Escuela de Pedagogía en Inglés

A Glance Thrown at the British Educational System: Two Schools in North Somerset

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Abstract

This research work seeks to provide a brief overview of English schools including types of schools, the National curriculum and its subjects, the evaluation system, modern foreign languages understanding, the House System, the school discipline, and a comparison between year groupings in Chilean and English education in order to comprehend the English educational system in two schools in North Somerset, and also a critical view of a Foreign Language Assistant's work for Spanish whilst improving skills in an English speaking context.

Keywords: English educational system, English schools, Type of schools, Chilean educational system, Foreign Language Assistant

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Table of contents

Introduction

A French proverb states that "a man who knows two languages is worth two men." In the following research work, I am looking forward to making this statement real by introducing the English educational system: ways of teaching and learning in two particular contexts located in the green valleys of North Somerset, England, the United Kingdom.

To fully comprehend the educational system in both school contexts, in chapter one there will be a brief, though complete, overview of the English educational system: such as a general introduction, types of schools in England, the National curriculum and main subjects taught at schools, the importance of modern foreign languages, a comparison between year groupings in Chilean and English educational system, the evaluation system, the House system, and the school discipline.

To continue, in chapter two there is a description of two secondary schools; Clevedon School in Clevedon, and Gordano School in Portishead, and the Sixth Form at Gordano School. In short, the topics covered are: a general description, the House System, school-to-family communication, the use of high technology, extracurricular activities and

sports, the Modern Foreign Languages Department, and finally, school success or the path to improvement.

Then, a critical view on my role as a Foreign Language Assistant for Spanish is going to be described in chapter three. Issues described will be: a description of a Foreign Language Assistant's role, my work in each of the schools, the use that the Modern Foreign Languages Department makes of the Language Assistant, difficulties and achievements for Spanish, and learning opportunities to improve own skills in an English speaking context.

Finally, a conclusion of measures to be adopted by the Chilean educational system, and a balance of this experience are expected at the end of this work.

CHAPTER I: Brief review of the educational system in England

• **Introduction**

The United Kingdom government establishes that "all children in England between the ages of 5 and 16 are entitled to a free place at a state school.".

This statement seeks to ensure a whole educational system and reduce school enrollment rates that reach 100% net in primary school 2010 in England and 100% gross in secondary school 2010, plus a 5% "due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged students basically because of early or late school entrance and grade repetition.". The high enrollment rates are explained by the Education Act, section 7, chapter 56 that states:

> "7. Duty of parents to secure education of children of compulsory
>
> school age.
>
> The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him
>
> to receive efficient full-time education suitable:

(a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and

(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."

- **Types of schools**

- **Overview.**

Most of the schools in England are managed and funded by local council and/or the state . In fact, the state manages grand part of the educational system, but on the other hand independent schools are also covering much more schooling years in England & Wales institutions than they used to in previous years.

Although English educational system could be classified in several categories for its wide variety, according to funding it is basically divided into three different categories:

- Local authority maintained schools/State schools: managed by the local council or the state itself. They are free to all individuals from 5 to 18 years old.

- Public/Independent schools: managed by foundations, charities or any other independent institutions. Generally, parents have to pay a fee to apply or get in.

- Home-schooling: managed by parents and home education associations. This type of education is a tendency which promotes home education based on the belief that parents have, ultimately, the right to educate their children.

According to their selection criteria, schools are divided into:

- Comprehensive school: do not select students on the basis of academic achievement or abilities.

- Selective school: select students on the basis of academic achievement or abilities.

- **State schools.**

  - *Community schools.*

    They are administered by the local authority which recruits school staff and owns the land and buildings. Moreover, they can set the enrollment criteria.

  - *Foundation and Trust schools.*

    Foundation institutions are managed by a governing body which recruits school staff and owns the land and buildings unlike the aforementioned. Similarly, trust schools are run by a governing body; nevertheless, they do it together with an outside body that could be a charity or business.

  - *Voluntary-aided schools.*

These types of schools are also known as faith, religious or church schools. Such schools are administered by a governing but unlike foundation schools, land and buildings are owned by a faith or religious group. They should have more freedom to decide, but it is just an administrative issue rather than educational.

- *Voluntary-controlled schools.*

In the same way as community schools do, the local authority recruits the staff and establishes the enrollment criteria. Ergo, land and buildings are owned by a church or a charity such as faith schools work.

- *Grammar schools.*

Grammar schools have been present since the early starts of history of education in the United Kingdom. Currently, they are not as expanded as they used to be in previous years.

Grammar schools are managed by the council, a foundation body or a trust. An exam is taken to enter.

- **Public/Independent schools.**

- *Academies.*

These are institutions funded by the government, but independent at the same time. In addition, they are partially maintained by other sponsors such as

business, voluntary or faith groups. The same admission rules must be followed as in state schools.

- ***City Technology Colleges.***

    Institutions administered directly by the Department of Education and not by the local authority. These secondary schools are specially focused on developing skills in science, technology and mathematics.

- ***Special schools.***

    Special educational needs (SEN) is a programme funded by the government. There are special schools to assist students with mental or physical learning disabilities. Nevertheless, according to the United Kingdom regulations, all schools must have a SEN co-ordinator and there are specific requirements for those educators as cited:

    > "(2) The requirements in this paragraph are that the SENCO—
    >
    > (a) is a qualified teacher (1),
    >
    > (b) if required to complete an induction period under regulations made under section 19 of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998(2), has satisfactorily completed such an induction period, and
    >
    > (c) is working as a teacher at the school."

