

French Immersion Programme – Stage de Nouméa

by Michelle Pinkney, Christchurch Girls High School, 2017

I heard about the Stage de Nouméa scholarship for New Caledonia several years ago, and have thought about applying several times but, with school trips planned and also family trip overseas, taking part was not a possibility. Finally, the opportunity presented itself again and I decided to apply as I had no knowledge of any French speaking country other than France. I was very fortunate to be selected as one of a group of teachers to take part in the Stage de Nouméa in April. I felt that I should really broaden my experience in order to be able to speak about other Francophone countries confidently with my students. I also think that, as French teachers, we need to constantly refresh our language skills and this scholarship was certainly an opportunity to do so with FLE sessions each morning at the University of Nouméa.

I was looking forward to staying in a host family and feeling completely immersed in both the French language and culture. Both of these expectations were fully met and my host family took their role very seriously, inviting me to family events and outings and also spending time explaining the culture and lifestyle of the island.

I was hoping to improve my French language through my homestay experience but also through the FLE classes at the university and I was not disappointed. The sessions were targeted to our level and at times demanding even for the native speakers amongst us!

I was also looking forward to working with other teachers in the group and sharing expertise. It was extremely beneficial to meet other like-minded teachers and exchange ideas and experiences. The other members of the group were such delightful people and I think we all enjoyed the opportunity to meet other French teachers from around the country and spend time together. In terms of sharing pedagogy and expertise, the stage was invaluable. I was particularly impressed with the pedagogy sessions delivered by the French National Adviser, Rosaria Campbell in the afternoons as they were engaging, informative and practical.

The highlight of the trip for me was our trip to the north of the Island. After a very moving Anzac Day memorial service at dawn in Nouméa, we headed north amidst breath-taking scenery and travelled through small towns. On our arrival in Kone we were welcomed very warmly by a school whose hospitality students had prepared traditional fare for our lunch. Afterwards we were invited into classes in local schools and were amazed by the interest which the students showed in New Zealand. It was really special to be welcomed so warmly and be able to share information about New Zealand with such enthusiastic students. A visit to a New Zealand war cemetery was a sobering moment but one much appreciated by all.

When I returned to New Zealand after my trip to New Caledonia, I felt inspired to share what I had learned with my students. They were very interested to learn about these French speaking islands so close to New Zealand and were particularly curious about the Kanak culture and SLAM; one song by Paul Wamo was so popular that many students downloaded it onto their phones and now know it by heart!

I now feel confident in my knowledge of New Caledonia, which was previously just the name of a French speaking island. It makes such a difference to how you feel about a place once you have visited it and experienced the culture, and especially once you know people who live there. I now have a connection with New Caledonia because of the people I have met and lived with; this I can share with my students.

I would absolutely recommend this stage. It opened my eyes to a French speaking culture of which I had no previous knowledge. I learned about the history of New Caledonia too, which is fascinating. The stage was hugely beneficial in terms of language immersion, language instruction, language teaching pedagogy and cultural experiences. It also gives one the opportunity to meet other teachers from around NZ from different teaching environments and créer les liens.

