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HOW GOOD CLASSROOM ORGANISATION CAN BENEFIT TEACHING

TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

EN EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA. MENCIÓN DE INGLÉS

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"No one can be free unless he is independent: therefore, the first, active manifestations of the child's individual liberty must be so guided that through this activity he may arrive at independence."

Maria Montessori

Abstract

The present document is focused in how classroom organisation can influence teaching. To achieve that, this document collects several pedagogic theories related to the theme of the document, to finally create a classroom organisation proposal.

Resumen

El presente documento se centra en cómo una organización de aula puede influenciar la enseñanza o la manera de enseñar. Por ello, este documento recoge entre sus páginas una serie de teorías pedagógicas relacionadas con el tema, para finalmente elaborar una propuesta de organización de aula.

Keywords

Classroom organisation. Learning centres. Curriculum. Learning areas. Personal experience. England. Spain.

Palabras Clave

Organización de aula. Centros de aprendizaje. Currículo. Áreas de aprendizaje. Experiencia personal. Inglaterra. España.

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1. Introduction

The present document contains the theoretical basis of several well-known authors as well as my personal experience in two different schools and two different countries which give me the opportunity of comparing and talk about two different classroom organisations.

This written work tries to create a new classroom organisation using the resources that our educational model let us. As educators, we must be conscious that with the resources and spaces we are given we can change the traditional classroom organisation.

2. Objectives

- Use the resources and the spaces of classrooms to reorganise them and modernise traditional classroom organisation.
- Confirm that there were no laws or official documents about classroom organisation.
- Check if a good class organisation makes teaching the contents of the curriculum easier.
- Confirm if the type of organisation of a class affects to the learning.

3. Justification

Prehistory marks the beginning of education, which was the same all over the world. It is true that education at that time was based on the oral transmission of stories and on the training through imitation for survival.

As more cultures were created, societies became more complex and because of this education also evolved and developed into something more complex, developing formal education.

We must not forget that great thinkers such as Plato, Confucius or Euclid were the ones that began creating schools, colleges or libraries helping the development of education and therefore, the evolution of society and citizens.

Based on the theories of philosophers and thinkers, educators and psychologists set up the school/education we know today, using as a basis the same pedagogical principle of the constructivism, making all basis of education coincide somehow. This together with the authors of *Escuela Nueva* which have influenced in the constructivism, have developed education to become the model that we know today.

So, if all current educational models started from the same basis, constructivism, why do some education systems have prestige over others? Why some have evolved so much and other so little?

According to the documentary film of Michael Moore *Where to invade next?*, We have a very clear example of the evolution of some educational models while other no. In the this film education in the US is compared with Finland. Both educations started

from the same basis, as I have said, however, one of them has grown and improved in terms of pedagogy, while the other has been maintained.

The same that happened with US educational model, has happened with the Spanish and English one. It is true that the English educational system enjoys more fame and prestige but, what is this due to? Both systems settle their education in the aforementioned basis of constructivism, which is the same as the countries that lead education in the world. However, each country has been adjusting and adapting that methodology to the reality of their society, and therefore to the reality of their students; methods, pedagogies, evaluation criteria, classroom management, classroom spaces or class organisation among others.

Focusing on Spain, unfortunately and because of the many educational laws implemented in recent years, it has been stalled. There are many different reasons of why this situation is taking place, and surely all under investigation, but due to the abundance of education laws in general, and the absence of other laws, royal decrees and specific decrees that deal with the classroom as a space, that rarely have specific programs or plans in schools that include it.

Having said all this, these ideas together with my experience in a Spanish and English school, made me curious and willing to know more about this theme. Observing different forms of class organisations helped me wondering what should be a well organised class that stimulates or favours the learning.

To conclude this section, I would like to say that as a future teacher I want to achieve one of the objectives that settle our educational law which is the following one: "Develop habits of individual and team work, effort and responsibility in the study, as well as attitudes of self-confidence, critical sense, personal initiative, curiosity, creativity and interest in learning, and entrepreneurship" that appears in article 7 of the Organic Law[1] to improve educational quality.

Besides, this theme allows me to achieve three important key competences established by the *European Parliament and Council Recommendation*[2]. This institution

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[1] Ley Orgánica 8/2013 LOMCE
[2] Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the *European Parliament* and of the *Council* of 18th December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006]

established eight key competences of which three of them could be developed and worked in a class with this subject. The three key competences bound with the theme are the following ones:

1. *Learning to learn:* it is related to the ability to search out and organise their own learning, either individually or in groups. In this case, *learning to learn* could be developed in a well organised class with corners or spaces in which the child could need some partners help.