Therefore, the State is concerned with the inclusion of students with special needs not only by integrating them in special schools with the same aim, but also trying to get them into a regular school system .

- ***Free Schools.***

They are a newly established type of school just in 2010. Although, free schools are funded by the government they have more control over administration since local authority/council is not involved. They have got special faculties to manage their finances and set teachers' salaries.

They are set up whether by charities, faith groups, educators, universities or parents.

- ***Private schools.***

Private or independent schools are paid institutions; therefore, they are not funded by the government.

All private schools must be inspected by the School Inspection Service in their corresponding areas.

- **The National Curriculum**

The educational system is based on the 'National Curriculum' for England & Wales only, since Scotland and North Ireland have got one of their own.

Most of the state schools have to follow the National Curriculum, but academies and other institutions could follow a different one.

Faith schools are also attached to governmental management, but associated to a particular religion. For that reason, faith schools are allowed to change the curriculum for religious subjects.

On the other hand, free schools follow a completely different pattern. They are quite independent and are allowed to write their own curriculum.

In *Chart 1* below, we can see an overview of schools that follow the National Curriculum in England & Wales, and others that do not:

Chart 1 – Comparison of the National Curriculum in England

STATE SCHOOLS	NATIONAL CURRICULUM	PUBLIC SCHOOLS	NATIONAL CURRICULUM
Community schools	Follow	Academies	Do not follow
Foundation schools	Follow	City technology colleges	Follow, but specialise in technology subjects
Trust schools	Follow	Special schools	Follow, but specialise in SNE subjects
Voluntary aided or faith schools	Follow all, but religious education	Free schools	Do not follow
Voluntary controlled schools	Follow	Private schools	Do not follow
Grammar schools	Follow		

- **National curriculum and its subjects.**

The National curriculum is made up of twelve subjects. Compulsory subjects for all students from 5 to 16 years old are English, Mathematics and Science. Nevertheless, through the curriculum we can realize there is much more emphasis placed on science than language. One such evidence is the fact that they have a lot of laboratories for science and technological resources. When talking about communication or language subjects in English, the emphasis is placed on drama and literature, rather than writing or grammar.

The other important subjects studied at schools are:

- Art & Design

- Citizenship

- Drama

- Design & Technology

- Geography

- History

- Information & Communication Technology

- Modern Foreign Languages

- Music

- Physical Education

- Religious Education(optional)

- ***Modern Foreign Languages in England.***

  The main languages taught in England in order of importance are French, Spanish, and then German. There are also other languages taught but not as spread as the aforementioned: Italian, Mandarin, Russian, Japanese, Urdu and Bengali.

  Languages are not compulsory in primary schools; hence schools offer foreign languages as a club, extracurricular activities or as part of their curriculum in private schools. Parents are asked whether they want their children to be taught or not.

  In secondary education, foreign languages are compulsory, but the specific language can be selected by students' or by parents' advice. In fact, in

key stage 3 students have one language, and in key stage 4 they could have two or three different languages.

- **Year groupings**

In the following table (*Chart 2)*, an explanation and a comparison of year groupings by age, stages, and years of obligatory attendance to school in England & Wales and Chile are listed below:

Chart 2 – Comparison of year groupings between England & Wales and Chile

AGE	STAGES	YEAR GROUPING	OBLIGATORY ATTENDANCE	AGE	STAGES	YEAR GROUPING	OBLIGATORY ATTENDANCE
3		Nursery	non-compulsory	3		Jardin Infantil	non-compulsory
4-5	Key stage 1 - Primary	Reception class	compulsory	4		Prekinder	non-compulsory

	school						
5-6		Year 1	compulsory	5		Kinder	compulsory
6-7		Year 2	compulsory	6-7	Primary school	Primero Básico	compulsory
7-8	Key stage 2	Year 3	compulsory	7-8		Segundo Básico	compulsory
8-9		Year 4	compulsory	8-9		Tercero Básico	compulsory
9-10		Year 5	compulsory	9-10		Cuarto Básico	compulsory
10-11		Year 6	compulsory	10-11		Quinto Básico	compulsory
11-12	Key stage 3 - Secondary school	Year 7	compulsory	11-12		Sexto Básico	compulsory
12-13		Year 8	compulsory	12-13		Septimo Básico	compulsory
13-14		Year 9	compulsory	13-14		Octavo Básico	compulsory
14-15	Key stage 4	Year 10	compulsory	14-15	Secondary school	Primero Medio	non-compulsory
15-16		Year 11	compulsory	15-16		Segundo Medio	non-compulsory
16-17		Year 12	non-compulsory	16-17		Tercero Medio	non-compulsory
17-18		Year 13	non-compulsory	17-18		Cuarto Medio	non-compulsory
		Higher education			Higher education		

In most parts of Great Britain, especially in England & Wales, the same school years are shared. In other parts of the United Kingdom, such as Scotland and Northern Ireland, there are different stage patterns to group students.

