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A YEAR IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: MORE THAN AN
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This research aims to give a critical and succinct review of the educational systems of England and Chile, including types of schools, national curriculum, assessments and approach to modern foreign languages, in order to compare them and provide a brief analysis of deficiencies and strengths. In the same manner, this work seeks to share the experiences of two Spanish language assistants in the north of England as they improve their language skills and take an active role in their respective regions.

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Introduction

Throughout human history education has been a social matter of main concern; however, it is in constant process of development, and changing according to the necessities of society. At present there seems to be a great educational crisis on a national and worldwide level, people are concerned and demand a better education, for themselves and for future generations.

As students and future teachers, it is important to have a critical point of view of the Chilean educational system, and understand its deficiencies. That is what we aim to achieve with this research work, through a brief overview and comparison of the national educational system and the English educational system.

In the first chapter we establish and define the components of the English educational system, in order to give some understanding and context. Giving great emphasis to equity and quality, and how they are present in the system.

The second chapter shows the changes the government has put into effect, and also briefly refers to aspects such as school funding and national curriculum, revealing the lack of pedagogical approach in the aforementioned.

In the third chapter we mention the differences that we could find after revising both educational systems. There are plenty of aspects that differ in both of them, but for the sake of brevity they are classified in three groups, in relation to the system, to the teachers and the students. Other topics such as national curriculum, stress and behaviour are also mentioned.

Finally, the last chapter narrates parts of our experience living abroad and working as a language assistant. We reflect on this experience and briefly compare them in hopes it can work as a reference for future students.

Chapter I: The educational system in England

1. Introduction

The United Kingdom's Educational Act proclaims that 'all children in England must receive an effective education'(Government of the United Kingdom, 1996, p7). In order for this to be accomplished all children between the ages of compulsory education are entitled to a free spot in a state-funded school. In the same manner, it is the parents' duty to safeguard for the children's education, whether it is at school or by other means, i.e. homeschooling.

In England, the school year runs from September 1 to mid-July, and is divided into three terms. These terms are divided by the Christmas holidays and the Easter holidays, each lasting around two weeks. Summer holidays begin at the end of the school year in mid-July and last for about six weeks. Although most schools operate like stated above, some state-funded schools use the dates set by the local authority. Independent schools also tend to make use of this standard system, but often have shorter terms and longer holidays.

1.1 Types of schools

1.1.1 Overview

In the United Kingdom most schools are provided and managed by the local government authority or central government, and are free for all pupils (HMC, 2013). As it is, 93% of children between the ages of 3 and 18 are in state-funded schools, however independent schools take on 7% of the children, percentage that rises to 18% for sixth form students. (World Bank, 2013)

Given its wide range, the United Kingdom's educational system can be classified in different ways, however according to founding it falls in two categories:

- **State-funded schools:** Refers to schools which provide education to children between the ages 3 to 18 without charge, and whose budget comes from public sector funds. State schools follow the 'National Curriculum', with core subjects including English, mathematics and science.
- **Independent schools:** Refers to a small group of institutions that are funded by charities, foundations, and student fees. They are governed by an elected board and are independent of many of the regulations that apply to state funded schools. Independent schools set their own curricula; however, they must be registered with the government and are inspected regularly.

In terms of admission criteria, schools are divided into:

- **Comprehensive schools:** A comprehensive school is a state school that does not select its intake of pupils on the basis of academic abilities or aptitude.
- **Selective schools:** In contrast, a selective school admits students on the basis of selection criteria, which is usually academic.

1.1.2 State funded schools

1.1.2.1 Community schools

Community schools are managed and controlled by the local educational authority (LEA). The LEA employs the schools' staff, owns the schools' land and has primary responsibility for the school's admissions.

1.1.2.2 Foundation and trust schools

Foundation schools are maintained by the Local Authority; however, they have greater freedom than community schools, as the governing body employs the staff and sets the admissions policy. Some foundation schools, also called trust schools, have a foundation or trust that owns the land and buildings.

1.1.2.3 Voluntary aided schools

Voluntary aided schools are maintained schools and often, but not always, have a religious character. The charitable foundation contributes towards the capital costs of the school, appoints a majority of the school governors, and has a substantial influence in the running of the school.

1.1.2.4 Voluntary controlled schools

Voluntary controlled schools are almost always church schools, but unlike the previously mentioned aided schools, the local authority employs the schools' staff and has primary responsibility for admissions.

1.1.2.5 Grammar Schools

Grammar schools are run by the council, a foundation body or a trust. These schools are fully selective and there is often an exam to get in, however, because of the increasing number of non-selective schools, they are not as common as they used to be.

1.1.2.6 Academies

Academy schools are directly funded by central government and independent of direct control by the local authority. Academies are self-governing; nevertheless they must meet the same National Curriculum core subject requirements as other state schools.

1.1.2.7 City technology colleges

Technology colleges are state-funded all-ability secondary schools which charge no fees, but are independent of local authority control. These schools teach the National Curriculum, but specialize in mainly technology-based subject.

1.1.2.8 Special schools

Special schools are part of a programme funded by the state. This Special Educational Needs programme (SEN) supports and assists children with their cognitive, affective and physical learning.

1.1.3 Independent schools

Independent schools are also called private schools; however there seems to be confusion when it comes to the term ‘public’, which is used to refer to small number of schools for historical reasons.

1.1.3.1 Public schools

Public schools are fee-paying schools for children between the ages of 13 and 18. This term derived from the fact that they were open to pupils regardless of their religion or where they lived. The term ‘Public’ is used only for a small group of schools which are some of the older, more exclusive and expensive schools.

1.1.3.2 Prep schools

Preparatory schools are fee-paying schools that educate children up to the age of 13 to 'prepare' them for entry to either public or independent schools.

In England, and the United Kingdom, independent schools have an excellent reputation for high standards of teaching and learning, and almost all pupils go on to prestigious universities.

1.2 National Curriculum

The National Curriculum was introduced in the nineties as a way of ensuring each pupil in England and Wales received the same educational opportunities wherever they were educated in the country.

The National Curriculum is a set of subjects and standards used by primary and secondary state-funded schools; although the National Curriculum is not compulsory in Independent schools, many of these schools chose to implement the National Curriculum.

There are two principal aims set out in the National Curriculum:

Aim 1: The school curriculum should aim to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and to achieve.

Aim 2: The school curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. (UK Government, 2014)

The National Curriculum is organized into blocks of years called 'Key Stages' (KS). At the end of each KS the teacher will formally assess the children's performance to measure their progress.

