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**A case study on the impact of a one-week Spanish exchange trip on the attitudes and productive language skills of four Year 8 pupils**

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**Abstract**

*This study reports the findings of a small-scale case study on the impact of a one-week Spanish exchange trip on the attitudes, speaking and writing skills of four Year 8 pupils from a Cambridgeshire comprehensive school, with a view to discovering how the language teacher can maximise the benefits of trips abroad for all pupils involved. The findings are based on language tests, interviews and attitudinal questionnaires completed before and after the trip. The data suggest that pupils returned from the trip with more positive attitudes towards Spain and Spanish-speaking people, and with increased motivation towards their study of the language in school. Pupils also gained proficiency in their productive language skills, and within this study a clear link emerged between improvement in confidence and attainment, and an amount of Spanish spoken and written while abroad.*

## **A case study on the impact of a one-week Spanish exchange trip on the attitudes and productive language skills of four Year 8 pupils**

**Karen Forbes**

### **Introduction**

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*The experience of a total environment affecting all five senses challenges learners in ways which the classroom can seldom imitate.*

(Byram, 1997)

School exchange trips form an integral part of countless Modern Foreign Language (MFL) departments across the United Kingdom, and as such, they are highly valued as providing a unique opportunity for secondary school aged pupils to become temporarily immersed in this “total environment” (Byram, 1997) of language and culture.

The benefits of these exchange trips abroad are implicit within the National Curriculum (NC) (QCA, 2007), which states that pupils should have the opportunity to “hear, speak, read and write in the target language regularly and frequently within the classroom and beyond”, and be able to “deal with unfamiliar language, unexpected responses and unpredictable situations”. They should also have access to “authentic materials and experience direct or indirect contact with native speakers and writers” (DfES, 2003). Trips abroad appear to provide the ideal milieu in which to fulfil these criteria. It is no surprise therefore, that these trips are marketed to parents as providing an excellent educational experience, especially bearing in mind that “even a short study visit of 5 days contains as many learning hours, at ten or more per day, as half a year of language lessons” (Snow & Byram, 1997). This firm belief in the benefits of exchanges is also echoed in the views of the participants. One MFL teacher from an 11-16 Cambridgeshire comprehensive school stated that they provide “an opportunity to speed up language learning in a real environment and for real purposes”, and a Year 8 pupil from the same school also cited improving his language skills as the principal reason for deciding to take part.

Yet in spite of this seemingly unfaltering faith in the advantages of exchange trips on the part of the government and the schools themselves, there is very little empirically based research on the topic. As a trainee MFL teacher, I am particularly interested in what effect these exchanges actually have on pupils' attitudes and linguistic proficiency, and specifically what I can do, as a language teacher, to best prepare students for exchanges and maximise the benefits while they are abroad. This study will therefore firstly examine what research has currently been done in this area, and then move on to describe and analyse my own study of the impact of a one-week Spanish exchange on a group of four Year 8 pupils who had only been learning Spanish for 6 months prior to departure.

## **Literature Review**

As stated above, in spite of the widespread nature of the exchange trip, there is surprisingly little empirical research into the effect it has on secondary school pupils' linguistic proficiency and attitudes. The majority of existing research has been conducted at tertiary rather than secondary level, focusing on the long-term undergraduate 'year abroad' rather than a short-term visit. As a result, I have chosen to focus on just three studies which, due to their varied perspectives, give an interesting overview of the effects of the school exchange. The first, and undoubtedly most relevant to my own study, is Fisher and Evans' (2000) research focusing on the effect of a school exchange on pupils' attitudes and proficiency in language learning. A 2005 article by the same authors follows this up by tracing the same pupils to GCSE level to track any long-term effects of the exchange. The second study, by Lapkin, Hart and Swain (1995) similarly deals with the linguistic attainment of secondary school-aged pupils, however over a longer period of time (three months) and this time in Canada. I will also make some reference to Laubscher's (1994) study which, admittedly deals with long-term undergraduate periods abroad, but does give an interesting insight into the effect of a home-stay environment on the students.

### **Effect on language proficiency**

Let us firstly consider what effect the short-term school exchange trip has on pupils' proficiency in the language across all four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing). One of the primary aims of Fisher and Evans' (2000) study is to determine if participation in an exchange trip has a positive effect on pupil's acquisition of the language, and if so, what the nature of this effect is. They conducted their study with 68 Year 9 pupils at three Cambridgeshire schools who were all

participating in French exchanges of either 6, 9, or 11 days, and would be resident in the homes of their exchange partners during the trip. In order to measure language proficiency, the researchers carried out language tests in all four skill areas both before and after the exchange trip.

Of the four skill areas, it was the pupils' listening skills that showed most improvement, with 62% increasing their score, however interestingly there was no significant improvement in reading skills. This seems plausible however, as pupils undoubtedly receive a much higher volume of aural input during an exchange, and many will logically become more adept at understanding and processing this spoken information. It is also interesting to note that in the 2005 study of the same pupils, the researchers discovered that even though "there was no statistically significant link between participation and overall GCSE grade, there was a small correlation between participation and results for the Listening skills paper". It seems therefore that it is the listening skills that not only make the most improvement during a short exchange, but also have the longest lasting effect. The study by Lapkin et al. (1995) also reflects pupils' improved confidence in listening skills, however they adopted very different means of data collection. Their study focused on over a hundred English-speaking pupils from grades 10-12, with varied experiences of learning French, who spent three months in Quebec living in French-speaking host families. In order to assess what gains were made by the pupils in French language proficiency, they not only set pre- and post-visit tests, but also pre- and post-visit self-assessment questionnaires where pupils were asked to assess how difficult they would find it to complete a selection of everyday activities. Results showed that "post-visit ratings exceed pre-visit ratings in all skill areas", but particularly in receptive listening activities such as watching and understanding a French television programme or film. Unlike Fisher & Evans' (2000) study, Lapkin et al. (1995) also witnessed some gains in reading skills, however we must take into account that their study took place over a much longer period of time, and their pupils attended regular classes in a French-medium school, so they would have had considerably more exposure to written material.

In terms of productive skills, Fisher and Evans (2000) found that writing skills showed significant progression after the exchange trip, with 52% of pupils improving their score. Upon analysis, post-visit texts demonstrated improved fluency and accuracy, with more use of idioms, different tenses and less interference from other languages. It was also suggested that in the post-visit task of writing about their trip, pupils were perhaps "driven by a greater communicative impulse" (Evans & Fisher, 2005) and found the topic more engaging than the pre-visit task of writing about their daily

life at home. Lapkin et al. (1995) also reported improved confidence with tasks such as writing a letter. Interestingly, Fisher and Evans (2000) discovered “a statistically significant correlation between pupils’ improved performance in writing and their claims about the amount of French spoken in their host families” reflecting a clear link between progress in the two productive skills. The 44% of pupils who improved their speaking skills demonstrated improved pronunciation, more confidence, and similar to the writing tests, more use of tenses and idiom. Similarly Lapkin et al. (1995) report not only that “substantial majorities in all groups perceived that their oral skills and confidence in speaking had improved a great deal”, but also that pupils ended the exchange with a higher level of sociolinguistic awareness such as an increased familiarity with different dialects and registers.

Whereas both studies detailed above were concerned with determining linguistic gains across the four skill areas, the study by Lapkin et al. (1995) also considered whether these gains differed according to proficiency level prior to departure. Unlike the study by Fisher and Evans (2000) which dealt with pupils who were all at the same stage of learning French, the participants of the other study (Lapkin et al., 1995) ranged from pupils who had 4 years of French studies at school, to those who had been part of French-immersion programs from an early age. Interestingly, they found that “students with initially lower French language proficiency will make greater gains as a result of submersion in a French environment” (Lapkin et al., 1995). This is something which had a bearing on the selection of pupils for my own study, which will be outlined later in this essay.

### **Effect of the home-stay environment**

We have seen that an exchange trip can significantly improve certain aspects of language proficiency, but let us now consider what role the home-stay environment has to play, not only on pupils’ acquisition of language, but also on their identification with the country and culture of the target language. In this sense, exchange trips are very different from other trips abroad where pupils stay in residences with other native speakers of their own language, and provide a unique and valuable opportunity for young pupils to experience the sort of “total environment” referred to by Byram in the epigraph above.

In terms of language acquisition, the studies by both Fisher and Evans (2000) and Lapkin et al. (1995) recognise the role of the host family environment in the improvement of language

proficiency. It inevitably creates “a variety of informal language learning opportunities” (Lapkin et al., 1995), with pupils often being placed in situations where they cannot resort to speaking in English, particularly with host parents, thus creating a situation where pupils are motivated to use the target language for real communication. These frequent interactions with native speakers “cannot be overstated in achieving impressive linguistic gains” (Lapkin et al., 1995), as pupils are constantly practising and improving their language. Fisher and Evans (2000) also comment that “very few pupils found the families’ efforts at correcting their French a discouraging factor”.