According to *Chart 2*, we can acknowledge that there are several factors that allow students to have better learning opportunities in the English educational system. First of all, children start compulsory primary school at the age of 4 there, in contrast to the educational system in Chile where children start at the age of 6. Then, compulsory secondary school is finished at 16 years old in England, and 14 years old in Chile.

Back to the English system, I mentioned foreign languages were not compulsory in primary school there. Thus, I would consider that language theories have not been taken into account regarding the National Curriculum for second

language acquisition in England. What I mean is that the younger you are, the easier it is to acquire a second language, because there is a lower affective filter. In addition, according to Brown: "if a child has already learned one second language in childhood then affectively, learning a third language as an adult might represent much less of a treat".

In my opinion, I consider that all students should have a bigger amount of foreign languages sessions in both Chile and the United Kingdom; that is, more schooling years to learn, even from primary school. However, that is not all; quality must be also taken into account.

Fortunately, the English government has realized not only that it is one of the latest countries to start teaching foreign languages compared to the rest of Europe, but also it is concerned about the gap left between private and state education.

In 2014, there will be a change in the National Curriculum in the United Kingdom that will make foreign languages mandatory from age 7.

• **Testing.**

Tests are taken all throughout the semester. High standard tests are used for the purpose of validity and reliability. There are educational charities in charge of preparing, and sometimes also taking tests at schools. Some of these well-known institutions in educational background are *Aqa* and *Edexcel*.

Depending on the school type, the main tests taken for foreign languages are FCSE (Foundation Certificate of Secondary Education), GCSE (General Certificate of

Secondary Education), and GCE A-Level (General Certificate of Education Advanced Level).

- **FCSE (Foundation Certificate of Secondary School).**

    FCSE exam for Spanish was designed to evaluate learning at schools in levels 4, 5 or 6 according to the National Curriculum in order to help missing the gap before GCSE.

    The award levels given with this test are Pass, Merit, and Distinction.

    Productive and receptive language skills are covered in this test. Those are speaking, writing, reading and listening.

- **GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education).**

    GCSE exam for Spanish is basically the continuity of FCSE. These kinds of tests are used to evaluate all language skills in Spanish and being able to understand the culture of countries where the language is spoken in.

    The structure of the evaluation is 60 per cent controlled assessment, and 40 per cent for assignments.

    These tests are taken in year 11 and counts as a baccalaureate for GCSE students.

- **GCE A-Level (General Certificate of Education Advanced Level).**

    GCE A-Level or A-Level exam for Spanish is a highly standardized evaluation and it is accepted by most universities.

This examination is taken as a continuity of GCSE, and starts in year 12 and finishes in year 13, (AS and A2) years in which students are also undertaking other three or four A-Level subjects at the same time. This makes the process really stressful and hard. At the end of each year an exam is taken for all language skills.

- **An evaluation system focused on test success.**

Standardized exams, such as the ones mentioned in previous paragraphs, are highly reliable and valid. But on the other hand, we have to admit they basically focus on final test success or product achievement rather than measuring the whole learning process.

These kinds of evaluations do not really reflect a learning process which will probably lead students to splendid marks, but not to real learning.

I am not refusing to admit the learning process is present, but process-oriented assessment would be much more beneficial in lessons, rather than product-oriented evaluation.

- **House System: Be part of us!**

The House System is a student becoming part of another group of students in the same school. Depending on the school, there could be two or more Houses. Most comprehensive schools (where a student is not selected by academic achievements) are using this method.

This system is a way of rewarding students for their good behaviour, marks, assignments, manners, attitude, or anything that could be considered to be rewarded. In

such manner, every time a student behaves well, the house which he is part of will get points, and at the end of the school week, month or year the winning House will receive a prize, or a celebration will be organized for them.

Besides, there is a balanced selection of students to be placed in a house. Dierenfield (1975) says the idea is to maintain a balance of age and physical or cognitive abilities. Selection criteria are established by head teacher, deputy head teacher or head of houses. .

Basically, this method was introduced due to the greater amount of students in comprehensive schools, and the concern of schools about how to make students feel welcomed, and also in order to control behaviour situations.

This so-called "pastoral care" is really effective to encourage team group, personal improvement, and group care, rather than individual.

The effectiveness of this system is explained by school participants as quoted below:

"We're using the house system to encourage pupils to invest in the life of the school - rather than treating the school as an enemy". Mark Morrell, head teacher .

- **School policies**

  - **Detention system or management of students' behaviour.**

    Detention system is practiced in England. Essentially, a detention is a punishment for a bad behaviour. It could be assigned by a subject's teacher, tutor teacher or even support staff. A detention could be explained as a moment when a student confined to an isolated room and is kept there, similarly to what detentions

at prisons are about. On the other hand, there are certain rules a teacher must follow to give a detention. Firstly, teachers must establish clear regulations. Secondly, he must give one or two warnings before giving the punishment. Finally, if a student disobeys the warning, he must be punished. Nevertheless, the drawback of the system is that in most of the cases teachers forget about warnings and detentions are given because the student talked once during classes, moved or even by not doing anything at all.

Detentions could be accomplished during break, lunch time, after school or even on Saturdays, although this last practice is not quite spread.

The similarities of the detention method with prison system make us reflect upon the educational perception of individuals. Even though, we cannot deny this system is quite effective in pupils' behaviour, there must be a mark left in them we cannot spot now.