The five Key Stages the National Curriculum is constructed in are:

- Early Years Foundation Stage - for pupils aged between 0 and 5 years old (not compulsory),
- Key Stage 1 - Foundation Year and Years 1 to 2 - for pupils aged between 5 and 7 years old,
- Key Stage 2 - Years 3 to 6 - for pupils aged between 8 and 11 years old,
- Key Stage 3 - Years 7 to 9 - for pupils aged between 12 and 14 years old,
- Key Stage 4 - Years 10 to 11 - for pupils aged between 15 and 16 years old, and
- Sixth Form - Years 12 to 13 - for pupils aged between 17 and 18 years old.

According to the National Curriculum the school System in England is divided in three stages:

- Early Years Foundation
- Primary School
- Secondary School

1.2.1 Early years foundation stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to the age of 5 years old. During this stage teaching is often done through play, where children learn about subjects and other people through games. It is important to mention that even though this stage is not compulsory or included officially in the national curriculum, it is part of the educational system, and it is in the Ofsted's faculties (Office for Standard in Education, Children's Services and Skills), to inspect and regulate childminders, child day care, children's centers, state school, independent school and teacher training providers.

The EYFS comprises a set of Welfare, Learning and Development Requirements. The targets are:

- Communication and language
- Physical development
- Personal, social and emotional development

The specific areas of learning are:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design

Assessments

There are assessments when children are aged between 2 and 3 years and another one at the end of the academic year when they turn 5. These assessments do not share the characteristics of academic tests, but are based on observations from the EYFS practitioners. The information from these assessments is used to support children's learning and development.

1.2.2 Primary education

Primary education comprehends Key Stages 1 and 2, coming before secondary school and after EYFS, and is the first stage of compulsory education in England. During this period children achieve basic literacy and numeracy, as well as establish foundation for Science, Mathematics and other social sciences.

The individual programmes of study for key stages 1 and 2 are:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Art and design
- Computing
- Design and technology
- Geography
- History
- Languages (KS2 only)
- Music
- Physical education

Assessments

At the end of Key Stage 2, in Year 6 all children in state primary schools are required to take national curriculum tests in reading, mathematics, and science. This test is called Standard Assessment Tests (SAT), and judge the level of ability of the pupils and their potential to obtain a higher level.

1.2.3 Secondary education

Secondary education lasts for another four to six years. During this period students prepare and achieve their national qualifications. There are two parts of secondary education, the first one, referred as 'lower secondary', which is compulsory and comprehends Key Stages 3 and 4.

During Key Stages 3 and 4 most pupils work towards national qualifications - usually GCSE's.

The compulsory national curriculum subjects are the 'core' and 'foundation' subjects.

Core subjects are:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science

Foundation subjects are:

- Information and communication technology (ICT)
- Physical education
- Citizenship

Schools must offer at least 1 subject from each of these areas:

- Arts
- Design and technology
- Humanities
- Modern foreign languages

Schools must also provide:

- Religious education (KS4)
- Sex education (KS4)

Assessments

Until 2008 all pupils were required to take a test during their last year of Key Stage 3, in the three core subjects. However, due to a series of issues in the marking of these tests, they were abolished for Key Stage 3.

At the end of year 11, in Key stage 4, students finally take their General Certificate of Secondary Education

Upon completing 'lower secondary' education in year 11, students can opt to transfer to a college, to leave education and start a job or apprenticeship, or to remain at school. Those who stay at schools enter Years 12 and 13. These years are the second part of secondary education and are traditionally known as 'Sixth Form', where 16 to 18 year olds prepare for their A Levels and university.

In the 17-18 age group, sixth form education is not compulsory at present, although mandatory education until the age of 18 is to be phased in under the Education and Skills Act 2008. This will take effect in 2015.

During the sixth form education students choose three to five subjects to prepare for their A- levels. There is a wide variety of subjects to choose from; however students tend to take on the core subjects, Mathematics, Science, and English. There is also a highly marked tendency of females choosing Modern Foreign Languages and males choosing Mathematics and Science.

Assessments

At the end of Sixth Form students take their A level examinations which will allow them to go on to further education in university.

1.3 External examinations

1.3.1 General certificate of secondary education

The General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) is an academic qualification awarded in a specific subject, taken by students between 14 and 16 years old, in secondary education. This Certificate was introduced in 1986 replacing the former O level/CSE qualifications.

The qualification is equivalent to a level 1 or level 2. In secondary schools, GCSE courses are taken in a variety of subjects, nevertheless, the most common are the compulsory, core subjects undertaken by 14 to 16 years old students. The only requirement is that in state-funded schools English, Mathematics, Science and Physical Education are studied during KS 4 (the GCSE years of school).

Grading

Regarding to grading, the candidates receive a grade for each subject that they have sat. from highest to lowest, the grades are: A*, A, B, C, D, E, F and G. Grade U, unclassified, signifies that a student achieved nothing, therefore no GCSE is awarded to the student in that subject.

Tiers

In many subjects, the GCSE's examinations are offered in two different 'tiers':

- Higher Tier: where students can achieve grades from A* to D. Including the exceptional cases of E and U.
- Foundation Tier: where students can achieve grades from C to G, and also U.

Results

Students receive the results of their GCSE's during the fourth week of August. Normally, students have to go to their schools to collect their results, although Edexcel allows the option of an online results service.

Examination boards

There are now five examination boards offering GCSE's examinations:

- Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)
- Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Edexcel
- Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC)
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA)

All these boards are regulated by the Office of Regulators of Qualifications (Ofqual).

1.3.2 The General Certificate of Education Advanced Level

The General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A Level) is a school-leaving qualification offered by educational bodies to students completing secondary or pre-university education.

The qualification is generally studied for over two years. The examinations boards are the same as in the GCSE's.

1.4 Modern Foreign Languages

According to the national curriculum the learning of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) is compulsory in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. However, during Key Stage 1 it is still possible for kids to opt for this as a play-based subject.

The national curriculum states that “Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures” (UK Government, 2013).

Therefore, the teaching of Modern Foreign Languages should foster students to articulate their thoughts and ideas in the target language, and in the same manner, understand and respond to speakers with great confidence, spontaneity and accuracy. The Teaching of MFL subjects should focus on developing both productive and receptive skills, based on a sound foundation of grammar and vocabulary.

