My Amity Experience

Explorations of Educational Aspects in a Different Culture

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School: Twin Cities German Immersion School

Country: USA

in: St. Paul, Minnesota

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1. **New Perspectives - Different Surroundings**

My first days in Minnesota were exciting. Everything was new. When I went to Target and Costos with my hostdad I was overwhelmed by the big size of the building and the things you can get in there. You can get nearly everything in there, not just grocery.

Today was my first day at the Twin Cities German Immersion School (=TCGIS). The teacher, I will assist, is called Mandi Rosenthal. She is very nice, as well as the other interns. But physical education is totally different to what I am used to in Germany. Just to name some differences: Students in TCGIS do not wear sport clothes; they cannot do any gymnastics because they do not have the equipment. They do not even have their own gym. The kindergarten has its sports lessons in the school’s basement, where the children can also have their lunch. From the first to the eighth grade, the students have to go across the street, where you can find a fitness center.

2. **First Explorations of your Assignment**

The school is in an old factory building and has a playground.

![The front door of TCGIS.](image-url)
One student did a snow dog at the school's playground.

Every classroom is designed differently, which looks really nice and comfortable. What makes the atmosphere even better is that there are less than 24 students in one classroom. Each class has its own teacher and intern. They have a cafeteria in the basement, but that is the only room that feels to be cold and not comfortable.

School's Basement where kindergarten has its sports lessons and where kids are having lunch time.
There are kindergarten classes and classes up to the 8th grade. That means that students are four when they enter school and about 14 years old when they leave school.

I am assisting only one teacher, namely Mandi, as I wrote before. I will teach some lessons in physical education. If I am not teaching on my own, I will help Mandi to teach the students. The sport activities, we can do in school, are basketball, volleyball, handball, dancing and some other sport activities.

In May there will be swimming classes, taught by teachers from the fitness center.

In TCGIS there are enrolled about 320 students right now. But next year, the school will move to another place and then there will be more children enrolled.

Special about the school or even in every building is that there are always water fountains where you can drink water for free. That does not exist in Germany at all.

Another thing is special about TCGIS. The students do not get any grades for their performance in any sport activity. They just get grades in their behavior and participation manner.

3. Children of the World

I think I will work with students that are from the upper-class or at least middle-class. Some families come from the inner and some from the outer-city. Many students have at least one parent with German origin. That is very useful for the students because they are taught lots of subjects in German. As far as I can say it, the school is not that much influenced by Germany. It is just the German language that is used, but besides that you cannot find any German manners or rules.

The school is very open-minded, which means that there are all ethnic groups, for example Asian, Hungarian, German, Swedish students. Furthermore there are students with special needs. One example for that is a boy who is authist. He is integrated in the school and his class pretty good. He participates as much as he can. The integration of all ethnic groups and students with special needs is very good for the development of the student’s behavior. They learn early to respect each other, even if something is different.
4. **Inside and Outside**

The school is in an old factory building, therefore the atmosphere has to be improved by pictures, decoration and competent and nice teachers.

As I wrote before, there is no own gym which is really awful because the physical education lessons are not that good. But not because of the teacher, just because there is nearly no equipment and there is not enough time to teach the students. The Kindergarten classes take 30 minutes and the other classes take 50 minutes. From 1st to 8th grade they have physical education in the gym across the street, which you can see at the following picture.

That is the fitness center where they are having sport.
Mandi is a good teacher but because of the few minutes they have, the missing sport clothes and the equipment every lesson is the same and sometimes she is not as strict as I would be with the students. But nevertheless I think she does a great job because students like going to her lessons and do some sport. That is the most important thing.

5. **Foreign but somehow familiar? … Or perhaps not?**

On my first day in my host family we went to a target shop. It was such a big building, with so many different things in it and in such a big size that it surprised me a lot. I found out that everything is XXL in the USA. And I saw that as I thought that everything is cheaper in the USA than in Germany.
On my second day at school there was one boy whose stomach aches. He told us that his mum never serves him any breakfast or if it is just candies, the school did not do anything about it. That was shocking for me, because if I were the teacher I definitely would talk to the mother and find out if it is the truth. And if it should be truth than I would kindly ask her to make breakfast for her son because it is that important to eat properly.

My host family tries to get as many German things as they can get. They buy for example German tea from the German company “Teekanne” and they buy yoghurt from Mueller, which is also a German company. There are lots of other examples. But I just want to name a few, like they are driving a BMW, they cook German recipes and read german newspapers.
6. **Understanding Cultural Aspects**
TCGIS try to have small classes; the average is 20 students per class. Each class has a regular teacher and an intern from Germany, Suisse or Austria. They have academic rigor, which means standardized assessments have objectively measured our success in language proficiency and academic skills. These include the A2 Language Proficiency Test from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in 5th grade; the Student Oral Proficiency Assessment in 2nd grade; and the state-required Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment tests in reading, math and science in grades 3 through 8. When individual classes dip below that level of performance, classroom teachers receive active support and interventions.