- **Safety system.**

Whenever a teacher has to enter school, he must show his identification card that was given when hired. Otherwise, he should wear a 'visit card' until the card is ready to be used. This identification card will be used or not to enter school

facilities and open doors. Some students also hold this identification card to enter or leave the school.

Teachers are not allowed to take pictures or videos from students unless it is for educational purposes. If the pictures are going to be published there must be parent's permission and school authorization.

CHAPTER II: School contexts: 'Clevedon School' and 'Gordano School'

- **Clevedon School: The Travel from 'Weak' to 'Outstanding'**

Illustration 1 – Clevedon Pier at dusk.

Clevedon School is a co-educational academy, and also a comprehensive school. It is located in the Swiss Valley of Clevedon, close to the coastline and surrounded by woodland in North Somerset, England, the United Kingdom. This large secondary school has got pupils from the age of 11 to 18, including Sixth Form. It had 1224 pupils in 2012.

The school has improved a lot since 2004, year in which a new head teacher, John Wells, was hired and the school was judged as having 'serious weaknesses'. Finally, in 2012 the school was transferred to academy status in order to provide better learning and teaching conditions.

In 2011, it was judged as 'Outstanding' by the Ofsted school inspection for 2011/2012.

The main members of the staff are: John Wells, Headteacher; Gareth Beynon, Deputy Headteacher; and Jim Smith, Deputy Headteacher and author of "The Lazy Teacher's Handbook: How your students learn more when you teach less."

There are at least 80 teacher staff members, and 60 support staff members. Actually, it is quite a lot if we think about the correlation between the number of pupils and the teacher staff; especially, if we compare the Chilean educational system in which the teaching staff has to work many hours and with different age groups for only one subject. The comparison leads to extremely disproportionate rates and becomes a matter of concern in our society.

Illustration 2 – Headmaster of Clevedon school with students of different Houses.

There is a House System within the school designated by colours: Conygar (red), Marine (blue), Valley (green) and Walton (yellow). As an endorsement to the house system, students have to wear a uniform designed with colour distinction for every house. Regulations about the wear of the uniform at school are very rigorous. No make-up, jewellery, fancy hairstyles or accessories must be used or worn inside the establishment.

Part of the school progress is due to this house system that made students be effectively aware of their learning, and that managed behaviour situations. The reason is explained by the fact that most of students are really competitive, or possibly, they have become more competitive after being part of this method.

This school holds a Vertical House System in which a teacher is the leader of a group of students across the age range from 7-11. This kind of pastoral organisation is very helpful and welcomed by the parents because just one individual is in charge of their pupils.

On the other hand, it could be a quite demanding work because that teacher has to contact every other subject's teacher who the student had a problem with.

The communication between family and school is really effective. In fact, the parents of the school have got the contact details of every teacher, and staff members. Tutor teachers get in touch with parents, and send reports or comments about their children whenever it is necessary by e-mail or text message. The so-called program in use is Schoolcomms. Besides, there is a fortnightly school newsletter reporting pupils' achievements, news or announcements; and a there is also a school radio.

In the case of a teacher's absence, students have the opportunity to spend the lesson in a fully-equipped classroom with computers and areas to work on. This classroom is named 'Discovery Centre'.

Furthermore, Clevedon School wants to build up digital leaders in the use of technology. Consequently, the recent use of 3D printing technology, and implementation of a project(i-clevedon) with high technological iPads with educational applications have been carried out at the school to provide better learning tools for studying. This experience has been really successful for learning purposes.

Illustration 3 – Students playing hockey in the field.

Currently, there is a huge sports centre for the community, which has vast playing fields for different activities. In fact, there is special attention paid to promote a healthy lifestyle through sports shown in the curriculum as extracurricular activities such as athleticism, cricket, basketball, badminton, hockey, and football, among others. In addition, in most of these activities students have inter-house or local competitions throughout the year, and competitors have won several prices by representing the school whether locally or nationally. Students also have the opportunity to go abroad to develop new skills. Moreover, part of the extracurricular activities, the establishment has got clubs for art, drama, dance, orchestra, jazz band, football, basketball, netball, hockey, squash, technology, discussion about human rights, and modern languages clubs for English, French, Italian, and Spanish. These activities are very useful for students because they help them to keep involved, and improve in one or more of their subjects.

Other evidence from school success is the fact that outcomes and lessons are clearly targeted. As an innovative school, they have earned reputation for ensuring student focused achievement, and presenting clearly learning outcomes and final check for learning in every lesson. Throughout the year, there are learning seminars organised by the community; and even external speakers are brought to run coaching sessions for students in order to improve their learning strategies using a more effective focus.

As a school, students also participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme that awards adolescents for attempting new activities and integrating themselves with their local community.

Illustration 4 - Older students doing a Duke of Edinburgh's award presentation.

As a comprehensive school, this institution runs an integration programme for SEN individuals. This program is held by the Department of Student's Support in which students are integrated in a programme. Most of the students that attend this centre inside school have extra lessons for English and mathematics, basically in early years until no further help is needed. The classroom environment in Student's Support is all air-conditioned for students not just having cognitive/physical skills difficulties, but also for students suffering other problems that could affect learning achievement such as bullying, abuse, phobias or any psychological implication.