However the research by Fisher and Evans, unlike that of Lapkin et al. also provides evidence that the benefits of the exchange trip, and particularly the home-stay environment, extend beyond the purely linguistic. Pupils generally had good relationships with their host families and found that “the home setting was more welcoming both personally and linguistically than other contexts” (Fisher & Evans, 2000). As a result, the exchange trip had a positive effect on pupils’ attitudes towards France and French people. After the trip they rated French people as being more tolerant, friendly and having a better sense of humour than they had previously thought, and 44.1% of pupils said they would like to live in France, compared to only 26.5% before the trip. Living in a host family therefore gives pupils a unique opportunity to assess what everyday life is like in a different country, a topic which Laubscher (1994) deals with much more thoroughly in his research.

Laubscher’s (1994) study primarily concerns undergraduate American students studying abroad at various institutions across Europe, Africa and Asia. Unlike Fisher and Evans (2000) and Lapkin et al. (1995), the focus here is on student perceptions of their experiences rather than linguistic attainment, and through purely qualitative data obtained through interviews, Laubscher seeks to find out how students have used out-of-class experiences to enhance their learning. Due to the age of the participants and the nature of their exchanges, a large part of Laubscher’s study is somewhat irrelevant to my own, however of particular interest is his discussion of the six students who spent either one or two semesters living with host families in Osaka, Japan, and who “considered the homestay to be the highlight of the non-academic program” (Laubscher, 1994).

As with most school exchange trips, host families were expected to incorporate their guests into family activities as much as possible and as such, “homestay deserves special attention as a way of gaining insight into the private lives of the host nationals” (Laubscher, 1994). One girl in Osaka, for example, tells of how living with the family helped her to learn about cultural differences in

interpersonal communication and differing expectations of family roles and responsibilities. We must bear in mind though, that these students had a much longer period of time to build relationships than secondary school pupils on an exchange. Yet the two groups, though very different, have similar opportunities to both observe and participate in a different culture and way of life. Laubscher (1994) comments that:

...by developing relationships with family members and by integrating themselves into the family environments, the informants were able to maximise the opportunity to be participant observers within the frame of their homestay arrangements. The homestay setting provided them with a “living laboratory” in which to exercise and develop their ethnographic skills.

It is interesting that Laubscher should refer to these students as ethnographers, as this is an allusion which reoccurs frequently in literature relating to exchange students (Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991; Snow & Byram, 1997). Denscombe (2007) states that “the ethnographer needs to share in the lives rather than observe from a position of detachment”, which is effectively what exchange pupils are in an ideal position to do within a host family. However these pupils, particularly young secondary school aged pupils, will not automatically develop and exercise these ‘ethnographic skills’; they therefore need to be prepared for making the most out of their experiences: “It is not simply enough to provide opportunities: The responsibility for ensuring that those opportunities are pedagogically sound rests with the educator who is planning and administering the program” (Laubscher, 1994).

### **Suggested interventions**

Bearing in mind the above statement by Laubscher, let us now look at some possible interventions on the part of the teacher. Interestingly, all three studies discussed above simply report on the effect of an exchange trip on pupils, without any pedagogical intervention on the part of the teacher or researcher. It is true that they provide evidence that even without any form of intervention, many pupils will return with improved linguistic proficiency in some skill areas and an increased awareness of another culture, but how can teachers exploit this unique opportunity in order to maximise benefits for all pupils?

Fisher and Evans (2000) end their article with some suggestions for teachers co-ordinating exchanges, which focus mainly on what can be done to prepare pupils for the trip before their departure. These include providing pupils with useful language for surviving in a homestay environment with a focus on pronunciation and increasing their cultural awareness about the

country they will be visiting. However as important as this preparation is, I believe it is also important to make the most of the time spent in the “total environment”, and other studies and books suggest some ways of achieving this. One such task which pupils could be asked to do while abroad, is to interview native speakers about a particular topic. Taylor (1991) for example, suggests that pupils could interview adults about “their occupation, distance travelled to work, means of travel” and later draw comparisons with a similar group of adults at home, and Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991) describe a school trip where pupils were divided into groups and asked to interview local people on market day about topics such as leisure activities in the area. This sort of task will not only engage pupils’ speaking and listening skills, but can also, depending on the topic chosen, have an ethnographic function in guiding them towards a better understanding of a different culture and way of life.

This observation of, and reflection on culture can also be encouraged through worksheets or group activities. Taylor (1991) for example, suggests observation sheets for pupils to use while in schools, which will encourage them to draw comparisons between their own learning situation and that of their partner. Snow and Byram (1997) also outline a series of brief case studies of activities designed to help “structure pupils’ experience of another country” and “reinforce positive attitudes towards other cultures”. These include tasks such as designing a leaflet to be used by future tourists travelling through the region, analysing the feasibility of twinning their home town with the town they visited in France, and investigating the accuracy of various preconceptions and stereotypes held by British people about France and the French. These tasks were all undertaken by groups on a residential school trip, rather than an exchange, however could easily be adapted to be included in a home-stay programme. Regardless of the nature of the activity, the authors underline the importance of creating “a task or scenario which involves pupils in an investigation with a purpose and a sense of realism, not just an exercise for its own sake” (Snow & Byram, 1997).

## **Conclusion**

It is clear from all of the studies presented above, that exchange trips still remain a worthwhile and beneficial part of the MFL learning experience. In spite of the fact that the three principal studies described are very different in terms of the age and circumstances of their participants and none of them are of a large enough scale to enable us to make generalisations, they do however concur in providing evidence that exchange trips offer an ideal environment for pupils to improve their



linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness. It is then the responsibility of the teacher or co-ordinator, to harness this potential in order to maximise the learning experience for their pupils.

## **Methodology**

Bearing in mind existing research outlined in the previous section, I decided to conduct a small-scale case study to determine the impact of a one-week Spanish exchange trip on four Year 8 pupils. I addressed the following research questions, with a view to discovering how the MFL teacher can maximise the learning potential of an exchange trip:

- How does a one-week Spanish exchange affect pupils' attitudes towards Spain and learning Spanish?
- How does participation in an exchange trip affect pupils' writing skills?
- How does participation in an exchange trip affect pupils' speaking skills?

Due to limitations of time, I decided to focus on the productive skills of speaking and writing in order to assess linguistic proficiency, although it would have been interesting to measure all four skill areas, as in the studies by Fisher and Evans (2000) and Lapkin et al. (1995).

## **Context**

The study was carried out in an 11-16 comprehensive school in Cambridgeshire. The school runs well-established exchanges each year to both France and Spain, and believes that “well organised visits, [...] not only support the curriculum, they can also provide enjoyable and memorable experiences that will last a lifetime” (School Visits Policy).

This particular trip was a one-week visit from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2009 to Palencia in Spain and constituted the first leg of the exchange. All pupils spent the week living with the family of their exchange partner. In total, 18 pupils decided to take part in the exchange, as shown in table 1.

	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 10</b>
<b>Male</b>	3	2	1
<b>Female</b>	1	11	0

**Table 1: Pupils taking part in the exchange**

### **Case Study**

I decided to focus this case study specifically on the four Year 8 pupils, who will be referred to throughout this study as Ellie, David, Owen and Chris. These pupils particularly interested me as they had only been learning Spanish for 6 months prior to departure and even though they are all high ability, motivated pupils, they had only been working in class at National Curriculum level 3 across all skill areas. None of the four had ever been either to Spain, or on an exchange trip before, however have all been abroad on family holidays.

I wanted to investigate whether, as Lapkin et al. (1995) suggested, students with initially lower language proficiency make greater gains on an exchange trip, however unlike Lapkin et al.'s much larger study, I will be focusing solely on this one group rather than making comparisons with other pupils of different levels of experience. As such, this study clearly falls into the category of a case study as defined by Denscombe (2007):

Case studies focus on one (or just a few) instances of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance [...] the aim is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular.

The “phenomenon” in question therefore is the single one-week Spanish exchange trip and the case study will focus on just four pupils within this. Taber (2007) also suggests that the case study is best suited to situations where “the investigator has little control over events” and where “the number of significant variables may exceed the number of cases, making control of variables impossible”, as is the case here.

However I am aware that one case study cannot offer enough evidence to support generalizations about all learners in a similar situation, and that is by no means the intention of this study. I wish instead to look closely at *how* the Spanish exchange trip impacts upon the attitudes and productive language skills of these four particular Year 8 pupils, with a view to discovering how I, as an MFL teacher, can maximise the benefits of exchange trips for pupils in the future.

### **Preparation sessions**

Due to the wide spread of pupils involved in the exchange over several different year groups and classes, it was not possible to integrate specific preparation for the trip into lessons. However, bearing in mind that “preparation is important for language learning in a natural context” (Ife, 2000), I chose to conduct a series of five lunchtime sessions for pupils involved in the exchange. During the first three sessions we focused on key language with a view to “preparing pupils for the kind of language they will need when staying in the family” (Fisher & Evans, 2000). Aware that the four Year 8 students had a very limited range of vocabulary and structures, I created a phrase booklet for them, which we worked through during the sessions, putting them to use in role-play situations. I was also able to record native speakers reading the phrases, and upload these audio files onto the school network so the pupils could listen to and download them to help with pronunciation. I also provided them with a list of common verbs in the past tense, so they would be able to talk to their host family about what they had done during the day, as they had not yet touched on the past tense in class. In addition, we discussed different “language gathering strategies” as suggested by Fisher and Evans (2000), such as writing down new vocabulary in notebooks, taking photographs of signs and collecting leaflets.