In agreement with the national curriculum, the teaching of MFL should provide suitable preparation for further study.

Aims

The national curriculum for languages aims to ensure that all pupils:

Aim 1: Understand and respond to spoken and written language from a variety of authentic sources. Speak with increasing confidence, fluency and spontaneity, finding ways of communicating what they want to say, including through discussion and asking question.

Aim 2: Can write at varying length, for different purposes and audiences, using the variety of grammatical structures that they have learnt

Aim 3: Discover and develop an appreciation of a range of writing in the language studied. (National Curriculum, 2014)

Chapter II: The educational system in Chile

1 Introduction

The education in Chile is determined by the ‘Ley General de Educación’ (LGE), in accordance with the previous stipulations of the ‘Constitución del la República de Chile’. Both of these state that the objective of education is the complete development of the individual in the various stages of his life, and while parents have the preferential right and duty to educate their children, the state must provide the means necessary for the exercise of this right (Gobierno de Chile, 1980, p12).

The Chilean school year runs from March, or late February, to mid-December, and it is usually divided into two terms. The first term ends in July and the second term starts the last Monday of the same month, after a two-weeks holiday period. When the school year is over there is a long break of two months before the next school year starts.

Most schools follow these dates, however there might be some changes regarding Easter and national holidays.

1.1 Types of school

According to the statistics provided by Ministerio de Educación de Chile, only 38% of children between the ages of 6 and 18, which regularly go to school, assist to fully state-funded schools; while the vast majority is enrolled in shared-funding schools with a 56, 2%. Lastly independent schools and delegated-administration school have the lowest enrolment rates with a 7,3% and 1,5% respectively (MINEDUC, 2012).

As stated by the government and the LGE, the most common classification for educational institutions is according to funding; these can be divided into four types:

- **State funded schools:** State funded schools are public institutions that provide free education for students in primary and secondary school, however there may be a small enrollment fee charged for the students. These public institutions are managed by the local authority and are regulated by the ‘Superintendencia de Educación Escolar’ (SEE), hence they must follow the national curriculum.

- **Shared-funding schools:** Shared-funding schools are institutions that receive economical support from the state, and from monthly fees charged to parents. These establishments are administered by stake holders; nevertheless, because they are partially funded by the state, they are regulated by the SEE and must follow the national curriculum.

- **Delegated administration schools:** Delegated administration schools are owned by the state, and managed by private corporations linked to the business and industrial world.

- **Private schools:** Private schools are institutions that do not receive state funding and the ownership and management is private. Their resources come from the collection of enrollment tuition and monthly fees paid by the students, or funding contributions from religious congregations, international institutions, and other bodies of private character.

1.2 National curriculum

The Chilean national curriculum is divided in two, one for primary school, and another for secondary school.

Primary schools work with 'Bases Curriculares'. This is a set of learning objectives that goes hand in hand with the general objectives set out per cycle throughout the six years of primary education. These objectives work as a foundation for the individual programmes for each subject, and constitute a broad and flexible frame of reference.

While the mentioned above are stated by the 'Ley General de Educación' (LGE), Secondary education works with the previous law 'Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza' (LOCE). This curriculum sets basic objectives that the students should achieve at the end of each school year and minimum compulsory contents.

The aim of both of these curricula is to give students the same learning opportunities throughout the country.

Besides, the national curriculum divides the years of schooling into three:

Pre-school - Sala cuna to Kinder - for pupils aged between 0 and 6

Primary education - 1° Básico to 6° Básico - for pupils aged between 6 and 11

Secondary education - 7° Básico to 4° Medio - for pupils aged between 12 and 17

1.2.1 Preschool

Preschool is the first stage of the Chilean educational system; it is contemplated as part of the national curriculum although the only compulsory stage is the last year, known as ‘Kinder’. Preschool broadens children’s social interactions, promotes the set up of a routine and prepares them for future school life.

1.2.2 Primary education

Primary education comprehends 1° Básico to 6° Básico. The main aim of this stage is that all children achieve the learning objectives proposed by the current national curriculum. Additionally, primary education seeks to contribute to the integral development of children.

According to the national curriculum of Chile the compulsory subjects from 1° Básico to 6° Básico are:

- Lenguaje y Comunicación
- Idioma extranjero Inglés (from 5° Básico onward)
- Matemáticas
- Ciencias Naturales
- Historia, Geografía y Ciencias Sociales
- Música
- Educación Física y Salud
- Tecnología
- Orientación
- Artes Visuales

Assessments

Each subject will prepare their exams individually throughout the school year. Most of these exams have an academic approach; however the criteria of evaluation and the type of test can vary, and depends mainly in the institution standards.

1.2.3 Secondary education

Secondary education is the last stage of compulsory education, taking up the years from 7° Básico to 4° Medio. This stage aims to give the students the necessary tools to develop their abilities, knowledge and social behaviours in order to achieve the objectives stated by the national curriculum.

Secondary education is divided between Scientific-Humanist, Technical-Professional, and Artistic, being the first one the most common.

The subjects from 7° Básico to 4° Medio are:

Core subjects

- Lenguaje y Comunicación
- Lengua Indígena
- Matemáticas
- Historia, Geografía y Ciencias Sociales
- Biología
- Química
- Física
- Educación Física
- Artes
- Educación Tecnológica
- Inglés
- Herramientas de Producción
- Filosofía

Optativos educación secundaria:

- Diferenciado Humanista (1° Medio to 4° Medio)
- Diferenciado Científico (1° Medio to 4° Medio)

Assessments

In the same manner as primary education, each subject will prepare exams through the school year.

During these years the students of scientific-humanist programmes prepare for the ‘Prueba de Selección Universitaria’ (PSU), which allows them to continue to further education. The PSU has two mandatory subjects, ‘Matemáticas’ and ‘Lenguaje y Comunicación’; and two elective tests which are ‘Historia’ and ‘Ciencias’.

1.3 Foreign languages

The national curriculum establishes the subject of foreign language as compulsory from the year 6 of primary education to the last year of secondary education. In most cases this subject is English, but there are schools that teach different languages such as German, Italian or French.

Chapter III: Comparison between Chilean and British educational system

There are many differences between both systems; unfortunately after comparing both of them the picture looks very unpleasant for the Chilean educational system. For the sake of brevity this is based on the global aspects of education.