Illustration 5– All the Foreign Languages Department at Clevedon School April, 2013. I am the one in the middle.

The Modern Foreign Languages Department (MFL) at Clevedon School is student focused achievement for languages, and a vertically organised Department. Several

languages are taught there; such as French, German, Spanish and also a little of Italian. To encourage language learning, there are programmes run by the Department such as "The European Day of Languages", "The Independence Day of Mexico", "The German Exchange", and the annual visit to Paris for students who study French. There are three teachers of Spanish Ms. C. Colvin, Subject Co-ordinator of MFL; Ms. T. Melgar, Spanish and French teacher from Spain; Mrs. P. Zotarelli, Spanish, French and Italian teacher from Italy; Mr. D. Velasco, French and Spanish teacher from Spain; Ms. E. Skiffington, French and German teacher from England, and Mrs. A. Rutherford French and German teacher from Wales.

2. Gordano School: high level achievements through innovative learning

Illustration 6 – Gary Lewis, Gordano School's Headmaster and some students starring and laughing.

Gordano School is a co-educational academy and has earned a long-established popularity in North Somerset for its vast academic results due to high standards. Older than Clevedon School, it was created in 1956. It is located in Gordano, Portishead; a coastal town in North Somerset, England. This secondary school has got pupils from the age of 11 to 18, including sixth form. It had 1913 pupils in 2012.

This establishment has vast infrastructure, resources and teaching/support staff to provide high educational standards. However, by 2007 this school was just judged as 'good' for the inspection service Ofsted. By 2012, a new report was submitted, and in this opportunity, school was found 'outstanding'.

In 1999, the school was given the award of Specialist Schools Technology College.

Among others, the school has won the following awards: Investors in People, Leading Edge School, European Award for Languages, Training School, Arts Mark, Technology College and Sport England.

The members of the staff are Gary Lewis, Headteacher; Rod Bell, Deputy Headteacher; and, Tom Inman, Deputy Headteacher. There are more than 130 teaching staff members and 67 support staff members. Every day in early in the morning, there will

be a briefing in which the Headmaster and the Department's Heads are going to give news or talk about students' achievements, school projects or to remind something important that should be done to other members of the staff. Such amount of teaching staff gathered with the Headteacher every morning makes a difference in the school system.

Illustration 7 – Gordano School's students

There is a House System working at school which consists of six houses which are named after shipping areas in England: Lundy, Fitzroy, Portland, Cromarty, Shannon, and Biscay. Unlike at Clevedon School, uniform is equal for everyone, and as a consequence, there is not visual distinction of students' Houses integration.

As a result of discipline management policies (*see Appendix A*), this school has a good reputation on student's behaviour. In fact, in last Ofsted report in April 2012 inspectors seemed very surprised for the good students' behaviour and their participation during the lessons. All the staff appears to be very organised and aware of discipline management rules at school, and what's more the students themselves. A form must be filled, and a compromise must be signed by student and parent when entering to school. As well, students are aware of a point system which will be discounted every time they bad behave. This way of thinking is managed by a form that faces 'actions lead to consequences.' (*See Appendix A,2*)

Teaching focus is also very important at Gordano School. Students are taught to spot which type of learners they are. Lessons are really challenging, interactive and fun; especially with the use of interactive boards. Teachers are going to do anything to plan a fun lesson. Even if they are required to dress up for a lesson, they will do it.

Illustration 8 – Teacher dressed up for a lesson to promote reading at MFL Department.

The Sixth Form at the school has around 400 students, and a lot of resources. Furthermore, it has been categorized as the best in North Somerset and one of the highest achieving by the Times and Guardian lists.

Students can use the sports centre to practice extracurricular activities (*See Appendix B*).

Illustration 9 – Students playing in the Sports Centre fields.

　　　　Other events are planned throughout the year to raise money for charities, concerts and films; including the European Day of Languages with competitions about languages or general knowledge. Students are invited to be leaders at the establishment through these events. There are exchanges and trips to Spain, France and Germany twice a year.

Illustration 10 – Christmas meal with the MFL Department and all the teaching staff.

　　　　The MFL department is composed of a fully-equipped staff; Mr. C. Pugh, Head of Department; teachers of Spanish, Ms. Barbara Sciarrino, Ms. A. Howell, Mrs. C. Maggs; three teachers of French, and three other teachers of German. Most of them are native speakers of the main languages taught, but whether English or target language is quite good.

CHAPTER III: Being a Language Assistant for Spanish,
and improving your English at the same time

•   **Being a Foreign Language Assistant**

A Foreign Language Assistant is the one who practice oral conversation in the target language, creating all kind of interesting material together with a the tutor teacher of that language. The experience will differ from other assistants depending on many factors. But in general as we understand it, a Language Assistant will not take sole responsibilities of lessons, deal with students' behaviour situations or be responsible for marking exams. .

You can be a Foreign Language Assistant coming from at least ten different countries: Austria, Belgium, China, Germany, Canada, France, Italy, Latin America, Switzerland, and Spain. There are as many languages as different countries are. The destiny could be England, Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales. The only main requirement is to be a native speaker of the target language.

The Foreign Language Assistant Programme is organized by The British Council which creates international opportunities for people of the UK and other countries , and builds cultural relationships between them. Furthermore, it is a non-profitable institution which seeks to promote language cultural exchange for young people created in 1934, and present in more than 100 countries.