2. *Social and civic competence:* social competence refers to all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social life. It is linked to personal and social well-being. Civic competence equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation.

   In this theme, civic competence could be well developed if the working method in class or if the class organisation is with corners and different spaces for pupils because in that way that will have to develop the sense of democracy, justice and equality that entails this competence.

3. *Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship:* is the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. It should include awareness of ethical values for the child development which could be done thanks to a well organised class in which the child could develop his autonomy and starting making decisions of, for example, what corner or learning centre does he want to go.

4. Theoretical background

Everything we know about education is based on theories, that is why this section is dedicated to collect different authors' ideas which have influenced in the classroom organisation as we know it today.

This section will be divided into two parts; one will be from the point of view of psychology and the other one from the pedagogy point of view.

Firstly, I am going to start with the point of view of the psychologists such as Vygotsky, Piaget and Ausubel.

To begin with, I am going to talk about constructivism before mentioning specific authors or psychologists. The original idea of constructivism is that knowledge and learning are the result of the dynamic in which the contributions of the child play a decisive role in learning and knowing. We must have clear the idea that there is not only one type of constructivism but there are different ones.

Lev Vygotsky maintain that the participation of the children in cultural activities allow them to know how to think and act. He considers that the transmission of the psychological functions is produced by the interaction between the child and the others in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the distance between the actual level of development and the level of potential development.

In the ZPD the teacher's role is being a mediator.

The most important features of the ZPD are the following ones:

- It is not an intra or inter trait but both.
- It is not a static but dynamic area, this character is an input from Bruner on the adjustment processes or "scaffolding" (this concept suggests that effective support that the adult gives to the child is the one that fits their skills in each moment and that change as the child is more responsible in the activity)
- The active role of learners is crucial to the dynamic nature of this area.

For Vygotsky, the suitable teaching is the one that overtakes the development but the question is how do we know what is the exactly moment of development of the child so that we can structure the teaching and learning. It is Vygotsky who answers this

question and offers two different techniques; one is the evolutionary scale of development, and the other one is the free play.

Knowledge is not built individually as other authors defend (for example, Piaget that will be explained later on), but it is co-constructed as people interact with each other.

Social interactions with classmates and adults are the main means of intellectual development. The child is born with elementary mental abilities which include memory, attention and perception.

Through interaction with classmates and adults, these innate abilities are transformed into higher mental functions.

Making reference to Piaget, he said that knowledge is a process of construction that must be directly and actively involved with the child. This process is made up of different elements:
- Child acts
- Materials on which the child acts
- Tools whose function is to facilitate the task

The activity of the child starts from the previous schema that he already has.

We must not forget that Piaget settled two different processes which are these ones:
- Assimilation: incorporate new experiences to their previous reference frame of the child, in other words, they have to be conscious of that change and add it to their knowledge.
- Accommodation: modify their current schemes in accordance with the new features of that new experience.

To make the intelligent behaviour works we need to launch a signal, we need to make something happens in the media that unbalances the subject. It has to be a stimulus that bothers the child but that also that suits his interests. Thus, for Piaget the mechanisms that explain the evolution in the knowledge of the subject are the following ones: ripening, experience with objects, people, etc. and equilibration.

Throughout the evolutionary development we can observe how cognitive schema become more complex and in certain stages different schemes take place. Piaget named these schemes "levels of cognitive development" and he establishes four of them which are:

- The sensorimotor stage, from birth to age 2
- The preoperational stage, from age 2 to about age 7
- The concrete operational stage, from age 7 to 11
- The formal operational stage, which begins in adolescence and spans into adulthood.

New information can come from objects or others; and the two main factors for intellectual development are physical experience and social interaction.

The third and final theoretical reference is David Ausubel, who believes that exist two different axes in learning:

- The first one is in relation with content, and it has several ideas: if the content is presented or given by the teacher the learning is called *Reception learning*; if the child has to discover the content by himself, then it is named *Discovery learning*, if that learning make sense it is known as *Meaningful learning*; and if it has no sense, it is named *Rote learning*.

- The second axis is in relation with the relationship between the previous ideas, the ones that the child already has, and the new ones.

The competence "Learning to learn", which is set by Spanish law[3], is the most important aim of education and school that could be improved if class organisation is the correct and lets the pupils interact with each others, as well as helping them to have personal initiative, achieving in that way another key competence established by law which is "Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship". Children could be really autonomous if the classroom corners are clear enough and if the displays and mediators fulfil their aim.

Secondly, I am going to talk about the point of view of the pedagogues, starting with the forefathers of the *Nueva Escuela* and then with the advocates of this type of pedagogy.