However as Snow and Byram (1997) quite rightly state, “the experience is much more than linguistic”, so I therefore used the remaining sessions to develop pupils’ cultural awareness. We started by making a mind-map of their preconceptions and expectations about Spain and Spanish people, which they were asked to take with them and investigate whether or not they were true, for example, by making a tally each time they saw a bull, or a Spanish person wearing a ‘sombrero’. The purpose of this type of exercise, as suggested by Snow and Byram (1997), was to prepare pupils for challenging stereotypes and to help them “to start to consider the differences between cultures from fact and not from bias”. We also discussed practical issues such as the difference in mealtimes and ‘siestas’ in the afternoon.

### **Activities while abroad**

In order to exploit the learning opportunities while abroad, I gave the pupils some tasks to do while they were away (Appendix 3). I asked them to keep a diary about what they saw and did, which they were to try and write in Spanish as much as possible with the help of their exchange partner. This would not only provide a practical outlet for pupils to practice their writing skills, but would

later act as a particularly useful form of documentary data for me to determine pupils' personal reactions to different events and situations, as I was not present on the trip. Pupils were also asked to interview their host parents about the town, and their exchange partner about their school using questions which we compiled together during the preparation sessions. As Taylor (1991) suggests, such activities can provide "a chance for genuine communication to take place" and also help pupils to "build relationships in the host family". As the pupils would also be spending some time in school with their exchange partner, I created observation sheets for them to complete during lessons as suggested by Taylor (1991) in order to help them to notice the similarities and differences, and make them "more aware of their own learning situation in England".

### **Data Collection**

In the week before their departure, the pupils completed questionnaires giving information about any previous experiences abroad, how they felt about learning Spanish and how confident they felt in each of the four skill areas, why they decided to take part in the exchange and their attitudes towards Spain and Spanish people (Appendix 1). Within a few days of returning from the trip they completed post-visit questionnaires which asked several of the same questions, and additional questions about how well they got on with their host family/exchange partner, the amount of Spanish spoken, and how much their language was corrected (Appendix 2).

Interviews were also conducted with pupils and accompanying teachers after the exchange trip. These interviews were semi-structured in order to "to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised" (Denscombe, 2007). I asked pupils about their experiences abroad in the host family and in the school, and also about how they coped with the language and what they noticed about Spanish culture. The aim of this was, as with Fisher and Evans (2000) study, "to identify any personal and social factors which might have influenced their language development". Transcripts of these interviews are presented in Appendix 4. To corroborate this and gain extra information on activities undertaken during the exchange, I asked the accompanying teachers for their perspectives on how the pupils coped both personally and linguistically.

Pupils also completed speaking and writing tasks both before and after the exchange trip. Before the visit pupils were asked a series of basic questions in Spanish about themselves, their family and their town, and the open-ended writing test was on the same topic. The post-visit speaking test questions were similar, but this time based on Palencia and their host family, as was the post-visit

writing task. The diaries written by pupils abroad also provided an important source of documentary data and another informal source of pupils' gains in written Spanish. By using multiple sources of data, as is typical of the case study, I was able to triangulate data and ensure the credibility of my results and analysis.

## **Data Analysis: How does a one-week Spanish exchange affect pupils' attitudes towards Spain and learning Spanish?**

### **Attitudes to Spain**

Both before and after the visit pupils were asked to complete a mind-map of what they associated with Spain. The purpose of this was not only to give pupils a focus while abroad as they had to decide whether or not what they had written was true, but also to see how their attitudes towards the country changed as a result of the visit. As Snow and Byram (1997) state, a trip abroad should not be "simply a matter of physical displacement, but rather the modification and development of richer attitudes and understandings". The pre-visit mind-maps were filled with stereotypical concrete images, such as the sunshine, tapas, beaches, bull-fighting, Benidorm and swimming pools. After the visit however, all four pupils had a lot more to say and more than doubled the number of items from the pre-visit mind-map. Several items remained, for example they all still commented on the weather, however they also removed some words, such as 'beach', 'Benidorm' and 'bull-fighting', as these did not form part of their experience abroad. They also included many adjectives to describe Spanish people, such as friendly, helpful and kind, and commented on the culture in terms of food (paella, ham), buildings (historical), everyday life (siestas, busy, large families) and schools (no uniform). Interestingly, Owen wrote 'catholic' on his pre-visit mind map, however in the post-visit interview, told me that he did not find this to be the case, as Spain was actually quite similar to England in that "it *was* quite religious, but now it's just kind of going towards... no one really cares that much about religion". This shows that by observing life in Spain and using their initial preconceptions as a starting point, pupils were able to assess and re-evaluate their judgements and therefore start to consider a different culture based on facts, as Snow and Byram (1997) suggest.

Pupils were also able to act as "participant observers" (Laubscher, 1994) in the Spanish school, and it was evident in the post-visit interviews that they had started to make comparisons with their own school. Chris thought "it was very different... they're much more busy", and David said "it wasn't

quite as modern”. It would have been interesting to follow this up in class after the exchange by perhaps asking the pupils to prepare a short presentation on the similarities and differences between the two schools. Pupils also found out about the culture by talking to native speakers. For example, from the interview task David did with his host parents, he “found out that quite a lot of them don’t live in Palencia in the summer, just for the winter for like, school and work. And in the summer they go and live in this little village”.

Pupils had the opportunity to go on several day trips throughout their stay, organised by both the school, and their host families. However, although they spoke of these experiences favourably, they did not appear to have had as profound an impact as the homestay environment. Chris for example, “learnt a lot about the cities” and Owen “enjoyed looking at the architecture”, however these experiences seemed “more superficial in terms of the insights they afforded” (Laubscher, 1994), which mirrors what Laubscher (1994) found in his study of undergraduate students abroad.

### **Attitudes to Spanish people**

As part of the pre- and post-visit questionnaires, pupils were also asked to indicate on a scale of 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), to what extent they agreed with a series of descriptions of Spanish people, as shown in figure 1 below.

In general, all four of the pupils came back from Spain with more favourable attitudes towards Spanish people than when they left. These results are in line with those of Fisher and Evans (2000), who found that “the exchange visit had positively affected the UK pupils’ views of French people as a whole”. It seems that these favourable attitudes may be, at least partly, the result of the home-stay aspect of the exchange, as all four pupils stated in their post-visit questionnaires that they got on either “quite well” or “very well” with their exchange partners and all of them got on “very well” with their host parents. Owen in particular stated that they “treated me with great respect and kindness”, and also commented favourably in the post-visit interviews on the “close-knit” nature of family life in Spain. The relationship with the host family is therefore very important, as highlighted by Laubscher’s 1994 study.

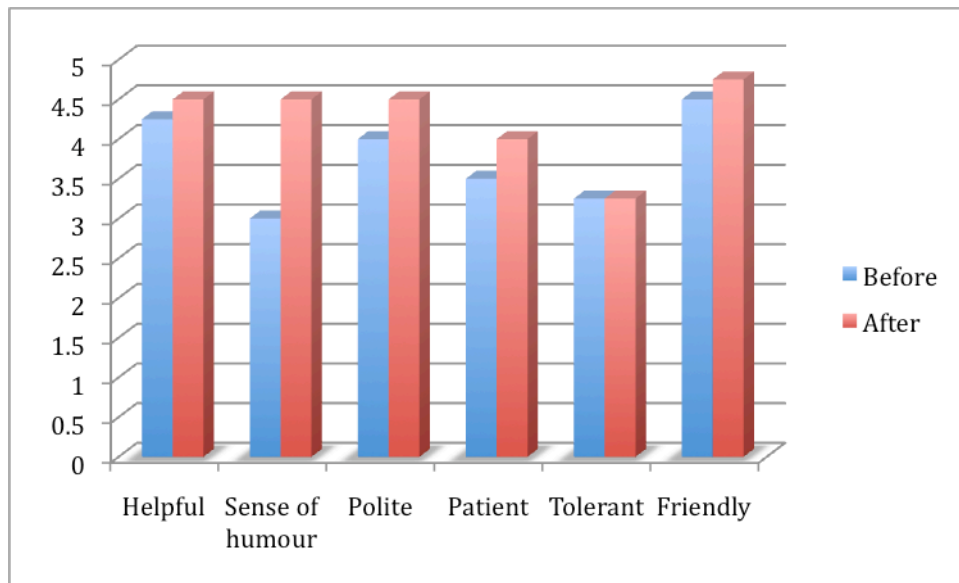


Figure 1: Pupils' attitudes to Spanish people before and after the exchange

Pupil responses to the question: 'Do you think you would like to live in Spain at some point in the future?' are shown in table 2.

	Ellie	David	Owen	Chris
Before	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Yes
After	Maybe	Yes	No	Yes

Table 2: Do you think you would you like to live in Spain at some point in the future?

The trip therefore has had a positive effect on David, has not changed the opinions of Chris and Ellie, but seems to have had a rather negative effect on Owen. However it is worth noting that in the post-visit interview, Owen stated that his main reason for not wishing to live in Spain was because "everything seems a lot further into the recession than it does in England", therefore this decision was not necessarily based on a dislike of the country or culture.