Students who will be taught are either in primary school, secondary school, Sixth Form, or even further education around Great Britain.

The purpose of being a Foreign Language Assistant is to offer communicative opportunities for students who are learning foreign languages in any type of educational entity approved by The British Council. At the same fashion, Language Assistants get benefit of this experience whilst they improve their English.

- **My Role as a Foreign Language Assistant for Spanish in North Somerset**

Basically, as a Language Assistant I had to produce creative material such as board games, cards, picture-games, worksheets, and power-point presentations for the Spanish Club all in my mother tongue: Spanish.

I taught Spanish in two schools in North Somerset, England, the United Kingdom; Clevedon School located in Clevedon, an academy and language college; and Gordano School located in Portishead, an academy and technology college.

We are enrolled in an eight-month contract so I taught Spanish during those eight months, and spent one more by getting to know other cultures around Europe.

The opportunity to being part of the Foreign Language Assistants' programme was awarded by an agreement between The British Council and Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez, my former university.

At Clevedon School, I taught Spanish to small groups of 4 or 5 at year 7, 9, 10 and 11. At Gordano School, I taught to small groups of year 7, 9, 10, 11, and one conversation lesson with each of the nine students at Sixth Form. Such learners prepared for standardized exams such as FCSE, GCSE and A-level respectively. From year 7 to 11, the material I prepared was mainly picture-games, board games, puzzles, crosswords, scrambled words, worksheets, and role-plays.(*See Appendix C*).

• Achievements and difficulties whilst setting your teaching goals

Regardless of the achievements you know you have made as a teacher, you never stop wondering how you could have made it better. I consider that one of the most relevant experiences I have had was the fact that the majority of my students of Spanish were certainly able to familiarise with the language from a Southamerican speaking country. Above all, I think it was an authentic and relevant experience for them because I was not a native person from a Spanish speaking country located in Europe. That fact, I am sure, will help to broaden their minds.

Illustration 11 – Display at the Language Assistant's room about Chile
From a cognitive perspective, in general I can say my students are much more fluent and able to hold a shorter or longer conversation (depending on the level) with a native speaker than at the beginning. Common difficulties are pronunciation and comprehension. This one is basically improved by practice i.e. a role-play. Pronunciation difficulties related to sounds such as /r/ in '**r**ápido', /ñ/ in 'a**ñ**os', /x/ in **j**uego, /g/ in **g**enio, and the omission of /h/ in **h**elado. The former is easily explained by the absence of those sounds in the English language. Educators who want to develop pronunciation must be aware that further practice on those sounds should be done.

The drawback of the teaching system is that Spanish taught at English schools is only focused on accent and lexis from Spain. Therefore, there is not much attention paid to learn South-American accent or lexis. In addition, the standardized exams taken at English schools are made with Spanish language focus. Therefore, Spanish assistant has to keep his own accent, and use the lexis given by the exam preparation books, or imitate a new accent that the individual is not used to. A critical point of view should be adopted with respect to this situation because that is not a natural language context. Fortunately, in my case, I was able to keep my accent, and could give the option for Spanish or Chilean lexical aspects.

- **The Sixth Form at Gordano School**

These nine students were my biggest teaching goal because they had the highest level of Spanish, and I was eager to help them to efficiently develop their skills. After having a conversation in the target language with each student the very first lessons, I started preparing all the necessary material according to the weaknesses I could spot. The levels of the students were highly heterogeneous. At the beginning of the lessons, three of my students made mistakes, but they had lived in Spain or had Spanish speaking relatives so were mostly native speakers. Two others struggled to understand and speak, but they had great potential. The rest four other students were unable to understand any of the questions in Spanish and struggled to speak fluently.

This group of A-levels became a challenge for me. I prepared different material, and used different resources and techniques to make them understand and speak.

I did not receive too much guidance from tutor teachers; otherwise I freely prepared all the material for the lessons. I just needed to know the updated topics of the lessons.

At the end of the assistantship period, all of them improved a lot. They were able to speak much more fluently and comprehend better with a slow pace. Three students who were almost native speakers overcame a lot of mistakes they made when they started. The two students who struggled with the language made the greatest improvement in the whole group. One student resigned the Spanish class because he/she felt unable to finish properly. The rest three students were able to get a good mark in the exams, though the level of Spanish needs to be improved.

Illustration 12 – Picture of a trip with a group of students at Sixth Form to Valencia, Spain in 2013.

• Improving your English proficiency: Which are the changes?

In the first place, I have to admit that most of the language assistants' expectations about the improvement of language skills are mistaken. You cannot predict which language skills will be improved more or how the process will be. The future is uncertain because of the situations, people, places, and other things are unpredictable, and certainly these are factors which will make language skills improvement differ.

Personally, I think my comprehension has improved a lot because I met a lot of people with different accents whether native or foreign language speakers. My fluency has improved a lot but not as much as my comprehension skills. Aspects of fluency such as my accent or intonation have also improved but it is quite difficult to evaluate without an evaluation instrument.

• Successful experience: The Spanish Club or 'El Club de Español'

The Spanish Club was an opportunity for my students to be able to talk with a native speaker of the language. Also, it was a chance to understand Spanish and other Spanish speaking countries such as Chile. It was done in an air-conditioned room at Clevedon School every Monday at lunch time. All students of Spanish were invited to participate in this club through screen displays with a slide shown promoting the club.

