

Language Assistant Programme

by Elena Vázquez, Spanish LA 2015



One of my professional goals in the beginning of my stay was to learn how to make language programmes more interesting and motivating for the students. I think I'm on the right track now, because I can see more enthusiasm on the kids' faces. I also wanted to establish links between students and the Spanish-speaking world, so I have started a pen-friend programme between my year 11 students at Albany Senior High School and the pupils of an English teacher back home in Spain.



Personally, I wanted to improve my level of English but I'm finding it quite hard since Spanish is my working tool. Besides, when you have been speaking and learning a language for so long it is difficult to get rid of bad habits. In some aspects NZ reminds me of the UK, but there are many things which are unique. I admit, that the main difficulties for me have been dealing with the quality of the internet connection and the public transport. Both more expensive and less "steady" than in Europe.

The cultural differences are many; I think the NZ society is much more sporty than the Spanish, almost everyone is involved in a sport club or, at least, go to the gym or running. In Spain we prefer watching rather than playing the sport games, even better if it's at a bar with friends. I miss the "street life" we have in Spain. Another thing that I found quite strange is that in Spain you always say hello when you enter a room and there is someone inside while here people usually don't say anything if they don't know you.

I find the NZ school system much more exciting and motivating to students. I can see that both the students and specially the teachers involve themselves much more in the learning/teaching process, resulting in a more authentic and productive programme. Both the Spanish and the NZ system share some difficulties, like the number of students in class or the lack of perception on the students' side of a real need of learning another language since they already speak an international one. The aspect that I find more positive in NZ is that the teachers, in average, are better prepared and, above all, more passionate about what they are teaching.

With the best students I do some extra work about pronunciation. I meet them in small groups every one or two weeks and help them with the questions they may have and we do different exercises to improve their pronunciation. I also meet the weakest students, in case they are interested in receiving help, and do some extra exercises on the topics and grammar point we have seen during class. I try to make it in a relax way so that they feel more comfortable and self confident."