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## Building Cultural Bridges – My experience as a German Immersion Languages Assistant at Ferny Grove State High School

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When I was about six years old, a teacher at my primary school in Germany asked me a question during my enrolment interview. She wanted to know what I wanted to learn at school and why. Now that I am 24, I actually can't really remember any of that interview or what I said but my parents swear that what I said was: "I want to learn English and I want to become an English teacher."

So that is what I did for the next twelve years at school and the following five years at university. At the age of ten I learned my first English words in English class. Only three years later, I read my first English novel and I definitely could have picked an easier one but my love for Harry Potter and the fact that the fifth book of the book series was not going to be published in German for another six months just made me sit down and read. At high school I also started watching my favourite TV shows and movies in English, I found pen pals from all over the world and later my travels opened up a world where I could communicate in languages other than my mother tongue. At university where I studied English and Geography, I enjoyed listening to professors from the United States, Scotland and England. They taught me how to pronounce sentences such as "This is Aunt Agatha's furniture, Margery" and how to translate computer manuals and political speeches. I absolutely loved it.

What I had done over all those years without even thinking about it was to slowly immerse myself in the English language. Today I do not translate English in my head anymore. I just understand it. When I read scientific articles, it does not make a difference whether those articles are written in my mother tongue German or



**The whole (host) family at The Best of All Lookout in Springbrook National Park**

my second language English. When I sit at the dinner table of my host family, talking about my day at Ferny Grove State High School in English feels just as natural as talking to my parents back home in Germany.

I have worked as a languages assistant at Ferny Grove SHS for almost a semester now and looking back on all the hours and weeks I had the honour to spend both with languages students and teachers, it is hard to say whether it is the students or me who learned more from having/being a languages assistant at Ferny Grove SHS. While I had the chance to extend my English skills by communicating with students, parents and teachers and the opportunity to acquire, apply and observe new teaching skills and techniques, the students had the chance to talk to a native speaker of German, get feedback on their drafts, and learn about the German culture.

The language programme at Ferny Grove SHS is very special in the sense that it offers students the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in a second or possibly third language at a very young age. Students of the German Immersion programme do not only learn the German that is used in everyday life but also the German language that is used in more academic contexts such as science, history and geography and usually not taught before students go to university. I cannot deny that I wish that my English education at school had been like that because I still find myself mightily impressed when I see how natural it seems to the German Immersion students talk to about rock cycles, Chinese emperors and fairy tales in German.



**Representing Germany and the German language with the languages staff at the Twilight Expo 2015**

Whether I gave feedback to the students, created learning materials for the classroom, worked with small groups of students, assisted in inbound and outbound language excursions or helped organising the languages camp, my time at Ferny Grove SHS has turned out to be a remarkable experience for me. I

feel highly honoured that I was given the opportunity to work with the teachers and students here at Ferny Grove SHS to help create a positive and worthwhile language learning experience.

### **Kristina Lange**

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