I created great amount of interesting material to work with students: board games, songs, videos, power-point presentations, classroom decoration, and a lot of handicrafts. Afterwards, I prepared a display and all the activities were placed in the Modern Foreign Languages wall-display.

Illustration 13 – Activities in the Spanish Club classroom.

As shown in pictures below, all the activities were created from a topic which could be a Spanish, Chilean, or British celebration:

Illustration 14 – Spanish Club activities:

1) The Carnival in Spain and Chile 2) Christmas cards.

Illustration 15 – Spanish Club activities: Diwali celebration kandils and mehndi hand designs.

Illustration 16 – Spanish Club activities: creation of posters to promote anti-bullying behaviour.
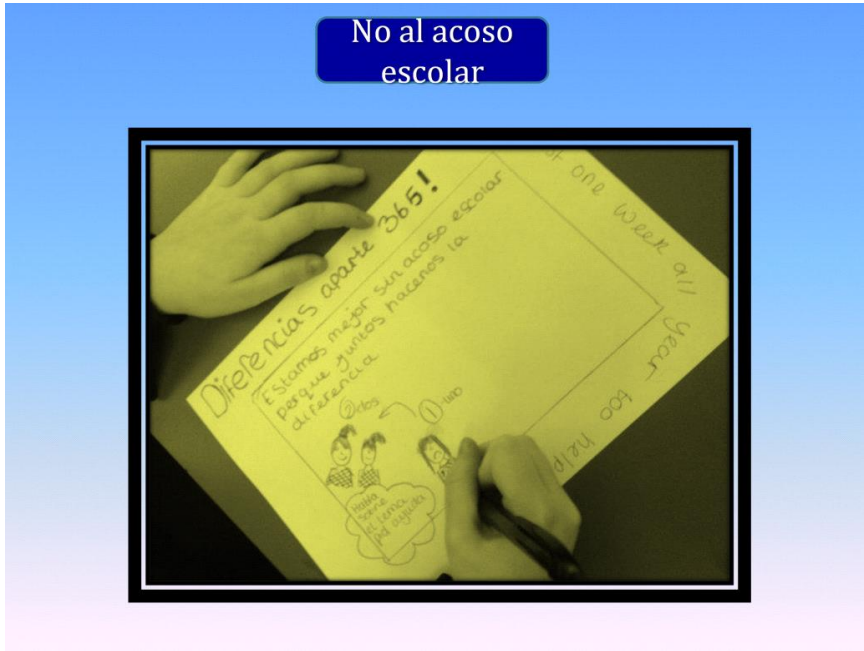

Illustration 17 - Spanish Club activities: Antibullying poster.

Illustration 18 - Spanish Club activities: Easter eggs decorations.

Illustration 19 – Christmas cards and boxes making.

- **Displays:**

Illustration 20 – Teapots display in the corridor of MFL's Department.

Illustration 21 – Diwali celebration display in the corridor of MFL's Department.

- **Participation in the Community at Clevedon School**

  • **Friday Review**

  The Indian community in the United Kingdom is wide, and that also means more Indian-religious students at schools. As a way of integrating such students, part of the school planning has to do with the celebration of certain cultural features of community members.

  For my role as a Spanish assistant, and the work done at the Spanish Club related to 'Diwali' (An Indian religious celebration), I was mentioned in the Friday Review, a school community newspaper (*See Appendix D*).

Friday Review 16th November 2012

Hello my name is <u>Rafia.</u> I live in <u>Clevedon.</u>
- **Namaste mera naam hai (...) Mein Clevedon mein rehta hoon. (for boys)**
- **Namaste meri naam hai (...) Mein Clevedon mein rehti hoon. (for girls)**

In MFL this week 14 students joined Miss Jara and Miss Quatreil, the Language assistants, to celebrate the Diwali festival. After reading the story of Lord Rama, they produced some beautiful decorations for the department wall. Lanterns, Hand painting and colourful representations of the Gods have been welcoming students to the department all week. Thank you to all the students, the Language Assistants and Miss Melgar for their hard work and creativity.

Illustration 22 – An article in the Friday Review of Clevedon School newspaper

• Hostess for the Chilean Foundation 'Súmate'

The Chilean Foundation "Súmate" was visiting schools throughout England to get to know the effectiveness of English schools in order to improve the establishments they own in the country. As a way to make the visitors feel welcomed at Clevedon School, I was asked to be the hostess. I had to show the school around, translate to the Deputy Headteacher,

and spend the whole-day visit with them. I was mentioned in local community newspaper 'The North Somerset Times'. (*See Appendix E*)

Illustration 23 – (L-R) Claudia Pizarro from Sumate, Clevedon School headteacher John Wells presenting Daniela Pizarro from Sumate with a Clevedon School handbook, Luis Valenzuela (Sumate) and Miss Jara-Reyes (Clevedon School) and students.

