

My immersive experience on the Côte d'Azur

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It is difficult to summarise the experiences and emotions I lived during this trip. It will truly stick with me, and I will now try and share why.

When I saw the opportunity to visit Nice with Francophonie as part of their *Université d'été* in the ALLNet weekly bulletin, I was intrigued. I filled in their questionnaire with no expectations and was fortunate enough to be offered a bursary for a place on their summer course. I was offered a two-week placement, but I thought the husband and children might find that a bit long, so off to Nice I went for the week at the very start of the summer holidays!



They do say that immersion is the best way to further your language, and I would whole-heartedly agree. At the end of the week, when I first spoke in English out loud, I hardly recognised my voice anymore as I my brain had truly switched into French mode. The *Université d'été* offered by Francophonie is a unique mixture of classroom-based CPD (you study 2 Modules in a week) and *Cours à ciel ouvert* where you are guided around some of the jewels of Nice and its surrounding area, while focussing on the philosophy of being a teacher. Of course, you do get some free time to visit Nice and its surroundings at your own pace and as I discovered, with newfound friends. I challenge anyone not to fall in love with the beauty of the beach of the lemon-perfumed shores of Menton or the view from the paradise gardens of the medieval town of Èze.

Firstly, when you arrive there is a very welcoming *Pot d'accueil* where you can meet French teachers from the four corners of the globe who like you, have

chosen to spend some of their summer exploring pedagogy and culture. Friendships are struck up and rich cultures are already being shared. Then, you arrive at the University for your first Module of the week. Yann, the director of Francophonie, gives a rousing speech about your participation in the programme and reminds you how quickly the week will go. You are placed in Modules that suit areas you said you were interested in. I was placed in '*Communi-action! Développer l'oral grâce au*

jeu, l'art dramatique et la musique' where we worked through lots of rich ideas for getting students engaged in talking more in the lesson.

The second Module I completed was '*Motiver vos élèves et dynamiser la classe avec le numérique*' where we looked at the latest tools available to be able to harness our students' attention and maximise their learning. There were a wide range of Modules to suit the needs of teachers and settings. My head is now full of ideas to bring to my teaching and also to share with colleagues across our wider network. The Modules were practical and engaging in addition to giving another opportunity to network with like-minded professionals from across the globe. The presenters of the Modules themselves came from around the Francophone world; it was so refreshing to hear such a wide variety of accents. I may have picked up a slight Canadian twang to my French now!



A truly distinguishing point of the week was the open-air classes. The first was in the *Vieux Nice* where we walked the sun-soaked winding streets of Nice and were enveloped by the atmosphere and the perfect blue sky. We stopped along the way to contemplate the role of the teacher and the impact that we have on our students; the future citizens of the world. Yann offered his insights, poetry reading and aptly chosen music tracks to guide us through moments of introspection and re-evaluation of our important place as teachers.



Similarly on a further outing, with the stunning backdrop of Villefranche-sur-mer, we listened to Brel and contemplated our impact as French teachers. If we could bottle the thoughts and feelings evoked, this potion would be invaluable to all those at any stage of their language teaching career. I came out feeling refreshed and with renewed purpose and pep for my return to the classroom in September.



There is something so unique about coming together with a common language to share different practice and culture. Two main highlights of the week for this were the *Soirée Méditerranéenne* where we all came together on the beach and shared food, drinks and music at sunset and the *Soirée Interculturelle* where different countries showcased aspects of their culture – lots of dancing involved of course! The connections I have made with other French teachers across the world will be lasting. Indeed, there are plans for postal/virtual exchanges between our schools and hopefully some opportunities to visit each other too. Proof that our subject is truly an opening to the world.



In summary, take the trip ! *'Ça vaut vraiment la peine !'.*