

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL
SPANISH LANGUAGE TUTOR PROGRAMME 2007/2008
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

Jordi Canalda i Ribas

INTRODUCTION

Although based at Saint Andrew's High, I also worked at Clydebank High School on alternate weeks. Occasionally I also visited Kilpatrick School and Dumbarton Academy. All of them are west Dunbartonshire Council schools. My position started on 3 October, 2007 and ended on 30 May, 2008.

1. Description of my workload as a Spanish Language Tutor.

1.1. The classes

I worked with 3rd and 4th –year classes in both Saint Andrew's and Clydebank High and with higher and advanced-higher Spanish classes in Saint Andrew's High School. In Dumbarton Academy I worked with a 4th-year Spanish class for one period every second week and I assisted the Foreign Language teacher at Kilpatrick School with the 1st and 2nd-year Spanish groups. These two latter schools I visited occasionally.

1.2. Timetables

I had a specific timetable for each one of the schools.

Saint Andrew's High School

At Saint Andrew's High my timetable ran from 8:55 to 15:20. I had 14 periods of Spanish and 6 observation periods. The rest of the gaps I devoted to my project. This timetable ran from October through March and after March I was given a new timetable with 10 periods of Spanish and 6 observation periods. Again I could work on my project for the remaining hours.

Clydebank High School

My timetable at Clydebank High School ran thus: from 9:00 to 15:30. I had 5 Spanish classes, 6 observation periods and free time to carry my project out.

Dumbarton Academy

I worked at Dumbarton Academy on every second Tuesday. I had a Spanish class and 2 observation classes. The rest of the day (from 9:00 to 11:00) was free for me for personal work.

Kilpatrick School

I worked at Kilpatrick School on every other Wednesday. I started at 9:00 and finished around noon. I had two Spanish classes.

1.3 Spanish Classes

My objective, on starting this programme, was to support the classroom teachers and help students improve, above all, their listening and speaking skills.

My tasks as a Spanish Language Tutor differed from school to school. The level of involvement and responsibility varied enormously depending on the school and the teacher I was to assist.

In Saint Andrew's HS, for example, I worked both individually and with groups of students inside the class. At times I even worked with the whole class. At all times, the priority was set on maximizing the use of language and reinforcing pronunciation. I also took part in a number of presentation classes which aimed at promoting the interest in foreign languages, specially Spanish.

In Clydebank HS I worked with small groups of students and with the whole class and I even took the whole group on occasions when I had prepared a special activity or when the teacher was absent. The basic objective, here too, was to reinforce students pronunciation and listening skills as well as broaden their vocabulary.

In Dumbarton Academy I exclusively worked with small groups of students on speaking activities I myself prepared most of the times.

In Kilpatrick School I worked alongside the class teacher on speaking activities with the whole groups.

1.4 Methodology

Again, the different way every teacher has of running a class was to influence the methodology I would employ.

I helped classes with pronunciation by saying the required vocabulary or expressions out loud and asking the group to repeat. I sat with individuals or small groups and ask them questions answers for which they had prepared before hand. I would correct any possible mistakes they made. I used flash cards with the students to boost communication, specially their speaking skills and language improvisation.

Together with the class teacher we enacted dialogues (in Clydebank HS), which required students to pay special attention to and elicit vocabulary from. Later students were to act dialogues out by themselves, too. I told them stories to them, I read fables to them using pictures, they would then have to recreate the stories in their own words.

I used varied visual presentations, such as powerpoint or picture shows I had compiled on traditions in Catalonia and Spain, for example. I sang Christmas Carols to the class. I recorded some activities and had my family (wife) add a female voice to the recordings.

I read listening-examination papers for the class, following the teacher's instructions.

2. My project

2.1 Presentation

My project deals with citizenship. In the light of the new Education Law (LOE), passed by the Spanish Government in May 2006, a number of new subjects were to start being taught as from last September, 2007. One of these new subjects is “Education for Citizenship and Human Rights”. On the grounds of this new scenario, therefore, I have developed a series of issues that deal with the general topic of *Citizenship*. The topics, after a hard task discarding and outsingling are the following ones:

1. Discrimination and Identity
2. Bullying
3. Xenophobia, Racism, and Genocide
4. Discrimination and Violence against women
5. Young people at risk
6. Human Rights

2.2 Observation

Although some teachers were not actually aware of my project I have to say that most of them offered me precious support and advice, not only regarding a subject which does not exist as such in the Scottish curriculum (*Citizenship* permeates through the curriculum and can be found in many shapes in each and every subject), but also regarding the structure of the whole project, the kinds of materials that would be interesting to use or by recommending me books that specifically tackled some of the topics I was to work on.