• Participation in the community's blog

As the Language Assistant for Spanish, I had to opportunity to participate and post in the recently released MFL department's blog:
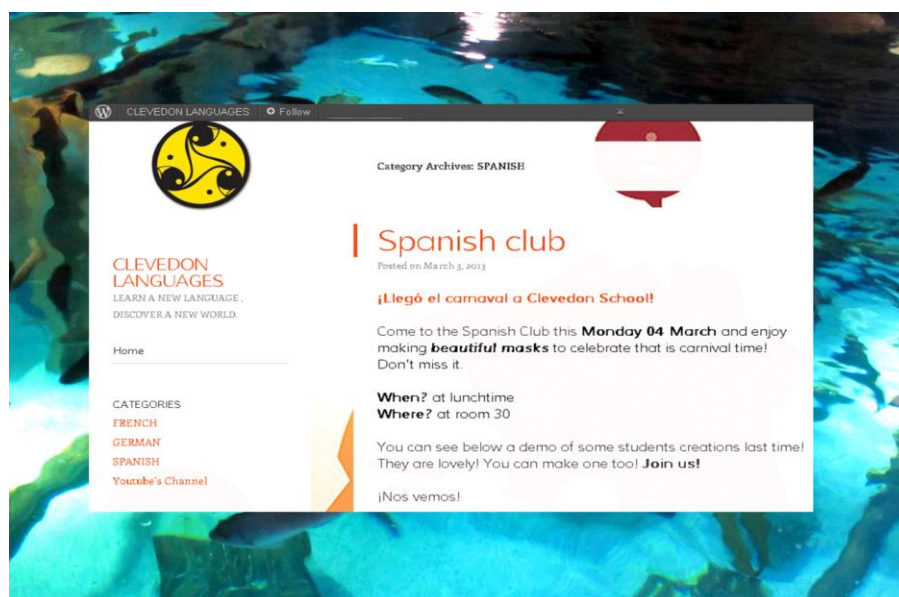
http://clevedonlanguages.wordpress.com/

Illustration 24 – Publications in the MFL Deparment's blog.

- **My Experience at English Schools**

At Clevedon School, I was able to participate in several activities organised by the MFL department such as the Spanish Club, MFL's blog, Hostess for a Chilean foundation, and even a competition for 'the Assistant of the year'. For that reason, I really felt as a member of the community. In addition, the MFL department had only few members which helped us to get to know each other better.

I enjoyed the work made with the students in year 9 and 10, and the role-plays and other activities which were partially guided by my tutor teacher there.

At Gordano School, I appreciated a lot the amount of resources that the language assistant's room had. You could find there all kind of games which I adapted for teaching Spanish. One example of that is the game 'Guess Who'. Students, especially at year 7, loved it.

One of the challenging things at this school was to plan all by myself in advance for year 10, year 11 and the Sixth Form. I enjoyed the challenging Sixth formers, and the four different years 7 because they always wanted to get the chance to participate in the assistant's sessions.

Conclusion

As a conclusion of this research work, it becomes a must to admit the gap and the weaknesses presented by the educational system in Chile. The main drawbacks of the curriculum are the short years of compulsory education and the little importance of subjects such as science, history, citizenship and extracurricular activities in the Chilean National Curriculum. Since our educational system supports mathematics and language as the main subjects of study, science and history are left behind. Moreover, history lessons were shortened a couple of years now, increasing the previous problem. On the other hand, subjects as citizenship or rode safety education are not present as part of the curriculum in Chile.

Other important facts are the quality of state funded schools in England: the amount of teaching resources, the use of new technologies in education, the available infrastructure for learning purposes, the organization and the number of teaching and support staff, the great choices for extracurricular activities and the emphasis put on arts, music or drama.

Regarding to the teaching resources and the use of the newest technologies, I would say they are not essential for learning, but it helps and makes all things easier for teaching purposes. In addition, it contributes to keep students motivated in a society where technologies have become an integral part of young people's lives.

About the organization and the number of teaching and support staff is not vital either to obtain the best learning from pupils or to achieve the teaching, but it allows teachers to be focused in fewer areas so they can be more efficient in single activities. The teaching working hours is a another fact just as important as teachers' quality of life since in the English educational system teachers work less, and are paid for the extra work which refers to planning, preparing activities or marking.

Moreover, the available infrastructure for learning purposes such as the proper science laboratories, the fully-equipped computers with the use of language learning programs to learn and check progress, air-conditioned drama, art and music classrooms, and the vast fields for playing any sport, contributes to provide the best learning-teaching environment.

As well, it is surprising the great amount of activities that students do at school. The emphasis placed on the development of skills is really convenient. Students act, dance, play music, practice sports and together with that they are developing all kind of skills which will lead afterwards to better learning: multiple intelligence theories put into practice.

Much more conditions than we can figure need to be changed to achieve a good education in our society. It is not a meaningless coincidence that Chilean educational establishments go abroad to get know one of the educational management leaders in order to improve their institutional operation management. It can actually change by taking small steps, little by little. For instance, I would propose the implementation of the House System

in primary school as a way of keeping students focused on learning, and at the same fashion, improving behaviour. Certainly, the System needs to be adapted in order to be carried out in a different culture, but I am sure it will bring a lot of great improvements.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Gordano School Rules

Appendix A2 – Behaviour for Learning Policies at Gordano School

Appendix B – Extracurricular activities at Gordano School

Appendix C– Role-plays 'Activities and sports, 'and 'In the Restaurant'

Appendix D –Friday Review at Clevedon School

Appendix E – Newspaper article:
'Education Charity Learns from Town School'