### Motivation for studying Spanish

We have seen that the exchange trip has had a largely positive effect on pupils' attitudes towards Spain and Spanish people, but what about their motivation for studying the language itself? Pupils were asked on both pre- and post-visit questionnaires to indicate on a scale of 1-5 (1 = really dislike, 5 = really like) how much they enjoyed Spanish. Before the trip, Ellie and David both said

they “really like” Spanish, while Chris and Owen opted for “like”. Interestingly none of the pupils changed these opinions in the post-visit questionnaires, however David stated in the same questionnaire that: “before Spain I enjoyed Spanish, but now I love Spanish, it’s so much fun and my Spanish is much better”. Pupils were also asked both before and after the exchange about their intention to continue with Spanish at GCSE level, the results are shown in table 3.

	<b>Ellie</b>	<b>David</b>	<b>Owen</b>	<b>Chris</b>
<b>Before</b>	Yes	Maybe	Maybe	No
<b>After</b>	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes

**Table 3: Do you think you will continue to study Spanish at GCSE?**

The exchange trip therefore seems to have had a generally positive effect on the pupils’ motivation to continue with the subject, particularly with Chris who was not intending to study Spanish at GCSE at all before the trip. He stated in the post-visit questionnaire that: “I feel I like it no more or less, but have improved my work skills all round”, which suggests that his decision was based on an improvement in confidence.

**How does participation in an exchange trip affect pupils’ writing skills?**

Let us now look at what effect the exchange visit had on pupils’ confidence and attainment in writing skills. As a result of the three-month exchange programme in Quebec, the pupils who took part in the study by Lapkin et al. (1995) reported improved confidence with tasks such as writing a letter in the target language. I found a similar trend, however understandably not to the same extent, as the participants in the Canadian study attended a French-medium school during their stay and therefore had more opportunities to practice and improve their writing skills.

The four year 8 pupils were asked on both pre- and post-visit questionnaires to indicate on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not confident at all, 5 = very confident) how confident they felt about writing in Spanish. The results are as presented in figure 2.



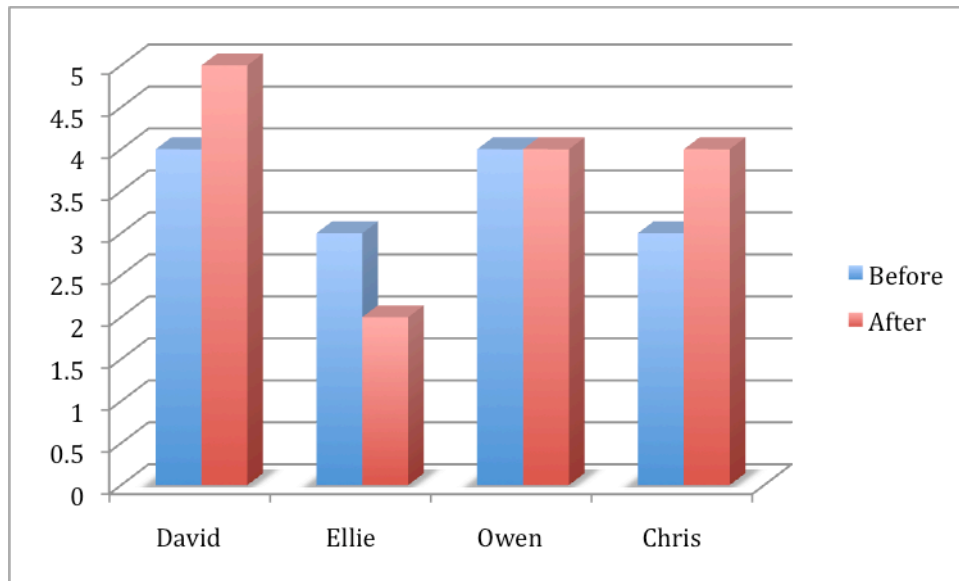


Figure 2: Confidence in writing skills

David and Chris therefore both returned from the trip with increased confidence in their writing skills, whereas Owen’s opinion stayed the same and Ellie’s decreased. However are these changes in confidence reflected in the pupils’ actual attainment in their writing? Before the trip, the pupils were given an open-ended task of writing about their family and hometown, and after the trip they were asked to write about their host family and Palencia. The texts were given a mark from 1-5 for each of fluency, content and accuracy and the results are given in Table 4.

	No. of words		Accuracy		Fluency		Content	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
<b>Ellie</b>	45	40	3	3	3	3	2	3
<b>David</b>	25	110	1	3	1	4	1	5
<b>Chris</b>	31	57	2	4	2	4	2	4
<b>Owen</b>	69	77	3	4	4	4	3	4

Table 4: Attainment in writing skills

Perhaps the most striking difference between the pre- and post-visit texts is the increase in length. This corresponds to what Fisher and Evans (2000) found in their study, which they suggest “would seem to indicate greater confidence in their [pupils’] ability to express themselves”. This suggestion is clearly supported by my own findings as David, who rates himself as “very confident” in his writing skills after the trip, produced a piece of writing which was over four times the length of his

pre-visit text. Similarly Chris and Owen, who rate themselves as “quite confident” write more after the trip than they did before. The only participant to write slightly less, is Ellie, which corresponds to her claim that she feels less confident in her writing skills after the visit.

In terms of the quality of writing, I found that all of the pupils showed some progression after the exchange trip, which corresponds to Fisher and Evans’ (2000) study where over half the participants improved their score. However where Fisher and Evans (2000) found that “pupils’ writing improved more in fluency and accuracy than it did in content”, I found that the greatest improvement in the texts was in the content, as after the trip pupils produced much more interesting texts using a wider range of vocabulary. This is perhaps partly due to the topic, as in the post-visit task, pupils were “driven by a greater communicative impulse” (Evans & Fisher, 2005), highlighting the importance of choosing tasks, both in and out of the classroom, that pupils can identify and engage with.

The main improvements in the post-visit pieces of writing were as follows:

- Much wider selection of adjectives in all four texts e.g. “amable”, “gracioso” (Ellie), “simpatico”, “bonito” (Chris).
- Better use and conjugation of verbs. For example, in the pre-visit text David missed out some verbs, e.g. “yo alto”, or in some cases used the wrong part of the verb (“mi familia y yo vivo”), as did Owen (“mi hermana tengo doce años”), however this was less frequent in post-visit texts.
- All four pupils were much more descriptive in their writing, e.g. “Palencia es grande y lleno de mercados” (Ellie), “el mercado es muy antiguo” (Chris), “la mayoría de la gente vive en apartamentos porque no hay muchas casas” (David).
- All pupils wrote about their opinions, which was not the case in the pre-visit texts, e.g. “Me gusta Palencia” (Ellie), “me gusta la plaza” (Owen).
- Some justification of opinions with “porque” e.g. “me gusta mi familia anfitriona porque es muy bonito” (Chris).
- Much less French interference in the texts. In the pre-visit texts Ellie used the pronouns “mon” and “ma”, and Chris referred to “le professeur fenominal”, however this French influence was much less evident in the post-visit texts.

- Use of connectives e.g. “también” (David).
- Use of the past tense in the post-visit texts by David and Owen e.g. “fue”, “era”, “jugamos” (David), “comí”, “visité”, “vi” (Owen).

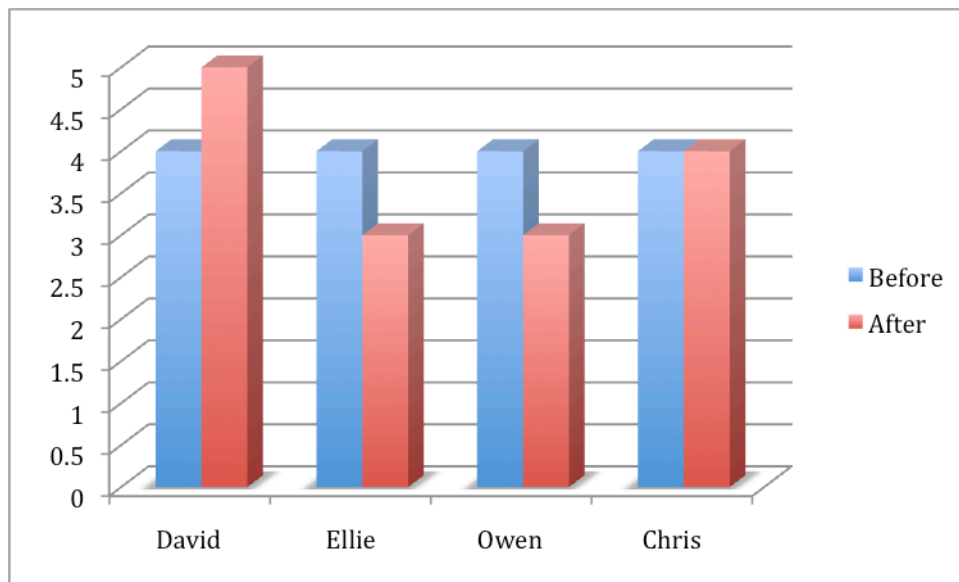
The diaries written by the pupils during their visit also provided useful data about their writing skills. They were encouraged to write as much as possible in Spanish with the help of their host partners. David and Chris wrote theirs entirely in Spanish, Owen’s included some English and Ellie’s was almost entirely in English, supporting once again the pupils own statements about their confidence in their abilities. David attempted to include a variety of tenses which he had not yet covered in class, for example: “el me presentó a su hermana quién ha sido bien traduciendo uno y dos preguntas para mí”. Chris also used the perfect tense, and had written “hoy tengo visitado” which he crossed out and corrected to “he visitado”, and Owen displayed a desire to convey his sense of humour, for example: “porque esto era divertido reí mi cabeza estúpido”.