On the one hand, there are the forefathers of the *Escuela Nueva* which are mainly three, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel:

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[3] Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa (LOMCE), BOE, nº295, 10 de diciembre de 2013

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the most influential in the development of pedagogy. It is true that it can be seen that Rousseau is influenced by David Hume, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Piaget or Diderot, but it is also true that many later writers took him as a reference; some of them are Marx, Kant, Friedrich Froebel or Maria Montessori. He is the creator of the natural current of education whose motto is "Back to Nature"; for him nature is the original and pure life, in other words, that is not influenced by social conventions. He also considers activity as the ideal way to approach learning.

We owe to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi the creation of the popular and public elementary school. Intellectual development raised two interesting concepts: educate starting with visual media and using stimulating teaching.

Another author is Friedrich Froebel, who in 1840 founded the kindergarten or preschool; his method is natural and active, try to develop the potential that the child has. The essential educational element is the spontaneous activity of the child; he recognized the game as a spontaneous activity and the main way for comprehensive education. He also carried out a systematic and intentional use of spoken language.

On the other hand, there are the advocates of the *Escuela Nueva* of which I will highlight the following ones, María Montessori, Rosa y Carolina Agazzi, Ovide Decroly, Célestin Freinet and Paulina Kergomard:

First I will speak about Maria Montessori, educator and pediatrician, who was interested at first in the education of children with mental deficiencies, although later she extrapolated her methodology to all children. She stand up for the idea that the environment is one of the main elements in the educational process, for what she states that the teacher is the one that has to prepare such an environment, guide the child, etc. The fundamental principles of her method are self-education and individualized teaching. She creates a sensory education, with an essential element that is the manipulative activity and experimentation method. She always based her proposals on the need of movement that the child has.

Rosa and Carolina Agazzi, Agazzi sisters, defended that the child is life and activity that tends to develop spontaneously. Such development allows the whole and comprehensive development of the child, which can only be carried out in a suitable and

stimulating environment, where resources are those which can be found in their environment.

The Agazzi sisters based their work on Froebel's ideas, from whom they collected the importance of game and language. The sisters, establish two categories in the basic material, on the one hand the material for exercises of practical life and play; and secondly, specific material (for sensory discrimination, development of observation and first language education).

Another promoter of the *Escuela Nueva* to consider is Ovide Decroly who created in 1907 in Brussels "School for life and for life" later known as L'Ermitage. The school for Decroly must be active, must allow the child to express himself. His method supports the elimination of a fixed schedule/timetable and a maximum ratio of 20 students per class as homogeneous as possible. Supports the discovery of the child about their needs letting them know their interests, which will attract and keep their attention and so will the child himself who search knowledge.

A phrase that sums up very well the Decroly method is as follows: "The school must be for the child, not the child to school."

A supporter of a rich and stimulating environment that enables children to experiment and communicate in a climate of security, confidence and freedom was Celestin Freinet. He maintained that the teacher should favour the climate of security, confidence and freedom adapted to the needs of the child and in which the child will unwrap.

Paulina Kergomard was essential in the renovation and foundation of the French nursery school. She reduced the number of students per teacher in order to encourage interpersonal relationships. "To make the child talk it is necessary to think, and to think it is necessary to live" as she proposed; that the child's role was to observe, touch, explore, etc. And the role of the teacher is to promote the child's will and let him explore, touch and observe in order to develop their intellectual habits.

Concluding this section, it is necessary to appoint the advocates of the *Escuela Nueva* in Spain, which were Pablo Montesino and Andrés Manjón:

Pablo Montesino founded the first nursery school in Madrid. He paid great attention to the figure of the teacher and established the game as the most suitable method.

Andrés Manjón was a priest dedicated to teaching that created in Granada the Ave Maria Schools as a first experience of "outdoor schools". Some of his contributions were: respect for the natural activity of children; outdoor teaching valuing cheerful and sunny spaces, but protected; importance of music, sensory and artistic education; etc.

All these authors previously mentioned, have been studied and the education of today extracted of all of them some crucial principles that are the basis of today's education and methodology. These principles are as follows:

- Principle of activity and experimentation: both physical and mental activity will have a constructive role, so that through play, action and experimentation children will discover properties, relationships and build their own knowledge. In short, this principle is based on children activity as the main axis of the educational process. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the accomplishment of activities and experiences to help them learn and develop.

- Principle of individualization: is the organisation of the different didactic elements to respond to each child favouring their personal activity and their personal efficiency. The main techniques derived from this principles can be grouped into two groups: those that establish homogeneous groups to which dedicate a common learning, and the ones that achieved individualization through the acceptance of individuality without taking into account the heterogeneity of the classroom.

