

A month at UWC Red Cross Nordic

By: Marloes Vrolijk

"Let's welcome our visitor like we always do!". Daniel Toa-Kwapong and the students in his D-studies classroom clapped, laughed and warmly welcomed me as a teacher trainee in their lessons. During the first ToK lesson, one of the students insisted that I would participate in the U-shaped setup instead of observing Edmund Cluett's teaching from the back of the class. A week later Narender Dalal's Global Politics students organized themselves and gave presentations about the course and the new insights they gained so far.

I am writing this reflection to firstly thank everybody (the students, the teachers, my housemates, supervisors and mentor) for an amazing time at UWC RCN. Secondly, I am writing to share my humble experience of the one month I spend in Flekke and to share the reactions I received back home when discussing the internship.

During my internship I observed, co-taught and taught lessons in the Global Politics, Development Studies and Theory of Knowledge courses. I also tried to participate in many extra academic activities and talk to teachers, staff, students and anybody else who was willing to share experiences at UWC.

Interning at UWC RCN allowed me to personally grow while teaching others. The education is more holistic compared to the forms of education I have experienced in the Netherlands. It felt natural to combine academics, music, sports and volunteering. In the Netherlands, it costs extra effort to squeeze in all these aspects into weekly life. The general commitment and positivity towards learning, studying and education at UWC RCN surprised me. Classroom management and keeping order is a main element of my teacher training while it is of minor importance at UWC RCN. This allows more time for discussing content and reaching deeper levels of understanding. Since teachers get enough freedom to choose personal teaching styles I could also practise experiential learning, concept-based teaching and classroom discussions. Other aspects which I liked most at the school are the diversity of students, the small class sizes, the long teaching blocks, the rolling timetable and the interaction and close relationships between students and teachers.

In one month I did not meet many true challenges. If I would have stayed longer I would put extra effort into building connections outside of the school. Living in a remote international community could blind me for the world beyond. Therefore, I valued activities such as the World Today events, the Ecovillage weekend and the Bergum Mottak visit. It could also be a challenge to attract guest lecturers and visitors. Luckily, during my internship, many visitors came. As an alternative to a guest lecture, we experimented with a Skype interview during

the Global Politics lesson. At times, it was challenging to choose between all the activities offered. Having a shared office helped me finding rest at these moments. I missed a shop with souvenirs for my family and friends, for instance with items which students brought from their home countries.

Having returned to the Netherlands, I realize even more what a special place UWC RCN is to me. Explaining about the schools to fellow teacher trainees and colleagues often results in amazement: about the diversity of students and staff, the location of the school, the great resources, the courses taught and the extra academic activities. Mentioning UWC also brings up stories of students who applied and got rejected more often than being accepted. Being back in the Netherlands it feels as if only a happy few are privileged enough to receive the intensive education and support at UWC. The value of my internship experience reveals itself as well while working together with fellow teacher trainees. They told me that discussing my experience of teaching a truly diverse class at UWC RCN instead of a homogenously Dutch group of students offered them new insights for their lesson preparation. Finally, I hope to have opened up the opportunity for a new collaboration between UWC Flekke and the World Teachers Programme at Leiden University. Hopefully, more teacher trainees could visit, learn from and contribute to UWC RCN in Flekke.

Both at Leiden University and my internship school my fellow teacher trainees and colleagues told me that I am starting to glow whenever Flekke is mentioned. It has been a great pleasure being part of your UWC RCN community for one month. Thank you.

Hå det Bra!