We have therefore been able to establish a correspondence between pupils’ confidence in their writing ability, their attainment in writing and also whether or not they took advantage of the opportunity to practise and improve their writing skills through activities such as writing the diary.

### **How does participation in an exchange trip affect pupils’ speaking skills?**

Let us now move on to the effect of the exchange visit on pupils’ confidence and attainment in speaking skills. Lapkin et al. (1995) reported that after the trip “substantial majorities in all groups perceived that their oral skills and confidence in speaking had improved a great deal”, however this is not reflected in either Fisher and Evans’ (2000) study or my own, and we must bear in mind that the participants of the Canadian exchange had considerably more years of language learning before the trip, and also a longer period of time in the target language province.

As with writing skills, the four year 8 pupils were asked on both pre- and post-visit questionnaires to indicate on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not confident at all, 5 = very confident) how confident they felt about speaking in Spanish. The results are as presented in figure 3.



**Figure 3: Confidence in speaking skills**

In the pre-visit questionnaires, all four participants deemed themselves to be “quite confident” in their speaking skills, however David is the only pupil to return with an increased confidence in his speaking ability. Interestingly the pupils in general seemed more confident about writing than speaking on their return, which is surprising considering they would have spent considerably more time speaking than writing. One possible explanation is that although the pupils felt secure in their ability within the controlled classroom environment, they lost some of this confidence when exposed to native speakers and therefore a large volume of new language and unpredictable situations.

	<b>Pronunciation</b>		<b>Accuracy</b>		<b>Fluency</b>		<b>Content</b>	
	<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>	<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>	<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>	<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>
<b>Ellie</b>	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
<b>David</b>	2	3	2	3	1	3	1	3
<b>Chris</b>	1	3	1	2	1	2	2	3
<b>Owen</b>	3	4	3	3	3	3	2	2

**Table 5: Attainment in speaking skills**

As with the writing tasks, let us consider whether these changes in confidence are reflected in the pupils’ attainment in speaking skills. Before the trip, the pupils were asked a series of questions in Spanish about themselves, their family and their hometown, and after the exchange they were asked

similar questions, however this time more focused on Palencia and their host families, as with the writing tasks. They were given a mark from 1-5 for each of pronunciation, accuracy, fluency and content as shown in table 5.

Overall, there was less improvement in pupils speaking skills than in their writing skills, which mirrors what Fisher and Evans (2000) found in their study. However there were some general differences between the pre- and post-visit speaking tests. The most noticeable improvement in the speaking skills of all four pupils was their pronunciation. This was particularly evident in Chris's speech. In the pre-visit speaking test he relied heavily on French pronunciation and vocabulary, for example, when asked to describe his family he replied: "Mi... mi mère es nombre Louise et ma père nombre Nigel", yet his pronunciation after the exchange was much better and he did not use any French words. Similarly, whereas David said in the pre-visit test that he lived in a "village" (with French pronunciation), after the trip he correctly said "pueblo", and before the trip he answered one of the questions entirely in English, whereas after the trip he attempted all the answers in Spanish. Ellie also showed improved pronunciation, as in the pre-visit test she said her town was: "em... po...porqui... porquina.... pequina", yet after the trip was able to reply "Swaffam Prior es pequeño", with little or no hesitation over the pronunciation.

Unlike the writing tests, there was no significant difference between the pre- and post-visit tests in terms of the quantity of language produced, however the pupils did generally attempt to improve the quality of their answers by using more adjectives and different structures, although there was less evidence of different tenses. For example, Ellie described her host family as "simpatico" and "dividido" [divertido], whereas in the pre-visit task when describing her own family she had simply stated that she had a brother and sister. Chris said that in Palencia, the "catedral es muy bonito... y el plaza es muy bonito" and used the connective "también", which he did not before the trip. David also used a wider range of vocabulary, stating that "Palencia es viento y sol. Es grande comparado a Cambridge". The pupils were also more interactive in the post-visit speaking tasks. When asked "¿Qué tal?", David, Owen and Ellie all tagged the question "¿Y tú?" onto their answers, which they did not do before the trip. Owen also used the target language to ask "¿cómo se dice 'shops' en español?" whereas when he could not remember a word in the pre-visit task he simply said "I've gone blank".

As outlined in the table above, it is evident that David made the most progression in speaking skills, both in terms of attainment and confidence in his ability, while Ellie made the least progression, however it is important to consider why this is. As suggested by Ife (2000), “developments in proficiency will be determined largely by the opportunities students encounter to use the target language and by their own efforts and motivation in ensuring that progress occurs”, and this is clearly evident here.

In the post-visit questionnaires pupils were asked to indicate how much Spanish they spoke with their exchange partner and host family, and also how much encouragement and correction they received when speaking Spanish. Out of the four participants, it was David who spoke the most Spanish, which may explain why he made the most progress. He spoke entirely in Spanish with his host father and mainly in Spanish with his exchange partner and siblings, and even though he admitted to speaking sometimes in English with his host mother, he said in the interview that this was “to teach me Spanish from what she knew in English”. The family encouraged him to speak in Spanish and even though they “always” corrected his language mistakes, this did not discourage David from speaking the target language.

After David, Chris showed the next greatest improvement in his speaking skills, and similarly, he seemed to take advantage of the host family environment to develop his language skills. He spoke mainly in Spanish with his exchange partner and host parents, and sometimes in English to the brother, although like David, this was for clarification purposes, so that “if I couldn’t say something in Spanish at the dinner table he could translate”. The family “sometimes” corrected his language mistakes, but this encouraged Chris to keep trying to communicate in Spanish. Similarly, Owen relied to some extent on his host sister who “spoke relatively good English” to help him communicate, although the family were willing to help him with his language and he spoke mainly in Spanish with his exchange partner, stating that “we just kind of, had a laugh, just like I would have a laugh on the weekend with my friends in England”.

Ellie on the other hand, said she spoke half in Spanish, half in English with her exchange partner and host mother, and mainly in English with other members of the family, and this may explain why she made the least progress in terms of attainment and confidence in speaking skills. She stated on the post-visit questionnaire that “the family were trying to translate a lot for me and it was nice”, and in the post-visit interview that “the mum was really nice because if I didn’t understand it then

she'd write it on a piece of paper in English", therefore we can infer that Ellie made the least effort to improve her language skills while abroad.

Looking closely at the actions and results of the four participants, we have been able to establish some correlation between confidence in speaking abilities, actual attainment in speaking, and the amount of Spanish spoken while abroad, however it is also worth comparing this to the findings from the writing skills. Interestingly, Fisher and Evans (2000) discovered "a statistically significant correlation between pupils' improved performance in writing and their claims about the amount of French spoken in their host families", and my own results also reflect this link between progress in the two productive skills. David spoke the most Spanish in the host family and showed the most progression in both speaking and writing, and conversely Ellie, who spoke the least amount of Spanish, showed the least progression in both skill areas. These findings underline the importance of maximising opportunities for pupils to communicate while abroad.

## **Conclusion**

By looking at how a one-week Spanish exchange affects pupils' attitudes towards Spain and learning Spanish, I found that pupils returned with a better understanding of the culture based on fact rather than stereotypes and bias, and a more favourable opinion of Spain and Spanish people due primarily to positive experiences in the home-stay environment. For future trips, it seems that it would therefore be beneficial to further exploit the pupils' position as 'participant observers' by having specific tasks or worksheets to focus their observations of a different culture and way of life. Further research would also be beneficial in order to investigate how the pupils can proceed to make the best use of this data when back in the classroom.

In terms of the effect of the exchange trip on pupils' productive language skills, I found that after the visit, pupils were producing generally longer written texts with better content, better use of verb tenses and adjectives, and less interference from French. Additionally, even though they felt slightly less confident in their speaking skills, all pupils showed an overall improvement in pronunciation, were more interactive in the discussion, there was less interference from French and more use of adjectives. It also emerged from the results, that those who spent the most time working on their productive language skills while abroad (whether this was by writing in their diary or speaking to

their host family), ultimately gained more confidence and made the most progress in terms of attainment. This highlights the importance of building clear opportunities for language production into exchange trips in order to maximise the learning potential of the visit.

However as a small-scale case study this research has many limitations:

- As I was not present on the trip, I had limited control over activities pupils' undertook while abroad.
- The study focused on only four pupils from Year 8. Were I to do the study again, I would also take a sample of pupils' from Years 9 and 10 to compare the language gains of pupils with different levels of proficiency.
- Similarly were I to do this study again, I would also include a control group to allow me to compare the improvement of those who took part in the exchange with those who did not. This would also allow for clearer discrimination between which aspects of language the pupils gained in the classroom and what they learnt while abroad.
- Due to limitations of time and space, I was only able to look at the productive language skills, it would also be interesting to look at the impact of the trip on pupils' receptive skills.