In a general sense, the Chilean educational system proves to be completely centered in laws and legislations, and not enough on the actual process of teaching and learning. Meanwhile the English educational system focuses on the actual schooling process. When gathering and looking for information it becomes painfully obvious the different focal points, and their curricula act as a clear example of this. The English national curriculum guides the teachers to be a support for the students and encourage them to improve, whereas the Chilean national curriculum wallows in complicated terminology and tedious bureaucracy that ends up forgetting to set aims that are in fact related to the students' needs.

Moreover, these laws and legislations are outdated, and even though some of them might be undergoing modifications, they continue to be based on a constitution built under a military dictatorship.

Following the matters of national curriculum, England offers a wide variety of subjects focused not only on academic performance, but also student's abilities, natural skills, and hobbies. In contrast, the Chilean national curriculum focuses mainly on academic subjects, leaving behind the development of a more widespread range of aptitudes.

Other important matter is funding. When it comes to budget the difference is outrageous. The 'Antecedentes Presupuestarios del Ministerio de Educación' states that in Chile around £7.5m are destined for education (DIPRES, 2014). In contrast,

the UK spends around £65bn (Worldbank,2014). It is because of this investment that schools have the human and material resources to succeed.

In the same way, if money is concerned, teachers' wages cannot be ignored. Based on certified working hours, newly qualified teachers in England start on £21,588 a year, which rises incrementally to £31,552, this comprehends 38 hours a week (Department for Education, nd). Furthermore, teaching is considered one of the most important and respected profession. On the other hand we have Chile, while there is no official consensus; most sources seem to point to wages that start on £6000 per year, comprehending 44 hours per week. This wage can rise up to £8000 per year (Mifuturo, 2013).

On a more personal note, there is a critical point in English education, which is the high stress levels teachers have to endure. This is mainly because of the grading system based on 'predictions'; government expects results that students, for whatever reason, may not achieve. This puts the teacher in a position where they have to push the students to achieve their target level, being the teachers who have to face the consequences of negative results on the exams, without taking into much consideration the student's responsibilities for their own performance.

In Chile the case is slightly different; while teachers are still stressed it is due to a completely different matter. What troubles the Chilean teachers is the lack of job stability and the low levels of job satisfaction. Not only the wages are low, but the absence of respect toward the teachers from students, parents and society makes the work that much harder and stressful.

Subsequent to the issue of stress, there is a very important matter that might be overlooked, this is the holiday period. In England the time spent away from the classroom is considered to be as important as the time spent in it. Having holidays

almost every month makes the school year less tedious, and gives both teachers and students the opportunity to relax. While in Chile the holiday periods are so far away from the other that gives the impression of the school year being longer and monotonous.

Suffice it to say that, while there are many more aspects on both educational systems worth mentioning, the main feature that comes to mind when describing them is how they work as a system per se.

In this regard, every participant of the English educational system seems to work towards the same goal, with a sense of companionship and solidarity; supporting and improving the areas that are more deficient. In contrast the Chilean educational system appears to work on an 'Every man for himself' basis, with very little appreciation for companionship and solidary work.

Surely, both systems are constantly subjected to modifications, one can only hope these work for the best.

Chapter IV: Working as a language assistant in the north of England

1 The language assistants programme

The Language Assistants Programme was created by the British Council as a way to help English students learn French. Nowadays it is one of the main programmes that promote language learning across the world.

The language assistant programme is open to both primary and secondary schools and aims to support teachers, and help students to improve their language skills and boost their confidence whilst increasing their cultural awareness.

“Language assistants are native speaker of Spanish, German, Italian Chinese, Russian, French and Irish, with a good understanding of English. They seek to gain valuable teaching experience while improving their English and learning about the UK culture” (British Council, 2011)

2. Vanessa Henríquez: My experience as a language assistant

2.1 Host school: Brigshaw Highschool and Language College

Brigshaw is a very successful school and a popular choice for parents and carers of the area. It is part of a federation, which allows having partnership with Brigshaw Trust primary schools and Temple Moor. These links promote inclusion among the community and have daily benefits for children, families and staff. The school is located on the south-east of Leeds and provides schooling to pupils from Allerton Bywater, Kippax, Great Preston, Little Preston, Swillington, Micklefield, Methley, Garforth and the outer Leeds suburbs.

“Every child every chance of success, whatever it takes”

The Brigshaw motto reflects what the institution stands for and its contribution to education. Brigshaw commits to give children from different backgrounds, the best opportunities and resources to succeed in life.

Brigshaw students have achieved great academic performance and test results throughout the years; however it is clear for the school that there is more to education than that. It is because of this belief that the institution aims to nurture and develop skills that not only help pupils with their academic performance, but are also key in the transition into adulthood and their placement in society. The school fosters natural talent and makes sure every student receives the support and encouragement they need when exploring different fields, e.g. arts, sports and languages. Brigshaw acknowledges how every child is unique and special and deserves a chance to thrive. Being part of a trust, Brigshaw also has a very strong set of core values such as solidarity, democracy, equity and self-responsibility.

These values are shared and practiced by the wonderful and caring community who give generously to support others.

Brigshaw takes pride on the work the institution and the staff does and, rightfully so, Brigshaw takes pride on their students.

Brigshaw Highschool was originally opened in September 1972. In September 2004 the school was awarded Specialist Language College status as part of the UK's Specialist schools programme. However the school continues to be a fully inclusive comprehensive school.

As a language college, Brigshaw believes in the importance of learning and speaking a foreign language as a way to broaden the students' horizons. The school's work as a language college has resulted in international recognition gaining valuable links with schools in Germany, Spain, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Poland, Namibia, China and Italy. This gives the students the opportunity to take part in exchanges, trips and experiencing new cultures and languages first hand. Moreover, the students also benefit from the foreign Language Assistant programme. Each year Brigshaw brings three language assistants, one for Spanish, one for German and another one for French; the students have the chance to work with them throughout the year to improve their language skills.

The language college status not only benefits the enrolled students, but also brings more language learning opportunities for local businesses and the local community.

2.2 Working as a language assistant

2.2.1 What to expect

When you first find out that you will be working as a language assistant in the United Kingdom, you cannot stop imagining thousands of different scenarios in your mind of how the experience would be. But anything that you can imagine does not come close to reality. You try to prepare yourself to fill in the role the best way you can, so you do some research and try to find useful information that will allow you to fulfill the school's expectation of having a language assistant. But as it always is with teaching, you cannot prepare for everything.

To give some context to all this experience, I will start by mentioning my host school, Brigshaw Highschool and Language College.