- Principle of socialization: this one propose the adaptation of the programming to the pupils taking into account the social environment in which they are. The full development of the person is not possible without interaction with others, thanks to interaction; children learn behaviours, rules, as well as group values.

- Principle of globalization: captures the reality in a syncretic (syncretism) way, so learning must happen globally. With this principle, learning is the product of multiple connections and relations between the new and the already learned.

- Principle of emotional involvement: create a warm, friendly and safe environment in which the child feels secure and confident.

- Importance of a good organisation of material, space and time that favours autonomy and flexibility.

All these authors discuss in some way or another the importance of autonomy, initiative, creativity and freedom of the student in class. This can lead us to think about the organisation of school spaces and especially the organisation of a classroom, What is the best way to organize a classroom to get the best from our students?

All these theories just explained, stand up for letting children to develop themselves by interacting with their classmates. Unfortunately, this interaction it is not allowed in our current model of class organisation. Thus, leaving aside preschool, primary education classes are often structured in such a way that talking or exchange opinions with their classmates is almost impossible. Maybe, that is the reason why I have chosen this theme, furthermore the main topic of this theme give me the opportunity of speak about a new method that is getting popular in Spain, which is the cooperative learning.

As we all know, cooperative learning consists on the exchange of information between pupils. It is about helping each other and carrying out activities that favours this type of learning, which could be achieved by working in class with learning centres and therefore, having a good classroom organisation.

Now, I will make a nexus between my theme and different theories of prestigious authors. The authors that I am going to mention now are clear defenders of innovating in class organisation, concretely, most of them talk and defend working with learning centres, which entails changing the current model of classroom organisation. It is at this point when I will mention some authors that talk specifically about class spaces or class organisation:

The first one is John Dewey, he defends the idea that teaching should be done by the action of learning by doing and not by instruction. That is why the teacher should focus on the interests and needs of each age and children, so that education is adapted to the child's experience. Dewey defends the using of experimental and laboratory method in class. The school must become the child's natural environment where he learns to live.

True education consists on the proper interplay of ideas, beliefs and values. It is education which should be adapted to the children's development and not the children adapted to the teaching development.

Other important author that studies and works with a new class organisation is Célestin Freinet. He bases his theory in some principles such as:

- School behaviour depends on the physical condition of the child

- Learning needs motivation based on respect and not on authority.

- Lessons should be based on practical activities and not just theoretical.

- Punishment is always wrong

After making a psychological and social study of the needs of children, Freinet established eight different workshops, which are part of a teaching method adapted to the maturation and the needs of the child.

Four of those workshops are called basic manual work, and the other four are about more evolved, socialized and intellectualized activities. Practice becomes essential and collaboration between pupils highlights the need a cooperative classroom organisation.

- Basic manual workshops:

  • Workshop 1: agricultural work and animal husbandry

  • Workshop 2: blacksmith's and carpentry

  • Workshop 3: sewing

  • Workshop 4: construction and mechanics

- Evolved activity workshops:

  • Workshop 5: knowledge

  • Workshop 6: experimentation

  • Workshop 7: graphical expression and communication

  • Workshop 8: artistic creations

With these workshops in class the lack of space of a traditional classroom disappears to provide a different framework for each type of activity, so that we can enjoy more space to use it for painting, playing, dancing, cooking, etc.

Retaking Maria Montessori, which has been explained before as an advocate of *Escuela Nueva*, and who is a really important author as to this topic of innovating in class organisations.

Her methodology is based fundamentally on children learning to do things by themselves, following their motivations and their own rhythms. This methodology introduces children to situations and materials that promote their whole development.

In a classroom with these features the space is large and not rigidly structured as in an ordinary classroom. In class everything is arranged in such a way that children can reach things or materials that they can manipulate. In fact, we must remember that manipulation is the way that Montessori understands for achieving learning.

The Montessori environment is an environment adapted to the needs of the child, a relaxed atmosphere in which the child feels at home, an environment that fosters opportunities for interaction and initiative of the child, an environment of freedom and responsibility. It is a classroom divided by areas: practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, art and science, in which children can develop themselves.

To finalize this section, I would like to make clear that each methodology involves a different classroom organisation and that not all methods can allow a new type of organisation or an innovative classroom. In traditional schools, teachers do not have the freedom of innovating in terms of class organisation. It is true that they can choose whether their pupils are going to be seated and if they are going to be individually, in pairs, in groups of four, in groups of six, in U shape, etc but teachers are not allowed to add some elements or objects to their classes such as carpets, daily life materials, art supplies, etc. That is what it has to be changed.

5. English and Spanish Curriculums

In this point I am going to talk about both curriculums, the English one and the Spanish one. But, as both of them are too extensive, I will focus this point in talking about Literacy (English) and Science, as well as the basic competences.