Furthermore, due to the small-scale of this case study, we cannot make sweeping generalisations about all learners, however as Denscombe (2007) states: "Although each case is in some respects unique, it is also a single example of a broader class of things". Therefore, even though this study deals exclusively with four specific pupils, it does tell us something about how we can start to increase the general benefits of exchange trips for participants. In order to develop these findings, further research is required into the impact of exchange trips, or indeed any form of residential visit abroad, on the linguistic attainment of secondary-school aged pupils. By looking at *how* these learners practise their language skills and cope with immersion in the target language environment, we, as MFL teachers, can further develop ways in which to advance these benefits.

In the final analysis, this study has reinforced the value of exchange trips in terms of raising pupils' awareness of a different country and culture and in improving their productive language skills. However it has also highlighted the importance of the teacher's role in preparing students for going abroad and in providing as many opportunities as possible for pupils to practise their language skills while abroad, as this will have a direct bearing on their confidence and attainment.



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## Appendix 1 - Pre-Visit Questionnaire

Name: ..... Age: .....

Nationality: ..... Spanish class: .....

1) How long have you been studying Spanish for? (please tick one box)

6 months or less	6 months - 1 year
1 year - 1 ½ years	1 ½ years - 2 years
2 years - 2 ½ years	2 ½ years - 3 years
3 years - 3 ½ years	more than 3 ½ years

1b) On a scale of 1-5 please show how much you enjoy Spanish (circle number)

<i>Really dislike</i>	<i>Dislike</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Like</i>	<i>Really like</i>
1	2	3	4	5

1c) On a scale of 1-5 please circle one number in each row to show how confident you feel in the following areas of Spanish

	<i>Not confident at all</i>	<i>Not very confident</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Quite confident</i>	<i>Very confident</i>
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5

1d) Do you think you will continue to study Spanish at GCSE?

Yes       No       Maybe

2) Have you ever been to Spain before?  Yes  No

2b) Have you ever been abroad before?  Yes  No

2c) If yes, how many times?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7+

2d) If yes, please tick what type of trip/s you have been on and give brief details about which countries you have visited.

Family holiday  
.....

School trip  
.....

School exchange  
.....

2e) Why have you decided to take part in the Spanish exchange this year?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3) Please circle a number in each row to show how much you agree / disagree with the following descriptions of Spanish people.

Spanish people are:

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Helpful	1	2	3	4	5
Good sense of humour	1	2	3	4	5
Polite	1	2	3	4	5
Patient	1	2	3	4	5
Tolerant	1	2	3	4	5
Friendly	1	2	3	4	5

3b) Do you think you would like to live in Spain at some point in the future?

Yes

No

Maybe

3c) What do you associate with Spain?



Thank-you and have a great time in Spain!

## Appendix 2 - Post-Visit Questionnaire

Name: .....

1a) Did you enjoy the Spanish exchange?

Yes

It was OK

No

1b) Why / why not? What did you like / not like?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2a) How well did you get on with your exchange partner?

Very well

Average

Not very well

2b) Why / why not?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3a) How well did you get on with your host family?

Very well

Average

Not very well

3b) Why / why not?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4a) Which language did you normally speak in to the following people? (please put a tick in each row that applies)

	<i>Entirely English</i>	<i>Mainly English</i>	<i>Half Spanish half English</i>	<i>Mainly Spanish</i>	<i>Entirely Spanish</i>
Exchange partner					
Host father					
Host mother					
Brothers/ sisters					
Other (please specify)					

4b) Did your exchange partner:

- encourage use of Spanish?
- not mind which language was spoken?
- encourage use of English?

4c) Did your host family:

- encourage use of Spanish?
- not mind which language was spoken?
- encourage use of English?

4d) When you spoke in Spanish, did your host partner correct language mistakes:

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

4e) When you spoke in Spanish, did your host family correct language mistakes:

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

4f) If your exchange partner and/or host family did correct mistakes when you spoke in Spanish, did this:

- encourage you to keep trying to speak in Spanish?
- have no effect?
- discourage you from trying to speak in Spanish?

5a) On a scale of 1-5 please show how much you enjoy Spanish (circle number)

<i>Really dislike</i>	<i>Dislike</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Like</i>	<i>Really like</i>
1	2	3	4	5

5b) How do you feel about Spanish now compared to before you went on the exchange?

.....

.....

.....

.....

6) On a scale of 1-5 please circle one number in each row to show how confident you now feel in the following areas of Spanish

	<i>Not confident at all</i>	<i>Not very confident</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Quite confident</i>	<i>Very confident</i>
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5

7) Do you think you will continue to study Spanish at GCSE?

- Yes       No       Maybe

8) Is there anything you think would have been helpful to know before you went on the exchange trip?

.....

.....

.....

.....

9a) Please circle a number in each row to show how much you agree / disagree with the following descriptions of Spanish people.

Spanish people are:

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Helpful	1	2	3	4	5
Good sense of humour	1	2	3	4	5
Polite	1	2	3	4	5
Patient	1	2	3	4	5
Tolerant	1	2	3	4	5
Friendly	1	2	3	4	5

9b) Do you think you would like to live in Spain at some point in the future?

Yes

No

Maybe



9c) What do you now associate with Spain?



## Appendix 3 – Tasks While Abroad

### Diary

Keep a diary of your week in Spain, with a section for each day on:

- what you did / saw
- anything you noticed about the culture / way of life
- new language you have heard / seen

Try and write some of it in Spanish if you can. And it might be nice to collect some leaflets / tickets which you can stick in.

### Interviews

Interview with host parents about what there is to see and do in Palencia.

1. ¿Cómo es Palencia?  
*What is Palencia like?*
2. ¿Qué hay de interés en la ciudad para los jóvenes / las turistas?  
*What is there of interest for young people / tourists?*
3. ¿Te gusta Palencia? ¿Por qué / no?  
*Do you like Palencia? Why / why not?*

Interview your exchange partner about their school.

1. Describe tu colegio.  
*Describe your school*
2. ¿Te gusta el colegio? ¿Por qué / no?  
*Do you like your school? Why / why not?*
3. ¿Cuáles son tus asignaturas preferidas?  
*What are your favourite subjects?*
4. ¿A qué hora empiezan / terminan las clases?  
*What time do classes start / finish?*
5. ¿Eres miembro de un club?  
*Are you a member of a club?*

## **Appendix 4: Interview transcripts: Post-visit pupil interviews**

### **Owen and Ellie**

Interviewer: Was the exchange trip what you expected?

O: Um... I would say... no. What I expected... certain aspects would be the way it was, but some other things quite surprised me, for example, I expected to spend more time doing activities run by the school but we actually did a lot more with our families than I thought we would.

E: Yeah, same.

O: And I actually played a lot more sport than I thought they would.

I: Was that good?

O: Yeah, yeah, that was brilliant! Hours on end just kind of playing football and rugby and stuff.

E: I thought that we'd be spending like the lessons with them, and like, I didn't really think that I'd need a siesta in the middle of the day, but I did need it... cause they went to bed really late there, and they got up really early for like, English time. So you'd feel really tired during the day, so you needed to take that siesta otherwise you'd be tired for the rest of the day. But I only had it a few times.

I: So it was a bit different to what you'd expected. Would you do it again?

O: Yeah, definitely! I want to do it in year 10 as well, so I can kind of, compare it.

E: I'd do it again, but I wouldn't live there, cause I mean, I think, well, I just... you know when you've got so used to where you live, then you think...

I: So you would do it again but not live there? So more of a holiday rather than living with a family?

E: No, I would go there for like an exchange again, but like, when I'm older I wouldn't live there. I wouldn't live like, in Spain.

O: Also like, in the news, cause, they like let me watch the news cause they thought it might help my Spanish, and everything seems like, a lot further into the recession there than it does in England. So I wouldn't really want to live there, or I'd just kind of get, swept away with the badness.

I: And how did you get on with your exchange partners and your host families?

O: Oh absolutely swimmingly! His parents were really nice, his sister was really nice, and he has a very close-knit family and I got on very well with all of them – his mum, his grandma, his dad, his sister, the two cats. Actually, the cat ate my headphones so I had to buy some new ones when I was in Spain.

E: Yeah, I got on with all the family, but the only thing that was a bit hard for me was that the dad didn't speak any English. And as well, the family kept on asking me 'what's this in English?', 'what's this in English?', so I didn't speak Spanish like, *all* the time, cause they were asking me questions. And then I met the family, because it was her aunt's birthday and most of the, some of the family spoke English.

I: Did you find it easy to settle in?

E: Yeah... Well, I think I felt a bit like, awkward, for like the first few days, and then I kind of felt like, better.

I: Did you find it easy to settle in Owen?

O: Relatively. Well, it was a bit dodgy on the first couple of days cause um, I'm afraid, well, being a very unorganised boy I left my sheets at home and was kind of winging it a bit, but luckily, personally, I felt that I adapted quite well. And I thought that if I stuck quite close to the sister who spoke relatively good English, then if I was really really badly stuck on something then I'd just... well, the first day was quite awkward cause I didn't really know how to say you've got a lovely house. Well, I knew how to say like, the view is beautiful, but I didn't know how to say anything else was beautiful, so I couldn't really compliment them, so I just had to kind of, nod my head and do the thumbs up and stuff. And as it progressed, I found that they had dictionaries so I was happy. And then, plus I just kind of got better cause I kind of remembered my Spanish.