Suffice to say that, while I had applied to West Yorkshire, and had high hopes to live in Leeds, I had never really heard of this school.

Brigshaw Highschool is a language college, where students have to take at least one foreign language and prepare it for their GCSE. It is located in the outskirts of Leeds, and has received glowing evaluations by the OFSTED. However, the levels of motivation among the students are very low and behavioural issues are not a seldom occurrence.

While this was very useful information at the time, it was not nearly enough, therefore, I decided to contact the school asking for some guidance on what to expect and what kind of expectations they had. Shortly after, I received a response, a very brief one.

'You are here to speak Spanish and show students that there are in fact other languages [aside from English] in the world'

It may sound simple, obvious even, but this is exactly what the students in Brigshaw and in most of the United Kingdom need. They need to broaden their perspective of the world, and see there is so much more than what they think when it comes to languages.

As a native Spanish speaker you can already have a huge impact on students, but being South American gives people whose only exposure to the language and culture is Spain, a whole new perspective. This is exactly what happened during my time in Brigshaw, the students were shocked by the fact that people actually speak Spanish in most of Latin America, this *new* knowledge made them eager and curious about my life, my country and every little piece of information I could provide them with. It helped us to built a strong relationship and I used their curiosity to my advantage and made every practice session an opportunity for them to enquire about my culture and life in Chile.

In theory, it does not sound like such a difficult job; however I must say it took me a couple of weeks to get the hang of it. Between the planning, coming up with new and innovative activities, making the material, trying to carry out my role as expected, not to mention an entire different country and school system, I had a lot to get used to. But with a fair amount of hard work I became more comfortable at school. I found support in the teachers and other language assistants, who were always there to answer my questions and to give words of encouragement.

2.2.2 Working at Brigshaw

I worked from 12 to 15 hours a week, usually Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and the occasional Friday. On a daily basis I worked with just two of the teachers from the Modern Foreign Languages department, but also helped the other teachers with the elaboration of material, lesson planning and even the occasional translation of texts.

2.2.3 Working with the teachers

The teachers I worked with every day were Ms. Fernandez and Ms. Scott. I had very different dynamics with both of them; needless to say they were both great teachers and very caring people.

Ms. Fernandez is of Spanish nationality, so we had the language in common and a slightly similar culture. Being both of us native speakers would not only provide the student with a great amount of input, but also expose them to real and natural conversations. Most of the time we spoke in Spanish to communicate with each other inside the classroom, leaving the children a bit confused, but also marveled at the language. It helped to show students in the most blatant way the diversity that exists in Hispanic world. We had a great relationship, she is a very lively person, and she became my friend and my support in the school. She understood what it felt like to be far away from your loved ones, so she tried and made me feel at home.

Ms. Scott on the other hand, is everything that comes to mind when you think about a posh English woman, and I mean that in the best of ways. She is such a dedicated teacher and is incredibly kind and loving to her students. We used to work together 4 hours a week; these lessons were with year 10. She was incredibly patient with them and always tried to push them to do their best, it was not an easy thing to do

considering the behavior problems in both groups. We worked as a team and somehow managed to get through the lessons. She was a great role model for me, I learnt a lot from her and I will always be grateful for all the advice she gave me.

2.2.4 Working with the students

I had the chance to work with a wide variety of students, throughout the year I worked with one Year 8, one Year 9, four Year 10, two Year 11; and 3 small groups of Sixth Formers.

Year 8 was a fantastic group, they were eager to learn and improve. They always had 'one more question' for you and would ask for you to read what they had written in class or correct their pronunciation. Of course it came with a bit of hassle, but nothing that you would not expect from 12 year olds.

Year 9, I consider them to be my own little success. At the beginning of the year there were a great amount of behavioural issues among the Year 9 that took Spanish, so as a measure to stop this situation the school reorganized the groups, however they ended up with one extra class that did not have a teacher, so it was assigned to me. It began a small class of 15 students, but over the course of the year it grew to 30 students. For what I had heard from other teachers, I expected this class to be a nightmare. I am glad to say I was wrong. From day one, they children from Year 9 were enthusiastic and in their own way, they worked. The class became a very relaxed environment, where students felt confident about sharing their knowledge and show their progress.

Year 10 was a bit more of a challenge, having the highest rates for behavioural issues. Not only they lacked motivation, but they overwhelmed the teacher to a point where

my role changed from being language assistant to teaching support. I will not say it was easy, most of the time Year 10 would completely drain my energy and leave me exhausted. Unfortunately I never felt I had the chance to really make a difference. I spent so much time making sure they would work during class that I forgone my role as language assistant. I did however try to motivate them as much as I could and helped them every step of the way. At the end of the school year I had the pleasure to see some improvement, maybe not in their language skills, but their attitude toward the language had change significantly.

As teachers we are not supposed to play favourites, but when it comes to working with people that is almost impossible. I mention this because, during my time as a language assistant, I became attached to both of the Year 11 I worked with. I had four sessions a week with each of these classes, which gave me plenty of time to get to know every single one of the students. They were a fairly big groups, most of the between the ages of 15 and 16. They had that cheeky attitude that English teenagers seem to spare; but they were also very generous, understanding, intelligent, and more than anything, considerate and loving. We worked as a team and supported each other in every part of the teaching-learning process. I believe this is what helped to build our relationship the most, they understood I was a new teacher living miles away from home and was getting used to the culture and language, so they tried to accommodate my situation as much as they could. In a way we were both teachers and learners, and they enjoyed it. This dynamic soon became part of our lessons, they would give me feedback on my language skills and I would give feedback to them, always using each other's native language.

The last group of students was the sixth formers they were a very small group and they were extremely shy. This presented a bit of a challenge given that our lessons were completely conversational. The idea was for them to give their opinions on a certain topic in order to have a conversation; however, they would often be

embarrassed or found themselves lacking the words to express their thoughts not only in Spanish, but also in English. So this was the main challenge, to get the sixth formers to open up, to get confident and to share their opinions with conviction. For about 2 months we spent the better part of the sessions just talking about anything they felt like talking about, slowly we started making the transition into Spanish. It was not easy; it was a very slow process, but a very rewarding one.

Overall I found my experience as a language assistant quite successful and both teachers and students reassured me of my performance and dispelled me of any doubts I might have had.

2.2.5 Achievements

Regardless of my achievements and what I might have accomplished as a teacher, I cannot help but wonder if I could have done something different or better.

