

LANGUAGE SCOOP

Helen Clark speaks Spanish at Waiuku Primary School

Vivienne Lee (Language Teacher) and Kay Vincent (Deputy Principal)

“Quiero una naranja” announces the Prime Minister.

“It’s wonderful to see the school pushing languages,” says Prime Minister, Helen Clark at the recent opening of the Waiuku Primary School Hall.

Year 8 students welcomed the guests, including the Prime Minister, Helen Clark, in Spanish, and she was able to reply in Spanish also – much to the delight of the audience.

Students addressing assemblies in other languages is a tradition at our school with Year 8 students researching greetings and introductions in many of the languages of our community. The hall opening was a special opportunity for them to do this.



The main focus of the Year 8 Spanish programme is Food and Communicating in Real Contexts. This builds up to our outdoor education week on Kawau Island where we put all our learning into practice. This has become a tradition and at the beginning of the year, Year 8 students know that they will have to ask for their meals in Spanish. The Prime Minister made mention of this in her speech to the school community, “I understand when you go to school camp, you’re only allowed to ask for the meals in Spanish, and if you don’t get it right, you don’t get fed,” she said. The Prime Minister then added, “Quiero una naranja,” much to the delight of the students who understood what she was saying.

Students are inspired to learn and use Spanish by knowing the story of one boy at a previous camp who only ate

cucumber one lunchtime as he had decided that pepino was the only word he knew in Spanish. By dinner time he had suddenly remembered he actually did know the rest of the menu and was able to request a well-balanced meal. Each evening meal starts with a grace said in unison, “Gracias por nuestra comida, y gracias por nuestro día.” and students are expected to use basic pleasantries and manners in Spanish during the meal. Students are supported word-for-word if necessary and are encouraged to take risks and to instigate conversations and pleasantries with teachers and each other. We find that, over the week, adult helpers join in, picking up vocab and phrases as they go. They are supported by teachers, students, posters and prompt charts on display around the dining room and are great role models for the students for risk-taking in languages. We have been fortunate to have our Languages Facilitator, Jane Lee, join us for a day each camp to help us support the students and to model authentic Spanish for us all.

Other opportunities to use Spanish vocab and phrases at camp include: numbering off for roll call; duty groups, activity groups and cabin group names; colours and numbers; songs and games; and Muy Bien reward tokens for group points. Many photos are taken during the week and once back at school, students use these to make PowerPoint presentations using sound bites in Spanish, reinforcing their learning and providing resources for future Year 8s.

Students discover, that by the end of the week, they are using Spanish automatically when asking for food. One girl wondered why the staff member at McDonalds was looking at her strangely when she asked for fries on her way home from camp. She realized she had asked, “Papas fritas, por favor.” Other students found themselves using Spanish at home for the first few meals after camp.

This is the fifth year we have integrated Spanish into our outdoor education camp and each year we are able to see further opportunities for authentic use of the language by students. We were thrilled to have our language-learning recognised by the Prime Minister and it will certainly look good in our final Milestone Report.

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