In this section I will express differences and similarities that both curriculums have. Because they will have some items in common but they will also have some differences. Firstly, I will explain the English curriculum, then the Spanish one and finally I will make a brief paragraph in which I will mention the main differences and similarities that both curriculums have.

The reason why I find this section important is for understanding the following sections of the document, that is why I wanted to talk about such an important point. Curriculum section is important to understand the classroom organisation, as well as to understand the section of my experience and my classroom proposal. Knowing the objectives for each subjects and what each country established would be easier to understand why each classroom organisation is what it is explained in the section of my experience.

English Curriculum:

The English curriculum is named as *The National Curriculum* and it sets out the framework for key stages 1 and key stages 2. In this document we can find:

- *Contextual information about the statutory national curriculum, including the statutory basis of the latter.*
- *Aims for the statutory national curriculum*
- *Statements on inclusion, and on the development of pupils' competence in numeracy and mathematics, language and literacy across the school curriculum*
- *Programmes of study for key stages 1 and 2 for all the national curriculum subjects that are taught at these key stages.*[4]

The aims of *The National Curriculum* are as follows:

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[4] *The National Curriculum in England. Key stages 1 and 2 framework document (September, 2013)*

- *The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said; and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.*

- *The national curriculum is just one element in the education of every child. There is time and space in the school day and in each week, term and year to range beyond the national curriculum specifications. The national curriculum provides an outline of core knowledge around which teachers can develop exciting and stimulating lessons to promote the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as part of the wider school curriculum[5].*

Also, *The National Curriculum* has settled the structure which consists in:

- *The Secretary of State for Education is required to publish programmes of study for each national curriculum subject, setting out the 'matters, skills and processes' to be taught at each key stage. Schools are free to choose how they organise their school day, as long as the content of the national curriculum programmes of study is taught to all pupils[6].*

The structure of *The National Curriculum*, in terms of which subjects are compulsory at each key stage, is set out in the table below:

	Key stage 1	Key stage 2	Key stage 3	Key stage 4
Age	5 – 7	7 – 11	11 – 14	14 – 16
Year groups	1 – 2	3 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 11
Core subjects				
English	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mathematics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Science	✓	✓	✓	✓
Foundation subjects				
Art and design	✓	✓	✓	
Citizenship			✓	✓
Computing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Design and technology	✓	✓	✓	
Languages[4]		✓	✓	
Geography	✓	✓	✓	
History	✓	✓	✓	
Music	✓	✓	✓	
Physical education	✓	✓	✓	✓

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[5] *The National Curriculum in England. Key stages 1 and 2 framework document (September, 2013)*
[6] *The National Curriculum in England. Key stages 1 and 2 framework document (September, 2013)*

All schools are also required to teach religious education at all key stages. And secondary schools must provide sex and relationship education.

Regarding to Language and literacy, I quote from the curriculum the main aim that teachers must achieve: "*Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject. English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching; for pupils, understanding the language provides access to the whole curriculum. Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects.*"

English has a pre-eminent place in education and in society. A high-quality education in English will teach pupils to speak and write fluently so that they can communicate their ideas and emotions to others and through their reading and listening, others can communicate with them. Through reading in particular, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Reading also enables pupils both to acquire knowledge and to build on what they already know.

The National Curriculum for English has established the following aims:
- *Read easily, fluently and with good understanding*
- *Develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information*
- *Acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language*
- *Appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage*
- *Write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting their language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences*
- *Use discussion in order to learn; they should be able to elaborate and explain clearly their understanding and ideas*
- *Are competent in the arts of speaking and listening, making formal presentations, demonstrating to others and participating in debate.*[7]

The National Curriculum for English reflects the importance of language in pupils' development across the whole curriculum, they really care about spoken language,

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[7] *The National Curriculum in England. Key stages 1 and 2 framework document (September, 2013)*

writing and reading but they also care about spelling, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation.

As for Science, they base on the importance of science in this way:

"A high-quality science education provides the foundations for understanding the world through the specific disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics. Science has changed our lives and is vital to the world's future prosperity, and all pupils should be taught essential aspects of the knowledge, methods, processes and uses of science. Through building up a body of key foundational knowledge and concepts, pupils should be encouraged to recognise the power of rational explanation and develop a sense of excitement and curiosity about natural phenomena. They should be encouraged to understand how science can be used to explain what is occurring, predict how things will behave, and analyse causes."[8]

Teaching science offers students the ability to access to a huge quantity of knowledge and information that will contribute to an overall understanding of how and why things work like they do. Science is able to explain the mechanics and reasons behind the daily functioning of complex systems. Children are able to use this knowledge to understand new concepts, make well-informed decisions and chase new interests. Science also helps to increase understanding and helps children and teenagers to retain that information.[9]