This experience allowed me to put to test my teaching skills and improve my confidence. However, with the benefit of hindsight I realize now that my greatest achievement as a teacher was to give the students a new perspective of the language. To be in touch with a native Spanish speaker that is not from Spain expanded the children's perspective of the world, and destroyed some misconceptions they had from Latin America.

The relationship I developed with my students also helped a great amount. It was because of this good chemistry and relaxed learning environment we forged, that they improved their levels of confidence and their attitude toward the Spanish language went from negative to positive.

In a more personal note, I must say it was very rewarding to have students come to me at the end of the year to say that they would miss me, and how thankful they were because of all my help, not with just Spanish and GCSE's but also with their personal difficulties. One particular girl, that had an incredibly rough time dealing with all the stress from the GCSE's, hugged me and in tears said 'you actually care about us and you made Spanish not suck', it might sound ridiculous, but coming from a fifteen year old, that means the world to me

Before my time in England I was not really one to make assumptions on how my language proficiency would improve, because is not something you can actually predict.

In relation to my work at Brigshaw I reinforced and reaffirmed my knowledge of the English Language. I also I improved my assertiveness when using the language in a professional and formal environment.

3. A year in the United Kingdom

Personally, I think that a very important part of being a language assistant is getting involved in the culture and exposing yourself to its different aspects. I firmly believe that getting to experience the world and having fun, does not mean you are neglecting your work, if anything, it makes the transition process easier, and the cultural shock almost non-existent.

3.1 What to expect

The experience of being a language assistant is different for everyone, some people will focus and put all their energy into their work, others will want to socialize. In my case I expected to do both.

A big part of why I applied for the post as a language assistant was to be able to see with my own eyes, the places I had always felt drawn to. I desired to travel, meet people, and absorb every little detail and transform it into knowledge that I could eventually pass on to my peers and to my future students.

However I did not want to put that much thought into it. Surely, I had my fair share of fears and anxieties, such as language barriers and cultural shock, but most of all I was afraid I would idealize the country and that my expectations would be so ridiculously high that I would end up being disappointed. So I decided to relax, take a step back, and enjoy the fact that I would have this once in a lifetime opportunity. I decided to take this possibly overwhelming situation with the same calm and spontaneous set of mind I have always had, and expected the unexpected.

3.2 Life in England

I adapted to my new life in England very quickly from the very beginning, which I found surprising because so many people warned me about the cultural differences and how you romanticize the idea of living abroad.

Taking everything into account, I think it was a combination of several factors that made my time in England so easy. In the first place I lived not only in the county I had applied to, but also in the city I wanted to live. Leeds is a beautiful place, full of life, and I had the chance to see it through the eyes of the local people and experience different cultural aspects and traditions as if they were my own.

Secondly, I had the pleasure of meeting a wide variety of people from England and Europe in general. Everyone was so genuinely kind that made me wonder where the stereotype of European people being ‘cold’ came from. In my experience that could not be any further from the truth, and, if anything I felt like they were more friendly and sincere than Chilean people.

Thirdly, I had a very interesting opportunity that not many language assistants have. Every year the language assistants from West Yorkshire have the possibility to take a course at the University of Leeds. This is organized by the Committee for Foreign Language Assistants in West Yorkshire and taught by the modern language department at the University of Leeds. So, every Wednesday I walked to university and had lectures on pronunciation, culture and language. It was a great experience; I had the chance to actually be part of a class in one of the best universities in England, with the best teachers. It was also a great social opportunity that allowed me to broaden my group of friends to the language assistants from other schools, and actual students from the university.

Lastly, I had the support of my friend Berni, who did not live in the same city I did, but was always there for me. We lived only two hours away, therefore I would visit her in Croston and she would come to Leeds on the rare occasion.

I found myself creating an easy routine between work, university, going out and ordinary tasks such as going to the market or taking the bus. I found myself at home, which gave me peace of mind during the months I spent there.

Moreover, being part of the language assistant programme was what I had worked for during my five years at university, and was way of accomplishing a lifelong dream.

3.3 Achievements

As teachers we can be very critical about ourselves and this tendency can slip to our personal lives, nevertheless I like to take into account the positive aspects of life more than the negative ones.

As a short term visitor to the country there is a limited amount of things you can do with the time you are given, thankfully, personal growth has more to do with self-awareness than time.

Being away from home, virtually on my own was a test from beginning to end, a test I believe I passed. These eight months allowed me to become more independent and responsible; and find a balance between my work and my personal life. This period was not frightening, it was not unbearable, it was in fact very rewarding and assuring of my capabilities. Now I feel more ready than ever to take on a new challenge.

Needless to say, my accent, pronunciation, and overall proficiency have benefit from this experience, however, I believe my knowledge and comprehension of the language in a natural context, have improved the most.

Most of the input I received during my time in England came from native English speakers which had positive aspects, but also presented me with the challenge of new and informal vocabulary; not to mention that I lived in the north of England where people have really strong accents and use different pronunciation.

It is very different to learn a language and hear it in a controlled environment, where everything is accommodated according to you needs, it is an entire different thing to have to use it every day with people who do not necessarily know or care that you are a foreigner and may have trouble understanding a few things.

4. Bernardita Alarcón: My experience as a language assistant.

4.1 Host School: Bishop Rawstorne Church of England Academy

Bishop Rawstorne is a truly outstanding educational establishment that is committed fully to meeting the individual needs of all of their students regardless of their abilities within a caring, supportive environment since the foundation of the school in 1960.

The staff at Bishop Rawstorne delivers a teaching and learning experience with some of the most innovative and creative practice in the country, all of which is supported by the school's rich programme of professional development.

Collegiate partnership is at the center of the strategic development of Bishop Rawstorne with a key role being played in the conception, integration and delivery of the strategies that will underpin excellent practice at local, regional and national level.

In the last twenty years in particular their growth and development has been recognized by the local and national authorities as a specialist Language College in 1996, and recently as a teaching school, In addition they became a training school in 2000 and were awarded leading edge status in 2004. As their reputation for academic excellence grew, in the year 2007 they were awarded additional status as a high performing specialist school of mathematics and science.

Finally, they gained the academy status in September 2011 and as of March 2012 they were designated as a national teaching school and national support school, in recognition of their sustained track record in teaching and learning innovation and excellence.

4.1.1 Modern Foreign Languages

The modern foreign languages' faculty is staffed by 6 full time and 1 part time specialist teachers. Students benefit from contact with one foreign language assistant each year, frequently this assistant would be from Spain or France. There are also associate teachers and parents that help children to improve their levels of confidence and fluency, and to learn more about the culture and countries where the languages are spoken.