Again, I have to say that my level of involvement or participation varied from class to class. For the sake of an example I could simply say that I had the chance to teach a class of religion at Saint Andrew’s HS, which was an interesting experience, needless to say. I took active part in some classes by providing feedback on a specific issue (laws in Singapore, safety in Spain, to cite two examples); in a few classes my presence was simply overlooked.

2.3 Resources

While doing my project I enjoyed total freedom to use resources in the different schools I worked. I had a personal key for internet access at each school and borrowed books and materials from the libraries. Fellow teachers and librarians really encouraged me to use all these materials and helped me through the specially hard adjustment stage.

The rooms I used to work in were the libraries and a staff computing room at Clydebank HS. The resources and the working environment were stimulating and could work perfectly well there. In Saint Andrew’s there was no such room, unfortunately, and I either worked in the library (which was not always possible) or shared a room with outdated computers with internet access (with students who had been expelled from class).

2.4 Objectives of my project

When starting work on my project I had to face a slight drawback: the fact (as I mention in 2.2 above) that there is no specific *Citizenship* subject in the Scottish curriculum. That would translate into me visiting and observing many classes which were somehow related to citizenship itself (PSHE, Social Studies, Religion, Computing, Tourism, etc.). The obvious problem that entails is that not each and every class I observed were actually tackling materials I could use or I could benefit from for my project. On the other hand, some issues were tackled laterally (gender violence, apparently part of a much broader *Discrimination* issue is an example of what I am saying). All in all I have to say that teachers, in general, provided me with enough information or feedback to make up for that. The experience of teachers here regarding this subject is considerable and their support and feedback were invaluable. I also spent countless hours doing web research, reading and putting ideas together. All that made me rethink my project a couple of times. The original layout has been changed and new topics added. I think that the objectives have been achieved in a 90%.

3. Social benefits of the programme

3.1. School activities I participated in outside my regular duties.

I took active part in a number of activities at each and every school I worked. At Clydebank HS, I played football with other fellow teachers. At Kilpatrick School I took part in a gastronomy experience put together by the Home economics' teacher there. I contributed to it by bringing a Spanish potato omelette. Exactly the same thing followed at Kilpatrick School. I Saint Andrew's HS, for example, I gave students some speeches on the importance of foreign languages in a globalized world.

3.2. Out of school activities I participated in.

I also took part in a number of events organized by the school staff. I went to Ceilidhs, night-out events, to a Christmas dinner; I went to pubs with the staff, etc. I also dined at teachers' houses, went up Ben Lomond with a teacher friend from Saint Andrew's. I have successfully organized a summer family stay in Sant Pol de Mar, my hometown, for a student in saint Andrew's HS. I had the chance of having dinner with the student's family. All these activities and events have helped me shape a better understanding of the Scottish way of living. I have to admit, however, that the fact that I was here with my family prevented me from engaging in an even greater number of activities.

3.3. Cultural benefits for the school

I truly believe this experience brings a two-sided benefit: not only does the the SLT highly benefit from it but the whole school community does.

As I will comment in point 4 this is a unique experience for a teacher. Nevertheless, it is, by no means, a lesser experience for the staff, students, or for the non-teaching staff surrounding the teacher, or even for the community as a whole.

This programme broadens students' minds, refreshes teacher's linguistic skills and helps create bonds between nations. In my case, even my family highly benefited from the experience and, in turn, the schools my children were at (their friends, the teachers, etc.). It is my understanding that such wonderful programmes bring a unique chance to learn about another culture first hand. In this sense, SLTs (or language assistants in general) help bridge the cultural gaps existing between countries and I really think this is more necessary than ever in this, our globalized world, in which there seems to be a sheer lack of understanding.

4. Further comments

1. Advantages of being an SLT (objectives)

I have had experiences working abroad in the past. This time, however, I have cherished each and every moment. Unlike past international experiences, this time I have had enough peace of mind to create the necessary conditions to fully live the experience. The results are remarkable: I have learnt a lot about this amazing country, for which my family and myself have developed a devotion; I have evolved as a teacher thanks to being in contact with so many different ways of approaching teaching and thanks to the fact of having witnessed and observed so many experienced teachers "in action" first hand; I developed more confidence at a linguistic level thanks to the mentoring of such teachers as W Coyle and J Moore, M Woods, S Connelly, etc. last but not least, I have come to understand the world a bit better.

2. Suggestions about this programme

It's a shame that not many teachers have the chance to live through such an experience. It is an inflection point in everyone's career. I would suggest the programme be made more accessible to the largest number of teachers possible. I would also suggest that teachers in Scotland be granted the same opportunity (they would make a difference in the Catalan schools, too).

Jordi Canalda

30 April, 2008