The National Curriculum has established for Science the following aims:
- *Develop scientific knowledge and conceptual understanding through the specific disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics*
- *Develop understanding of the nature, processes and methods of science through different types of science enquiries that help them to answer scientific questions about the world around them*
- *Are equipped with the scientific knowledge required to understand the uses and implications of science, today and for the future.*

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[8] *The National Curriculum in England. Key stages 1 and 2 framework document (September, 2013)*
[9] http://www.cest.org.uk/importance-of-science-in-schools/

In *The National Curriculum in England* does not establish any key competence that can lead us to suppose that they are regulated by the *European Parliament*[10], which establish eight key competences that will be explained later on.

Spanish Curriculum:

The Spanish curriculum sets out the objectives of education, the seven key competences, the compulsory and non-compulsory subjects, some specific ways of acting as to personalised attention and assessment among others.

The structure of the curriculum, in terms of which subjects are compulsory at primary education are as follows:

Students are required to take the following areas of core subjects in each course:

1. Natural Science
2. Social Science
3. Language and literature (Spanish)
4. Mathematics
5. First Foreign Language (usually English)

Students are required to take the following specific areas in each school year:

1. Physical Education
2. Religion or Social and Civic values (choice of parents)
3. Depending on the regulation and programming of educational provision established by each education authority, at least students have to take one of the following areas of specific subjects:
   a. Art
   b. Second Foreign Language
   c. Religion, only if parents have not chosen in the election mentioned in the previous paragraph.
   d. Social and Civic values, only if parents have not chosen in the election mentioned in the previous paragraph.

It is important to make clear that what in England is called English or Literacy, here in Spain is Literacy, English or First Foreign Language. Having said this, I will quote

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[10] Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the *European Parliament* and of the *Council* of 18th December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006]

now from the Spanish curriculum why teaching English or Literacy in Spanish schools is really important:

Improving communicative competence in a foreign language is a requirement of modern society that with the evolution of information and communication technology (ICT), attends a progressive internationalization of relations. This new society requires students able to unwrap in a multicultural and multilingual context which is an identity of the present and future society[11].

To set the study of Literacy or the First Foreign Language is taken as model the *Common European Framework for Languages*.

The curriculum for this subject is structured around two main axes which are understanding and production of oral and written texts. Therefore, the curriculum determines the following blocks that are common in each year of Primary Education:

Block 1: Understanding oral texts

Block 2: Production of oral texts: expression and interaction

Block 3: Understanding written texts.

Block 4: Production of written texts: expression and interaction

Inside each block, there are established common contents for each year, but then it is also specified the contents and objectives per content block.

Regarding Science, in Spain it is divided in two types of Science; Natural Science and Social Science

I will start talking about Natural Science help children to understand the world in which we live, to understand our environment and to understand the interaction between people and nature. It also helps them to recognize the contributions of the scientific and technological advances in our daily life and value the work of those who have contributed the progress.

Development of science and scientific activity is essential to understand the human evolution. Nowadays, science is a crucial tool for understanding the world in which we live, and it is also crucial to develop responsible attitudes related to living things, resources and environment.

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[11] Orden Edu/519/2014, de 17 de junio, BOCYL, n.º117, 20 de junio de 2014

The curriculum for this subject has determined around five huge content blocks:

Block 1: Introduction to the scientific activity, in which it is included the procedures, attitudes and values related to the rest of the blocks. Because it is a transversal content, it has to be developed during the rest of the content blocks.

Block 2: Human being and health. This content block includes contents related to the human body, its structure, vital functions, necessary cares, healthy habits and knowledge of oneself.

Block 3: Living beings. Differentiate between types, characteristics and classification. It also includes ecosystems and attitudes that favour environmental sustainability.

Block 4: Matter and Energy. Knowledge and experimentation with matter laws and discovery of energy sources, as well as sustainable development of the Earth.

Block 5: Technology, objects and machines. In this block, children will start knowing, practicing and evaluating this elements and the importance that they have in our daily life.

Like Literacy or English, in Natural Science inside each block, there are established common contents for each year, but then it is also specified the contents and objectives per content block.

Lastly, I am going to explain Social Science which integrates various disciplines that study people as social beings and their reality. The purpose of Social Science is to develop different capacities in children that allow them to interpret and participate in the reality, as well as learning how to live in society.

Understand the reality in which children live means knowing how to observe the environment, as well as differentiate and classify the elements that make it up.

For this subject, the curriculum has established four main contents blocks that are as follows:

Block 1: Common contents. It establishes the characteristics and techniques common in the area.