Language options are determined by the school; in this case the available are French, German and Spanish.

Students in year 7 at Bishop Rawstorne study one language for 3 hours per week, the more able students can take a second language in year 8. The majority of students study one modern foreign language at key stage 4. More able students have the opportunity to continue 2 languages to GCSE level. Students are taught in 'bands' based on their linguistic capabilities, at the end of the academic year students are assessed and according to their results they may be positioned into another band.

Lessons are highly interactive, with a strong focus on independence and creativity based on their own grammatical knowledge. Students are strongly encouraged to learn vocabulary independently and to make use of the departmental subscription to the interactive "linguastop" website as part of their self-study programme. Given that homework is crucial to support the learning which takes place in the classroom and students will usually receive a homework task to complete each week.

The faculty runs yearly educational study visits abroad to Paris, France and Cologne Germany for year 9 and 10 students. Last year their year 10 and 11 students had the opportunity to visit Barcelona in the inaugural educational study visit to Spain.

4.2 Working as a language assistant

4.2.1 What to expect

As native Spanish speaker you do not realize how much power you have, you master a language and know how to use every aspect of it, however when you think about actually teaching your language it becomes quite a challenge. It is not the same using a language intuitively than teaching it.

In perspective I can say that I feel very pleased with my performance as a language assistant but it was not always this, at the beginning I was terrified, insecure and negative towards many things, but when the day of going to work finally came, all these apprehensions vanished.

Some language assistants have a wonderful time, they thrive in both social and academic aspects. Some schools receive assistants warmly, are well-organized and have a clear plan for them; however this is not always the case. Realistically, you are a 'blip' on the life of host school, you are there briefly and may be a great help, but in the same way you can be a mild inconvenience.

As a language assistant you do not know what you are going to face, some things may be completely out of your control. The school may have some expectations; the previous assistant may have been dynamic, popular and integrated into the life of the school. Or it may have been work-shy and unhelpful. In addition, the students may be keen, well-motivated, and have a good level of Spanish. If so, count your blessings, for you have met a group that is part of the minority. Much more likely, you will meet a group of less motivated students, shy, anxious about speaking Spanish, and perhaps used to being bored by last year's assistant.

Frequently, you are promised a timetable which may or may not materialize, in the same way the small group you were promised expected could turn into a whole class.

All these factors express a clear and simple message: try to be realistic when it comes to your expectations. Be pragmatic and try to ensure that you can benefit from this experience and more than anything enjoy this opportunity.

I have heard the experience of previous language assistants, and they revealed they were virtually ignored by most of the teachers including the MFL teachers.

4.2.2 Working at Bishop Rawstorne

I had never heard about Bishop Rawstorne, Croston or even Lancashire before going to England I just knew it was in the north where I had applied. I remember my first day in England and I remember the bus driver could not understand me when I said 'I am going to Southport' and I thought, 'oh dear this is not going to be easy'.

The first month was mainly about listening, try to get used to the dialect and the accent. I had to write everything, pay a lot of attention and asked if I did not understand. Being curious was very important and I could not afford to be shy, because if I wanted to improve and fulfill my task as a language assistant I had to be willing to make mistakes.

After a few weeks I made some progress and understood what the instructions were and what my work was. Basically, I had to be a language assistant in every Spanish lesson and support the students in every step of the learning process.

I worked in the classroom 12 hours per week from Monday to Thursday, but my work did not stop there. I stayed at school from 8.30 am to 3.15 pm. my timetable changed every week; however I normally had four lessons per day. I worked with most of the teachers from the MFL department and I also spent 4 hour per week helping teachers to create exercises and lessons, and translating some texts from English to Spanish or sometimes from French to Spanish. Moreover, I spent a daily half an hour in speaking practice.

I worked with students from year 7 to year 11, this included being in charge of entire classes and working with smaller groups. Most of the time teachers provided me with the material to use in class; however I did help three of the teachers from the MFL department to prepare material, which I enjoyed greatly.

One of my main tasks was to give presentations on Chilean culture and traditions, e.g. Christmas, Easter and New Year's Eve. For these presentations I used material brought from my country, which gave the students a better understanding of our culture and put into evidence the differences between Chilean and British traditions.

4.2.3 Working with the teachers

As I mentioned before I worked with most of the teacher from the MFL department, however, I formally worked with three.

Mrs. Kate Lawley was one of the teachers I worked with, she was very patient and enthusiastic she spoke in Spanish during the lessons and use a British flag to speak in English, but it was just to explain a new content or give an instruction. Students were also required to practice this dynamic, and they were eager to do it. Even when students did not understand the topic they refused to use English, they would rather ask in Spanish or wait until the caught on. Mrs. Kate's lessons were based on drills

and practice. My role in her classroom was mainly to pronounce new vocabulary and correct the student's pronunciation. Every other lesson, I took a small group of students, and through game based activities, I would reinforce their previous knowledge. I specially remember a game called 'spend your words'; in this game each student had seven words that had to be used to form a new sentence. They had one minute to complete this task, and the first to complete it, won the game. It was very fun and the competitive nature of the students made it very interesting.

Mrs. Kate Lawley was the head of the department and my mentor teacher. She dedicated her life to the school and was always working. She often went out of her way to give more opportunities to those students who needed it. Working with her was inspiring, but also great challenge, she did not speak Spanish fluently and this small language barrier caused me some anxieties, luckily she was very kind and patient.

Mrs. Karen Broadley was another teacher I often worked with and she was brilliant at her work and very proactive. She worked with the 'top band', so her lessons were very demanding and fast-paced, this challenged me and the students to do our best. Karen was very fluent in Spanish and her pronunciation was flawless; more important she was very intuitive and was aware of the students' needs. I remember a couple of girls which I could barely hear when they spoke; it took me a lot of time to help them build a level of confidence that matched their academic abilities.

Mrs. Elaine Hunt was my favorite teacher we worked with a very energetic and loud special needs group. They had a lot of behavioural issues, to such a degree, that we spent two months teaching respect and class behaviour. However, they were very curious and willing to learn a new language. Elaine had the 'bottom bands' from year 7 to year 11. These lessons were very different compared to the others; they were more about memory exercises than vocabulary or grammar lessons. Elaine's' focus

was different because she knew most students needed to gain confidence than just learn the language.

