Student Exchange Report

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<th>Exchange Period</th>
<th>☑ Autumn Semester 2016 ☑ Spring Semester 2016</th>
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<td>Home University</td>
<td>National Institute of Education, Singapore</td>
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<td>Home Country</td>
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<td>School Level</td>
<td>Secondary I</td>
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<td>Start of your studies</td>
<td>☑ Autumn Semester 2016 ☑ Spring Semester 2016</td>
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<td>Contact (optional)</td>
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Before the Exchange

In the span of five weeks with the school, I wish to experience the typical Swiss Home Economics class, gain insights on the syllabus/content that are delivered to the students. I also wish to gain deeper understanding of the Swiss classroom routines and procedures. This would enable me to compare and contrast with the experiences I have in Singapore.

I have always wanted to visit Switzerland for its beautiful scenery and landscapes, especially the Alps. I chose PH Zürich as my friend who came for his exchange programme here shared with me his wonderful experience here. I also feel that living in a country's that is non-English speaking, or with a non-english first language would be good experience for me to step out of my comfort zone.

Organisation

The staff at PH Zürich were warm and welcoming during our stay here - keeping us in check with constant emails. My home University staff have been keeping in contact with me on a weekly basis to ensure our well-being.

The welcome day at PH Zürich was good - It helped to set a common ground and understanding for the ultimate aims of the practicum exchange.

The Exchange

Studies & Practicum

The classroom experience I had in Switzerland is completely different from what I had in my home country. From the class size to the classroom routines to the content delivered, there are many differences. It was an eye-opening experience to see how an entirely different education system works as well.

In general, the schools here are smaller - smaller class size and fewer teachers. In Singapore, a typical class consists of 40 students, and we can have as many as 80-90 teaching staff in one school. However, in Switzerland, the class size are generally less than 20, in the lower ability class, I have also seen less than 10 students. This is a true luxury that Singapore cannot afford due to our resource constraints. I feel that the smaller class sizes make a huge difference in teaching and learning for both teachers and students. Teachers are able to cater to the students' learning needs better - teachers can easily monitor students' progress and lessons can be easily tailored to the students' needs. The smaller class size also makes classroom management more of a breeze. Having to manage about 15 students would be less
challenging than managing 40 students at one time. With the teacher's undivided attention, students are more likely to put on their best behaviours during class time. I have not observed any disciplinary issues during class time here in Switzerland.

Also, the teachers in Switzerland has the autonomy design their lessons and plan activities for students that they believe are beneficial. They are often not bounded by a strict set of guidelines or syllabus. This is very different in Singapore, where we have a pretty fixed and strict guidelines and syllabus to follow as the students have to sit for national examinations at the end of their secondary school education.

Accommodation
I lived with a host family in Dübendorf. My accommodation was arranged by PH Zürich and I feel that the accommodation cost was very reasonable considering Switzerland's high cost of living. My experience living with the host family was great. In fact, it is one of the highlights of my stay in Switzerland. Living with a host family means I get to experience the authentic Swiss culture, lifestyle and food. Apart from that, my host family has been really warm, welcoming and generous. They even offered to drive me to places of interests and often prepared meals for me. The location was also good - very near Dübendorf Bahnhof, as well as Bahnhof Stettbach, which is really near the city of Zürich. Although, the journey to my practicum school, Fehraltorf, is not as near (takes about an hour or slightly more due to waiting time of the bus/train), my warm and lovely host family definitely made up for it.

Living in Zurich
My impression of Zürich - It is an urbanized city with rich history. There are many international brands but in the same area, the Zürich old town offers cultural and historical sights. The people in Switzerland are generally very nice and helpful, especially in the smaller towns. Although I do not speak German, language has not been a barrier for my everyday life here as most people are able to speak simple conversational English.
Places to visit in Zürich: Zürich old town, Uetliberg, Lake Zürich, Rapperswil
Places to visit outside Zürich: Appenzellerland (My host says that is the "real" Switzerland), Rheinfall, Lucern, Creux du Van, Mt. Titlis, Gruyere for the Gruyere cheese factory, Cailler chocolate factory and the old town.

After the Exchange
Administration & Conclusion
As an individual, I have certainly took a major step out of my comfort zone by being away from home for a long period. I feel that I have challenged myself and put my resourcefulness and independence to test throughout my stay here. Also, I am quite an introverted person. I have been really putting myself out to meet and get to know more people/neighbors/colleagues here. As a country is not only about its sights but its people. I am really grateful for this trip as I am about to see the world in another perspective.

As a teacher,
As a teacher, I have observed many good and effective practices here in the Swiss classrooms. For instance, in the home economics class, the students are encouraged to be independent - they are expected to work on their own with the given recipe. Students learn through their own experiments in the kitchen. In Singapore, teachers often demonstrate the skills to the students before they execute it. There
are hardly any space for their own exploration and experimentation. Hence, I would certainly love to bring these good practices when I begin my teaching career.

As much as I feel that Singapore's education system may sometimes be too fixed, and that the Swiss education system allows more freedom for both the teachers and students, the grass is always greener on the other side. However, using a Swiss approach in Singapore may not work too, as our cultures are very different. We can only try to adapt some of the practices and learn from experience.