I: What sort of things did you do with your family?

O: Well, we, I went to, oh where was it? Well, I went to where like the big canal is, and we like, took a boat trip., and we lots of castles. And I went up their church spire, and I went to a viewpoint to see the European peaks, and played a lot of sport, slept ate, ate again... ate even more, played a load of table football, watched some television, and, talked to my friends in England.

I: Did you have a similar kind of experience?

E: Well, on the weekend I went to Segovia and we went to this castle and there was 157 steps. And I would go up there like, 5 minutes before them cause I was really fast and then they were like 'E, are you up there?' and I said 'yeah, I 've been up here for like the past 2 minutes'. Yeah, so we went up this castle to see the top cause there was this really nice view, and then I went to see her handball team, I went to her aunt's birthday, I slept in. Well, no I didn't really sleep in, I slept for like, siesta for a few days. Well, I only had siesta 2 or 3 days...

I: So what sort of things did you talk about with your exchange partners, with your families in Spanish?

O: Um, well, football and rugby was one of them because they were Real Madrid supporters and there was the big Liverpool Real Madrid match, and, being a typical English person I supported an English team, and since they won 4-0 I have a feeling that they weren't too happy about it... as I was doing laps round the table shouting 4-0! So they weren't too happy about that, but that was like, on the penultimate day so for the rest of that day and a bit we talked about the football and stuff because that kind of sparked it off. And being at the age of massive hormones we talked about

girls quite a lot, and just kind of, had a laugh, just like I would have a laugh on the weekend with my friends in England. Only there was a bit of a language barrier so I had to ask his sister something quite embarrassing in English to what it was in Spanish and then repeat it in Spanish.

I: But you found you were able to communicate?

O: Yeah, but they tricked me into saying that I was pregnant as well!

E: I talked about the football teams that the mum and the daughter like – they like different football teams. But then when they're watching it the daughter Ainhoa, she liked Liverpool and then the mum wanted Real Madrid and then they were like 'what do you want? what do you want?' and I was like 'I don't like football, I don't mind!'

I: How did you find coping with the language? Was there anything you particularly struggled with? Or anything you wish you'd known before you went?

O: Oh, I did kind of struggle with, well, on the first one or two days practically everything! But from onwards it was just kind of conversation starters. I would just come out with random things and they would look at me funny and then we'd continue the conversation.

E: Em, I would have liked to know another word for *sí*, because they kept on saying 'stop saying *sí*' so I didn't know what else to say. Because she was 'do you like this?' and I said '*sí, sí*', and I didn't know what else to say, so I would just have liked to know what else to say apart from *sí*.

O: Variety is the spice of life!

E: I wasn't going to say '*sí, porque...*' and then have this massive description of why I liked potatoes or something like that. And then they kept on telling me what potato and stuff was in like, German, because that's *Almania*, and then he was going '*patatas*' and stuff like that because he works in a company in Germany. At least it'll help me for German when I start that! I think it was like, all round educational, but I'd rather, it would be nice to know, like Owen said, more conversation starters cause I didn't really know what to say.

I: Was it more the informal, colloquial things that you would say in English that you found it was difficult to say in Spanish?

E: Well, sometimes I had to say it in English, but then the mum was really nice because if I didn't understand it then she'd write it on a piece of paper in English, because she used to study English – so she remembers how to write it but she can't speak it that much. So she wrote stuff down. And one time when we went to this museum she'd tell me everything that it was in English, so I thought that was really nice.

I: So what did you think of the school?

E: I thought it was kind of interesting that it used to be a brick factory!

I: Did you find that the school as a whole was similar or different to schools here?

O: What I would say is that, well, if I went there I would just expect it to be like a sixth form college – apart from the fact that everyone there looks a lot younger than they actually are. I was there, and I was one of the tallest people there, and everyone looked like they were about 12 and they were 15, you know, I kept on getting how old they were wrong, and I'd say wrong things and then they'd get a little bit hacked off.

E: From the outside it looked more, OK this is going to sound really weird, but like a jail kind of thing. Because the bricks were all the same colour, the windows, they were either like, barriered up with like metal kind of blinds or they'd be open and it looked quite rough. But then on the inside it looked quite normal. It was more polished and had loads of paint, it was very white and clean. The outside was more different...

O: It looks a little bit like a mental institute on the outside and a bit more...

E: Like a hospital on the inside!

O: Yeah!

E: It, well, it made you have different perceptions. Cause when we'd walk up there, we wouldn't... if it was the first time there you wouldn't think that it was a school. You'd think oh it would be a brick factory like it was. You wouldn't think it would be a school.

I: What about the atmosphere, was it a similar atmosphere to schools here?

E: Not really. Cause everyone crowds round you. Like, when we walked in everyone was like [Owen: 'speak English, speak English!'] 'Oh look, Ainhoa who is this?' And then they'd be like talking Spanish and then they would push them over and stuff like that. And then it was like just get into the library, get into the library, run!

O: Yeah, and kinda ran to the library as soon as we got there cause we were getting quite mobbed! And they all found it very interesting that we were from England...

E: They were like 'They're English! English!' It was kind of scary at first because they would all crowd round you and they would be staring at you.

I: You were like celebrities!

O: We felt a bit more like fugitives than celebrities!

I: So what about the culture in Spain?

E: Well I thought the food was a lot cause like, when I was departing they gave me this massive salami sandwich about that big, and then biscuits, and then a massive bottle of water that I had to chuck away cause it was so big. And I was like 'no no no, mi bien, mi bien', and then they were like 'no no no, you OK, you eat'. So they gave me all this stuff and different things to eat. Oh, and another thing, I kept on going 'biene' like Italian. I was like, oh no!

I: So how do you think it was different or similar to English culture?

O: Well, I would say it was similar in the kind of way that it was quite religious, but now it's just kind of just going towards... no one really cares that much about religion. Because when I went there I expected it to be kind of strict, like best clothes on every Sunday, march off to church, march back, if you don't want to go get the cane.

E: Yeah, they asked me if I was catholic or Christian... protestant.

O: Yeah, I said protestant.

E: Yeah, well, my dad's catholic and my mum's protestant, well, like Christian protestant kind of thing. So we go to like, a normal church, but only sometimes, and they go to like catholic church. But she didn't go because I was there.

I: What was your favourite thing about Spain?

O: Oh! Well, there are a few things I would say...

E: Oh yeah, I've got some! Sweetie shop! The sun sometimes when it came, but it snowed one day. Um... the views, I liked the views.

O: But... other things that I really like was the sun, the fact that they were so friendly, the food, the sun... did I say the sun already? Fine then, the weather. I actually really enjoyed looking at the architecture as well cause its very classical and the guides when we went to like Salamanca and stuff were...

E: They were really nice they all spoke English.

O: Yeah, they spoke English and Spanish and tried to like, meld it into the middle so we knew which bit was what.

**David**

I: How did you find the exchange trip? Was it what you expected it to be?

D: Well, it was better than what I expected it to be. I expected to learn some Spanish and I learnt a lot. I was really happy with my family, um, his mum spoke English and managed to teach me Spanish from what she knew in English. They were really friendly and the whole family pretty much shared the same interests as me. Most of them were interested in football which was good. And, em, they all helped me a lot with my Spanish, I really enjoyed it.

I: So did you find you were speaking mostly in Spanish? You said the mum spoke English but used that to help you with your Spanish...?

D: Yeah, she used that to help me speak my Spanish. Most of the conversation was in Spanish, especially with his father cause his father only spoke Spanish. So, the only time when I was speaking English was when I was asking what something was.

I: That's really good. So, what sort of things did you talk about?

D: Um, usually about her visits to England. Em, or just about Spain in general, asking what's going on. A lot of the time I was doing more listening than speaking, but when I was speaking it was usually in Spanish. I learnt a lot about Spain really, about the lifestyle.

I: Was there anything you particularly struggled with in terms of the language? Was there anything you found really difficult?

D: Remembering a few words that kept slipping my mind and I was thinking I was saying the wrong word for the wrong translation.

I: But you found when you were listening you could follow what was going on?

D: Yeah. I could follow it roughly if a conversation was going on.

I: And did it improve as you were there for the week?

D: Yeah, I feel so much better at Spanish now, just after the week.

I: And would you do it again?

D: Definitely. If there's another chance to go I will.

I: And how easy was it to settle in? Both into the family and into Spanish life?

D: I found it surprisingly easy to get settled in. It was a little bit odd at first, I wasn't quite used to the way they do things – over there's a lot different to here. Especially how late they eat and how late they go to bed. But I got used to it in the end.

I: Was that the main cultural difference that you experienced?



D: Yeah, it all started to make sense towards like, the second day.

I: And you got on well with both your exchange partner and your host family?

D: Yeah, yeah, his family were really helpful for me. And I got on really well with him, he got on really well with me.

I: What sort of things did you do when you were with the family?