Block 2: The world in which we live. Study geography, from the reality next to children to the Universe. Water and responsible consumption, climate and climate

change, landscapes and human intervention in the environment, are also taught in this content block.

Block 3: Living in society. This content block initiates a process of understanding different social groups and their characteristics, respecting and valuing them. Understanding who are its members, how they are distributed, the rules for living together and how responsibility and work is distributed among its members.

Block 4: Traces of time. In this block it would be taught the understanding of concepts for instance historical time and its measurement. It would also be taught the different stages of history and humanity, as well as date the five ages of history. It is important for children to acquire historical references that allow them to develop a personal interpretation to the world.

As well as with Literacy or English and Natural Science, Social Science has inside each block established the common contents for each year, but then it is also specified the contents and objectives per content block.

Key Competences:

The *European Parliament*[12] established through a recommendation eight key competences that they find essential in a knowledge society. The eight key competences established by the *European Parliament* are as follows:

1. Communication in mother tongue: ability to express and interpret concepts, thought, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form.

2. Communication in foreign languages: same skills as in the previous competence but in another language. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology: ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve problems in daily situations. As to science and technology, it refers to the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies that explain the world.

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[12] Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18th December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006]

4. Digital competence: involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT).

5. Learning to learn: ability to pursue and organise their own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with their needs.

6. Social and civic competence: it refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and all types of behaviour that equip children to participate in an effective way in social life. Linked to personal and social well-being.

7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship: ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking.

8. Cultural awareness and expression: it involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, art, literature and visual art).

These key competences are all interdependent, and the emphasis is on critical thinking, creativity, initiative and decision taking among others.

As the English curriculum does not set any key competence we can suppose that they follow the ones that the *European Parliament* established, but the Spanish curriculum does set key competences that will be explained next.

Regarding the Spanish curriculum, we cannot forget that it does establish seven key competences, one less than what the *European Parliament* recommend. The Spanish competences are the following ones:

1. Linguistic communication
2. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
3. Digital competence
4. Learning to learn
5. Social and civic competences
6. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
7. Cultural awareness and expression

As we can see, Spain establishes one key competence less; this missing competence is *communication in foreign languages*. Leaving this detail aside, we can see that our education follows the *European Parliament* recommendation.

In summary and to conclude this section I want to make a brief comparison between both curriculums the English one and the Spanish one. This comparison will be structured in two main axes, differences and similarities:

- Main differences between *The National Curriculum in England* and the *Spanish Curriculum*:

  - The English curriculum established the hours that each core subject has to be taught in a week but leaves to the teacher's decision what to be taught and at what hours. In Spain the curriculum established the hours that each subject has to be taught in a week and leaves to the school the decision of making the timetables, but the teacher has not got the freedom of choosing the timetable of her/his class and changing it whenever she feels to.

- Main similarities between *The National Curriculum in England* and the *Spanish Curriculum*:

  - Both curriculums established the main hours of each subjects and give the opportunity to parents of choosing some of the optional subjects such as religion.
  - Both curriculums have core subjects or essential subjects and some others that are not as important as these ones.
  - Both educational systems established more or less the same priorities and objectives to be reached by their children

6. Classroom organisation in Spain

To begin with, as it has been said throughout this document, in Spain there is only one law that sets the basis of the essential aspects and characteristics that a school and a classroom must have. This law[13], only establishes the metres that each child should have in class, as well as the ratio of each class and the main rooms that the school must have. But there is nothing about class organisation.

Taking a general view of the classroom organisation in Spain, we may found that in most classes if not all of them, students' tables/desks were fronting the blackboard and the teacher, this type of classroom organisation is known as the "Bentham's Panopticom (point?)"

This model established by Jeremy Bentham, was a jail model *Panopticom,* which consist on guard all from a central point. Then, each person would feel that look in itself and would guard itself. Although this model was created for jails, soon it was used in factories and schools.

If we think about it, our classes are organised in such a way that the teacher usually controls everything from its position. The teacher is always in front of its students and some years ago, the teacher was in a higher point that the rest of the class to observe it all.

Fortunately, within time we have changed some things about classroom organisation but we still having to change lots of things, for instance when we talk about working learning centres we always think about pre-school education but this type of methodology could be carried out in primary education with quite good results.

It is true that each methodology involves a different classroom organisation and that not all methods can support a new organisation or an innovative classroom. There are lots of new schools with new methodologies such as Waldorf Schools or Montessori Schools, in which is rarely to find a common classroom, there may be tables and chairs but only for concrete and specific as painting activities that the other tasks and / or activities are performed either standing or outdoors or on the floor.