The school program includes half- and full-day immersion kindergarten. English instruction begins in 3rd grade. And progressive art, music, gym, and science programs are available for each class.

The school wants to build up a strong sense of community for parents as well as children — an amazing 87% of parents volunteer in some capacity at the school. Furthermore there are introduced responsive classroom strategies that form the foundation for success in a strong academic curriculum.

Spanish language is offered in the 6th grade, making the TSGIS one of the few immersion schools in the United States to offer a third language.

7. **Sharing your Language - Sharing your Culture - How do YOU do it?**
My role in physical education is to show the students and the teacher as many German games as I can. One example is soccer. Normally, the Americans do not play soccer, but I will teach them some of it.

In my host family I am supposed to show them as many German recipes and traditions as I can – and for sure, I will do that.
8. School Structure

TCGIS is a K-8 charter school that values high academic achievement and engages each individual child through an enriched foreign-language curriculum. With the strong support of parents and community members, the school creates an environment that nurtures a child's curiosity and fosters international awareness. The vision of the school is to educate children for informed and active world citizenship. (*Andere hören, andere sehen, weltoffen denken und handeln.*)

The school's goals are:

Students who complete the program through 8th grade will be able to use their German-language skills to do school work, speak with friends and teachers, and communicate with native speakers comfortably and effectively. In addition, they will be well equipped to enter and succeed in challenging secondary school opportunities, including International Baccalaureate programs, Advanced Placement classes, College in the Schools programs, and Minnesota's Post-Secondary Enrollment Options.

Instruction in the primary grades is focused on whole child learning, emphasizing social, emotional and intellectual development. The curriculum begins with children's personal experiences and expands into how we become global citizens. The school implements multidisciplinary content topics using inquiry-based learning and authentic assessment. Teachers are trained in instructional models that consider children's developmental stages and individual learning styles. In addition, teachers differentiate instruction for all levels of learners within a class and children's socio-emotional needs are met through cooperative interaction and attention to the multiple perspectives of our diverse community and world. Community service learning is also promoted through class projects, activities, and community events.

**US Standards:** TCGIS's goal is to fulfill all Minnesota state standards in all subject areas K-8 using German and American curriculum. As children progress through each academic year, staff collaborates to clearly define standards to systematically embed them into the curriculum.

**German Standards:** As part of the immersion philosophy, and to offer students opportunities to study abroad in Germany, TCGIS uses the Baden-Wuerttemberg educational standards as a guideline for fulfilling the German curriculum K-8. Students prepare for the DSD I exam in the 5th grade and the A2 written and oral exams in the 8th grade.
The PTO, which means Parent-Teacher Organization has a great influence on the school. They are always planning parties and field trips.

9. **Children and Youth in your Community**
I live in a rich neighborhood, which is about 9 miles away from TCGIS. It’s a quiet, nice place. Many inhabitants work as doctors or attorneys.
Children can go out and play on various playgrounds. Most of their free time, they have piano lessons or any other music instrument lessons, doing sport activities and go to the church. Many of the children share a lot of time with their parents because if you want to go anywhere you have to take the car. The public transportation system is not that good.

10. **The many Forms of Family**
My host family is really nice. There are four family members, Katy (mum), Joe (dad), Amelia (daughter, 10 years old), Gretchen (daughter, 7 years old). They are spending a lot of time together, for example if they go to church or skiing together.
The parents educate their children in behaving friendly and behave themselves at the dinner/lunch table.
The atmosphere in that family is politely, quite and comfortable.
There are no special gender roles. Both, Katy and Joe do domestic work. They both take care of their children and they both go out working each day.

11. **Putting it all together!**
The time here in Minnesota, at the TCGIS and with my host family was amazing. I had so much fun, useful experiences. I learned a lot for my future and can recommend anyone such an assignment. You can gather lots of teaching experience for your future life as a teacher.
Furthermore it is such a great opportunity to live with native speakers, it gives you the chance to be fully integrated in the American society.
The whole internship showed me that you have to be flexible in your teaching career. You can prepare your lessons as good as possible, but sometimes there are happenings you cannot foresee and then you have to change your plans quickly. Moreover I learned that every student is unique and that is worth trying to integrate all of them because every individuum can help to make our society better.