D: We went skiing at the weekend, we visited the village that they live in in the summer. Because I found out that quite a lot of them don't live in Palencia in the summer, just for the winter for like, school and work. And in the summer they go and live in this little village and we went to the village and visited it with his best friend and we rode his motorbike around this little square in his village. The trips with the school were quite fun as well, going to Salamanca, Valladolid as well, it was really good fun, I learnt a lot.

I: And what about the school? Did you spend any time in his school?

D: Not that much, probably about 4 hours in total, just turning up over the week. Em, didn't get much of an idea what the teachers were like cause it was mainly only one or two really. They didn't seem strict. That was just like, first impression.

I: So the general atmosphere of the school, did it feel different to schools here?

D: Yeah, um, it was kind of, um, it felt like it wasn't quite as modern a school but that was just my first impression. It felt really odd. All the Spanish students went to see us – it was really odd for them to see us. Everyone was hanging out windows to see us. It was really odd, but yeah, the school was actually really nice. And I noticed how much they like sport in Spain. I thought England was quite sporty but Spain was as well.

I: And what about the culture? You mentioned about the different eating times, was there anything else? What about going to visit Salamanca, going to visit different cities, or just being within a Spanish family... did you notice anything? Even about Spanish people?

D: They were a lot more connected with their family. Because I thought I saw my family regularly but every day their family was round. I know I see my granddad every day and the rest of my family most weeks, but they saw their family every day. Probably because they live closer.

I: That's interesting, so more family values?

D: Yeah, more connected. And it was hard getting used to the siesta, remembering that everything shut down for about an hour or so. So we went home, sat down, and either studied or talked about Spain. Sometimes we walked round Spain, walked round Palencia just to see what it was like, but it didn't happen very often because there wasn't much to do. He couldn't tell me much historical... he told me a bit about Spain, Palencia. I started to realise though that I was grateful for the siesta time, when I realised how late I was going to bed I was grateful for a little rest.

I: And what would you say was your favourite thing about Spain?

D: Making lots of new friends really. I'm really good friends with a lot of people in Spain now, it's really good. I don't know, probably making new friends and learning what Spain's like.

I: Was Spain how you expected it to be?

D: Um, I didn't really speak to many people who weren't part of the exchange, but the country was just how I expected it to be really. Really hot most of the time. I didn't expect there to be so much greenery around. I was stunned going through the countryside and seeing hills of green.

I: Did you have a least favourite thing about Spain or was it all quite positive?

D: No, I think it was all quite positive. There was nothing that went wrong, nothing that I didn't enjoy.

I: Was there anything that you wished you had known before you went?

D: No, I think maybe having more than 6 months of learning would have been a bit more helpful, but I think I got by really well for just 6 months. And its helping my Spanish now in class, I feel a lot better at Spanish. I feel a lot more confident than I used to, and I felt pretty confident in the first place with it. But yeah, it's really helped it.

**Chris**

I: Was it what you expected it to be?

C: Well, it was different because I thought we were going to go to school, but we didn't go to any classes or anything.

I: Did you spend some time in the school?

C: Yeah, we were talking to people, but we didn't go to the classes. But it sort of was what I expected, apart from I didn't meet up with anybody or do anything apart from when we went away. I enjoyed going to Salamanca. That was the best.

I: Why did you like Salamanca?

C: Because we got to go off on free time for two hours and I got some fake Armani sunglasses! And I was known as 'el gafas chico' because I had four pairs of glasses on my head!

I: Would you do the exchange again?

C: Yeah, definitely. I'd like to do it in two years time, but it was quite expensive.

I: How did you get on with your exchange partner and your host family?

C: It was good because the brother spoke quite a lot of English, and I had a stomach ache, which I didn't know how to say, but he kept ... because it was cold there, but it was normal weather here, they kept on saying 'oh, porque mucho frío', they kept on thinking it was because it was really cold, but it was the meat they fed me. But, the food wasn't the best, but they were a really nice family and Jesús, he was nice, but like I said, they didn't let me go out without them... it was annoying.

I: How easy was it to settle in?

C: Em, it took, until the next day maybe. Um, because on the first night I had a sore stomach, so that was a bit miserable, but it didn't take long to settle in.

I: And what sort of things did you do with the family?

C: In the evenings, watched football. At the weekend they took me to this little village where they've got a second house. It's like, just next to Palencia. For some reason, everyone has a second house there. And they've invited me back for summer. They took me there, and we played football there for like, hours, and I just got so thirsty! And the next day they took me to Palencia cathedral, which I'd already been to before. And they were like, seventeenth century and I was like, I know! I knew everything that they were telling me.

I: And what sort of things did you talk about with the family and your exchange partner in Spanish?

C: What I did during the day – I would get home from a trip at maybe 4, 5ish and I'd say oh, I had chocolate, that 'chocolate' thing and all that sort of stuff, and I said like, can we do this? Because I

didn't know how to say like, go on the street, but Jesús does, and when he took me on the street we went with his parents, and we went to loads of bars and had this food. I've forgotten what they call it, it's like a breadstick with tuna on it and stuff.

I: Tapas?

C: Sort of. Yeah, and we mostly talked about how my day went. Oh yeah, and football! 4-0! We went around the streets cause we went bowling that night. Half past nine and everyone was watching it and we went on the streets 'four... no, cuatro zero!'

I: I'm sure that went down well! How did you find you coped with the language? Was there anything you particularly struggled with?

C: Yeah, like I said with feeling ill. They didn't understand it wasn't the cold, it was the meat they gave me. And they just couldn't understand that. That was like, quite difficult to get past. Eventually I went on the translator on the computer to look up 'it was the meat' and they were like, 'frío, frío, frío'. That's probably about it, I found it quite easy to communicate. The brother was a massive help, but I talked as much as I could in Spanish.

I: Was there anything you wish you'd known before you went out? Any particular areas of language or phrases that you think would have been really useful?

C: My tummy hurts!

I: And what about for normal conversation?

C: I'm trying to think... no, I found it quite OK.

I: That's good. And you were saying you didn't spend a lot of time in the school, but what did you think of it from what you did see?

C: It was quite just a formal... apart from, like, they didn't have school uniform, but it was just like, a block, a corridor, nothing really that exciting, but here we've got the swimming pool, we've got all the area there, but it was just bang in the middle of this town with a brick factory next to it.

I: And what about the atmosphere?

C: It was quite busy, and it was really scary. Because on the first day we went to the library and I just stood there for one second and I literally... there was me there and I had a circle of people, and there's the library door and they were like 'hola, hello, hello hello!'. I just walked past and they all went silent and then sort of, moved out of the way as I walked past. It was like some sort of freak show!

I: Did it seem quite similar to schools here?

C: No, it was very different. They're much more busy, because there's more stairs and everyone's just like, rushing up. The stairs are like tiny, and the corridors are tiny so it was rush, rush rush everywhere. Here it's more laid back because it's bigger and a nice layout of the school. I prefer this school. Just bring the weather from there over here.

I: What about culture in Spain? Did anything strike you about Spanish culture?

C: The food – it's so different. They had this leg of pig, the one that I ate that gave me a sore tummy, and it was, it wasn't even cooked I don't think, and they just stuck it on these two stakes, these spears in the kitchen and carved off it and put it in my sandwiches. And when they gave it to me I just kept sneaking it off to my teacher because he loves it and I hate it! They gave me three rolls each day. They just have so much food! They eat so much, I don't know how they cope.

I: What about siestas?

C: Well, I slept for one actually. I was so tired. Apart from that I just watched TV really. Got home from school, watched TV, mailed my mum, that was it. I didn't sort of, think of it to be special, I don't know. The parents slept cause it was like, in their tradition but Jesús just watched TV as well. Not many people sleep now I don't think.

I: What about when you went on trips? Was there anything about Spain that you noticed?

C: The towns – all of them have town squares. I mean, I guess in Cambridge it would be the market, but they just take it to another level – all these brilliant designs on their buildings, it was really good. But I guess if you go to the outer part of the thing it's just all sort of massive great blocks of apartments, they're not really flats, I don't know, they're sort of apartment complexes. Yeah, but I enjoyed Salamanca the most. It's a really beautiful town.

I: What would you say your favourite thing about Spain was?

C: The weather. The little place where they had a house, it was such a beautiful like, old, sort of like run down but in a nice way. There haven't been houses built there for hundreds of years and if you live there you've got connections back for ages. But I like the little villages and the cathedrals in the town. If you go inside its good, but the tour guides just make it so boring! It was really boring. I would just happily like, go around on my own and give myself four hours free time with my friends. And the shops are cheap as well, they're really good!

I: Did you have a least favourite thing about Spain?

C: Yeah, like not going out. Cause everyone had such a good time like, going to football after school and meeting up, and I just like, went home. And the annoying thing is that he lived like right next to the school. So close, and his mum walked him to the school and back, and I just thought that was a bit, not very good. It'll be interesting to see how he deals with my life cause I have to like... cause mum's not always there in the mornings because she has to do earlys sometimes at the hospital, so I have to wake up on my own and get ready and walk to the bus stop.

I: Are you looking forward to the second part of the exchange?

C: Yeah, I'm going to tell everyone not to treat him like a freak show because it's very intimidating. And when we were leaving, there's like the school playground area and from three stories people were waving going 'adios, adios! have a nice trip'. And it was quite intimidating.

