

Language Assistant Programme

by Fabian Prolingheuer, German LA 2015

"Guten Tag! Ich heiÙe Fabian. Ich bin 25 Jahre alt. Und ich komme aus Deutschland. Understood* Cool!" (This word is used a lot in German.)

And now you: ... (you will probably need words like "Neuseeland" [nɔɪːzeːlant] or "England" [ˈɛŋlant]). Quite good, try again to say "ich"; the "ch" is like the whispered "y" in "you," with a constantly flowing airstream. Sehr gut—very good!

A typical situation in my job, taken from the beginnings of Year 9: language modelling, language support, coaching in language use. For the school year 2014, I work in four Auckland high schools for one day a week each, up to four periods a day. During the six months that I have spent here so far, I gained a lot of experience and have enjoyed working with the students very much. On junior level, grammar practices are probably my most common duty. Therefore, I usually take the students out in small groups to repeat and reinforce correct verb forms and to talk about the time or their pets. But also real conversation practice, such as talking about holiday activities or favourite movies, is a frequent issue. Being an active musician, I always keep an eye, or rather, an ear on aspects like pronunciation, intonation, and word and speech rhythm, attempting to shape a natural accent rather than some form of recital of what they have learned from the books. For these aspects of language, I was given the chance to try out some things with a group of largely international students, all Year 9 boys that grew up speaking Asian languages. After only a few sessions, in which I drew on music as a help for learning the language, e.g. by using rhythmic activities or taking it as an underlying, motivational sub-text, all of them showed good improvement in their German speaking and reading ability. In another Year 9 project (3rd year of German, though), I got the chance to experiment with pre-step forms of CLIL in teaching a very musical German class by setting up a rehearsal of a current German pop song. All these experiences are highly motivating for me and provide a great bridge between my recent studies in ESOL (that German assistants have to hold a MA degree in to apply for NZ) and Music Education, and the teacher training that I will face back in Germany. Other activities on junior level include quizzes or games, which I often prepare myself or with the help or material of a teacher.



My major focus, however, is on the students at senior level. Beside regular conversation practice, as on junior level, the range of activities is even further spread. Sometimes, the students need help with or supervision of their writing, at other times, I can share with them German views of current ethical, such as abortion, or political issues, such as mass surveillance, which especially in the latter case often differ significantly from NZ opinions. Facts about Germany and German culture are discussed, and also on this level, I bring many cultural elements to the classroom, from current German literature (e.g. Marc-Uwe Kling, Die Känguru-Chroniken ("The Kangaroo Chronicles")) to songs (e.g. Cro or Wise Guys) to videos (e.g. Lorient or documentaries on the North Sea region). Before the winter holidays, we even managed to cook authentic "Fischbrötchen" (Northern German fish rolls) and "Pommes/Currywurst" (curry sausage and chips) in two classes—a great experience for both the students and me, as I do not get these "delicacies" too often here...

Within the four schools, I assist nine German teachers overall. This is really interesting, as I can observe many different teaching styles and pick out the aspects that I find appropriate for my own teaching. I learn new methods and get access to a range of teaching materials, which in the case of pictures and flashcards will even be useful for my English classes back in Germany. In some cases, the relationship can even be seen as a giving and taking one, although I would not have expected that, as they have (in the majority) decades of experience. But as they are open for new ideas and approaches, they give me some space to experiment as well, which is very helpful for me (a big thank you to all of you, if you are reading this!). And with the bonus of the native speaker and of being grown up in the target culture, I can contribute to their teaching, cultural knowledge and language support as well.

Talking about my living experiences, I can clearly say that I enjoy being here a lot. I like the friendliness and open-mindedness of the people here and have done a few trips so far, which led me to Wellington, the Northland, Matamata and Coromandel, and most recently to Rotorua. While I have tried to learn some bits of Te Reo Māori since I arrived in NZ, there, I got the first cultural experience with the people. In my free-time, I enjoy walking in the Waitakere Ranges, which I have done a few times with my new friends already, and also on my own, which turned out to be somewhat adventurous. With my flatmates, I have had an amazing beach trip and several barbecues, and watched many of the German matches of the Soccer World Cup. Due to all these experiences (and with the recent final in mind), I will start the second half of my year with enthusiasm and confidence.

*If not: no worries, here is the translation... "Good afternoon! My name is Fabian. I am 25 years old. And I come from Germany.