Elaine was special to me, she was not just a colleague, and she was also a friend. We worked very well together and she gave me the freedom to prepare my own lessons. She loved my ideas and took them into account when planning the lessons, making small adjustments. At the end of each lesson she often gave me a feedback that helped me to improve my work as a teacher.

4.2.4 Living in England

At the beginning, I found I adjusted to life in England pretty quickly; I did not face the so called ‘cultural shock’.

Previously to my arrival in England I had not arranged a place to live in Croston, but I had no problems finding a house with a room to let. The Landlady and the locals were very friendly and welcoming. I was lucky to live in a small town, where you find kind people that make an effort to get to know you and are eager to practice Spanish.

The days I spent in the countryside were quite different to the city life I was used to, so I spent most of the time discovering the village. Everything was green and quiet which provided a great place to go for a run which I did at least three times a week. Luckily I did not spend all my time on my own, one of my teacher’s daughter joined the gym and I went with her. She was very into in Spanish, and because she wanted to study it at university, we took this opportunity to improve our language skills.

Living away from home, made me more confident and independent, because I had to do everything and solve every issue on my own.

I was very lucky because my landlady provided me everything that I needed, and that made a great difference; she was my support all the time and my friend as well. As I had a lot of free time I used to go for a lunch with her and her friends. She showed me the country lifestyle which I ended up loving, after a couple of months and when the weather was nice, I spent most of my time gardening, moreover, she helped me to improve my English.

I had lots of opportunities and plenty of time to travel as I had Fridays off school and there are lots of holidays in England. I met up with other assistants and visited lots of places. I also spent a lot of time with my friend Vanessa.

4.2.5 Achievements

My biggest achievements during my teaching experience were the great comments I received from the teachers and the students at the end of the academic year. It was certainly a great pleasure and satisfaction to see that my performance as a language assistant had helped the students learning process.

I must also say that I put into practice what I had been taught in the past 5 years of university.

I believe this past year gave me more confidence on my teaching skills. a few days after I finished my work I received an email of one of the students, and she told me that she would definitely going to miss me next year and she would like to have me as a teacher. Certainly, that was one of the best rewards I have received so far.

Now when I reflect on the many students that I have met the pass year, one particular student comes to mind is Jack Tylor. He was a year 7 student, he was brilliant and

very participating but he struggled in pronunciation I gently assisted him and I sometimes I adjusted assignments for him, encouraged him, and helped him after class. He successfully improved his pronunciation skills and finished the year with great progress and took Spanish for the next year. He was one of my accomplishments.

Living abroad is an enriching experience because it forces you to adapt to things that are unfamiliar and unusual to you. You become independent and open to new, exciting, or terrifying challenges that you would never have encountered in your home country. And that is the most rewarding of all: the opportunity to learn and develop as a person, because you will discover things about yourself that you may not have known before; your beliefs, your passions, your character. Through interacting within a foreign society, your eyes will be open to all sorts of aspects of life that would be difficult to learn in your native country.

5. Comparison between two experiences as language assistants

Although being a language assistant will most likely be rewarding, regardless of where you are posted, every experience is different and several factors to be taken into consideration.

Bishop Rawstone was a very organized school, with clear aims and plans for the school year. They understood the importance and value of having a Language assistant. Berni was the first Latin American assistant, which the school took as an advantage, giving the students a new influence both on culture and language. The teachers used Berni's capabilities to its maximum, and made the most of her time.

On the other hand Vanessa worked in a school that had some administration issues, and whose Spanish teachers were not used to work with language assistants. More often than not, they would not have a plan for the lesson and struggled to incorporate the role of the language assistant into the class.

There were also differences on the attitude and behaviour of the students. Bishop Rawstone has developed and maintains a disciplinary system compatible to the core values of the institution. The students practice this on a daily basis and take pride in their attitude. On the contrary, at Brigshaw behavioral issues were a daily occurrence and the school struggled solve the recurring problems.

As a last observation, we cannot ignore the impact of the social and economic inequality. There was a clear gap between the backgrounds of the students of Bishop and Brigshaw. The lifestyle to which the students from Bishop were used to, allowed them to focus on their studies, having all the resources the school provided, and also the help the parents were eager to provide.

Most of the students at Brigshaw were of a modest background, this did not reflect on the resources they had access to, but in the involvement of the parents. This mostly made a difference when it came to the participation of the parents, and the conditions they had at home.

Nevertheless, our experiences were not as different as we anticipated. The north of England has a very particular atmosphere that does change whether you are in a city or a village.

Moreover, being in permanent contact with each other allowed us to have an outsider's perspective of our situation, and helped us to get better outcomes.

Conclusion

As a conclusion for this work it is important to emphasize on the differences between the English and Chilean educational system.

The lacks of funding and outdated legislations have a very negative effect on Chilean education. Both of these factors are the foundation of a deeply damaged system that only offers superficial solutions instead of the radical change it needs. One of the areas that have had to deal with the ramifications is the national curriculum. It is essential to mention that its structure, presents issues that can only be classified as excluding, giving little to no importance to subjects that develop the children natural abilities and only focusing on academic performance. This is only a small proof of a growing tendency that cares very little about the students and teachers, and that tends to overlook and neglect the needs of both parties.

Another thing worth to mention is the sense of collaboration found in the English educational system. Everyone, from the student body to the authorities, has an equally important role, which is why it is important for everyone to work as a part of a team. On the same note it is understood that the labour of teachers is of great importance, hence it is appreciated and respected by the community.

In regards of the language assistant program, it is to be said that provides great benefits to the students of foreign languages. England, as a country that struggles with this subject, has found a way to show students the diversity of the world and give them a chance to interact with native speakers of different languages in relaxed yet controlled environments. This programme is a big step towards stopping the shortage of language skills in the United Kingdom, and preventing the economic and cultural impact this may have in the future.

There is one thing we know with utter certainty, and that is that we have had a once in a life time opportunity. After years of hard work we were able to accomplish a dream that most English teachers have; however, and as a personal reflection, we find necessary to say that this research work and teaching experience will be completely pointless if we do not find a way to use it as a reference and adapt it to our future realities as teachers. We hope to give our students the same opportunities that were given to us, and use our knowledge of the English language and culture to open their minds to greater things, and to show them that with perseverance and conviction anyone can achieve their goals.

In the same manner, as a way to improve our national educational system, it is important to take the positive aspects of what we have seen from the English educational system and use it to have a more critical view on our performance, and make a real and valuable contribution.

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