spanish slang terms they have heard on TV or in movies. For many activities, I try to personalize things and make it more relevant to them. We also do songs in class that they are familiar with hearing like pop songs that expressed certain grammatical forms that they were working on in class. Students constantly had questions about Spanish food, movies and music and so it is fun to be able to talk to them about their perceptions of our country and be able to sometimes deter stereotypes or tell them something new they didn't know before.

My year abroad far exceed my expectations, and I have been able to make connections with German friends and teachers and learn about their culture and way of life. While many things differ from our own culture, this year is helping me to broaden my own horizons as well as share my own culture with young students of Germany. While I had not expected to teach subjects like math and computer design (I assumed we would all be teaching Spanish only) this experience was interesting as well. Math is certainly not one of my strengths but this class is a learning experience for me as well, as I had to brush up on my math skills which I haven't used since high school. Of course, my classroom role in each class differ based on the subject matter and teacher. Some teachers preferred more of an interactive role while others liked to have a larger part in the lesson.

For German people, we sang songs and did other cultural activities, but for Math and Computer design it is more difficult to always include cultural information as these are more straightforward subjects. However, we played games like “Battleship” and other activities to incorporate Spanish into the subject matter in a fun way.

Of course, life outside the classroom in our city is enriching as well and lent us a look into the local culture of Germany. We are able to converse with locals, speak about their opinions of others Spanish, and help to eliminate some stereotypes. This year is for me a cultural exchange, and proves to be more than just teaching for 12 hours per week in our high school. I think that they will be nine months of getting to know a new culture and share parts of my own culture I take for granted - in addition to sharing my native language with young people in Germany. I only hope that they learn as much from me as I do from them, and that I somehow shape their view of the Spain and contributed to their learning of the Spanish language.