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From a semester abroad to working as a student assistant

How Stockholm broadened my pedagogical perspective

The internationalisation of teacher training is becoming increasingly important in our globalised world. As a prospective primary school teacher specialising in German, mathematics and Islamic religion, I had the unique opportunity to spend a semester abroad at Stockholm University in Sweden in the summer semester of 2022. This semester did not only enrich me academically but also had a lasting impact on my subsequent work as a student assistant in the IMPACCT project. In the following, I would like to reflect on my experiences in Stockholm and show how they have significantly influenced my work in the project.

My decision to spend a semester abroad in Stockholm was facilitated by the IMPACCT project, an innovative programme that prepares student teachers for the challenges and opportunities of a heterogeneous classroom. In Stockholm, I immersed myself in an education system characterised by openness, innovation and a strong intercultural focus. The university actively encouraged exchange between students from different cultures, which resulted in a vibrant and diverse learning environment.

One formative experience was participating in a practical course on intercultural pedagogy. In this practical course, various models and theories were presented that emphasised the importance of cultural diversity in the educational process. I learnt how cultural differences in the classroom can not only be taken into account but actively used as an asset. Through case studies and group work, this practical course raised my awareness of the specific needs of students from different cultural backgrounds and showed me practical ways to promote inclusion and equal opportunities in the classroom.

In addition, living in Sweden allowed me to familiarise myself with the country's language, history and culture. I took part in traditional festivals such as the Midsummer Festival, visited museums such as the Vasa Museum and explored historical sites. My regular exchange with local students and fellow international students deepened my understanding of a multicultural society and the importance of openness and tolerance. These intercultural experiences not only broadened my personal horizons but also provided valuable inspiration for my teaching practice.

After returning to Justus Liebig University, Giessen, I started working as a student assistant on the IMPACCT project in the winter semester of 2023. My main task was to accompany and support future outgoing students. I was able to draw directly on my own experiences to help others prepare for their semester abroad. I supported them by answering organisational questions, helped them choose suitable courses and gave them tips on living and studying abroad.

The intercultural skills I had gained abroad proved invaluable for this job. I organised meetings and informative events where I gave practical tips and prepared students for possible challenges, such as cultural adjustment difficulties, language barriers or bureaucratic hurdles. I also promoted dialogue between former and future exchange students in order to create a supportive network in which experiences could be shared and questions answered.

Another focus of my work was public relations work for the IMPACCT project. In seminars and lectures, I gave presentations about my experiences and was available to answer questions. I created posts for social media such as Instagram to pique students' interest. My authentic reporting about my time in Stockholm, including photos and personal anecdotes, helped to emphasise the importance of international mobility in the teacher training programme and to dispel any fears or reservations.

My experiences in Stockholm had a direct influence on my work for the IMPACCT project. Through the semester abroad, I developed a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with studying abroad. These include adapting to a new system and dealing with cultural differences. This understanding helped me to better recognise students' needs and offer them targeted support. Understanding different communication styles, values and norms is essential to avoid misunderstandings and facili-

tate successful interactions. I used these insights in my meetings to prepare the students not only professionally but also personally for their stay abroad. For example, we discussed cultural differences in teaching and learning methods or dealing with authorities.

My time in Sweden also helped me to react flexibly and creatively to new situations. Whether it was communicating in a foreign language, overcoming unexpected challenges in everyday student life or finding my way around a new city, adaptability was always required. These qualities were not only essential for my work for the IMPACCT project but will also be of great benefit to me as a future teacher. The problem-solving skills I strengthened abroad proved to be a valuable resource in my project work and will also help me in my future career to respond to the individual needs of my students.

The combination of a semester abroad and subsequent project work was extremely enriching for my personal and professional development. I now feel better prepared to manage a diverse classroom and to cater to students from different cultural backgrounds. My intercultural experiences have had a lasting impact on my pedagogical approach, diversified my teaching methods and heightened my sensitivity to diversity. I am convinced that these skills will be invaluable in everyday school life in order for me to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Working as a student assistant also enabled me to actively contribute to the internationalisation of the teacher training programme. It was extremely fulfilling to see how my work helped others to have similar positive experiences and develop their own intercultural competences. I am convinced that projects such as IMPACCT make an important contribution to equipping future teachers for the demands of a diverse society and thus increasing the quality of the education system as a whole.

In conclusion, I can say that my journey from Stockholm back to university has come full circle. The experiences I gained abroad have enriched my work for the project, and working as a student assistant has enabled me to pass these experiences on to others. I hope that I can continue to help promote internationalisation in education in the future and inspire others to take advantage of the opportunities offered by a semester abroad, because only by living international experiences can we as teachers contribute to promoting an open, tolerant and diverse society.