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[13] Real Decreto 132/2010, de 12 de febrero 2010, *por el que se establecen los requisitos mínimos de los centros que impartan las enseñanzas del segundo ciclo de la educación infantil, la educación primaria y la educación secundaria.*

7. Personal Experience

Fortunately, the two years of my teacher trainee I have been in two different schools and in two different countries, what have let me observe different curriculums, different methodologies but also different classroom organisations. Moreover, a great good point in all this is that in both schools I have been in the same school year which is year 4, therefore the age of pupils was the same, between 9 and 10 years old.

Firstly, I will talk about my experience in the Spanish school, here in my city, Palencia. As I have already said I was in year 4, which means that pupils were between 9 and 10 years old.

Regarding the classroom organisation, which can be seen in *annex 1*, pupils were seated in groups of three except one group that was made up of only two. Usually the group of only two were next to the teacher's desk and the pupils seated there were the ones that were more talkative or the ones who needed more attention or help to follow or understand the lesson.

All the tables/desks of the pupils were looking to the front of the class, in other words, all children have a clear view of the smart board, the blackboard and the teacher.

The reason why students were seated in threes is because the teacher put in each group of three one child that was well-behaved, other that did not have difficulties and other one that could have difficulties or that was talkative or miss-behaved.

There were two main parts of the class with hangers, where pupils hang their coats. Another positive point of this classroom was the quantity of windows that it has and that the door of the classroom was made up of two doors what made it big enough.

The class is full of mediators, most of them in English except few of them that were in Spanish. Just above the blackboard there are about ten mediators with useful expressions for English and Science, in them it could be read: *Can you repeat, please?* or *Can I borrow your..., please?*. Not only are they useful, but also they are strategically placed above the blackboard so that pupils could see them without any difficulty.

Now, I will talk about my second experience as trainee teacher. This one took place in England, concretely in Liverpool. As I have said I was in year 4 with kids between 9 and 10 years old.

The physical aspect of the class can be seen in *annex 2*.

As it can be seen in the image, classes here are quite different of the ones we have in Spain. From my point of view, there are some huge differences between Spanish schools and English ones; based on my experience, there are quite much bigger than in Spain, and they have in class some resources, materials and services that we do not have in a Spanish class such as computers, iPads, and trays in which they can keep whatever they want to.

The class has two main parts; one is the main class in which teaching took place while the second part is separated by one cupboard and various shelves and in there is where support is given to some pupils that really need support.

Year 4 class has two doors; one is in the playground and it is used to come in at 08:55 in the morning and to go out at 15:20 in the evening, so that they don't make mess in the corridors which are only used for those children that arrive to school in the school bus. This door, it is also used for going out and in at 10:45 that is the break time and at 12:15 that is in lunchtime.

The other door it is only used by staff, children that need wheelchairs or mobile walking and for moving inside the school. In other words, it is used for going to the hall (for assembly), for going to PE, for going swimming and some other activities.

As you go in class, on the left we can find the hangers in which children put their coats or small bags they bring to school. In this same wall further on, we can find the toilets of the class. There are two toilets for children; the staff of class is not allowed to use them. They are adapted for children and they are quite spacious for those children that are in wheelchairs, although they usually use different toilets located in the corridor of the class because they habitually need help from two members of the support staff.

On the right we have the main class that is made up by 6 tables in which they are sat between 6 and 4 children in each table. Each child has 3 different seats depending on the subject or activity that is going to be carried out:

- Class place: this seat is where they are when carrying out an activity that does not need special help or support. They are mixed.

- Maths place: this sits have been decided carefully so that they can help each other. The two tables that are nearer to the door are where the pupils with difficulties are sat in this subject and the other four tables are children that need help but not as much as the other two tables.

- English place: they are sat mixed and in that way that they can help each other but not in the same level as in maths.

Between the tables of the pupils and the trays and armchair of the teacher, there is enough space that sometimes children sit down in the carpet when the teacher show them some explanation video or when she is explaining something or at fruit time when the teacher reads a book or show them *Odizzi* or *Espresso*. Besides, between the tables of each group is enough space that the teacher or the support staff uses to move between tables. The way of moving between them is with a small chair with wheels.

One special fact of the class is that the teacher's desk is not facing the pupils, instead it is facing or looking the whiteboard and the children's trays. This is quite interesting because usually in Spain the teacher's desk is facing the class and pupils.

In the back of the class there is a huge shelf in which there are lots of boxes with materials and resources as iPads, games, Spanish materials, dresses, etc. Here it is also two desks where pupils with really special needs come to be taught if needed.

8. My classroom proposal

In this section I will talk about my classroom proposal, which will be a mix between what I have seen in my personal experience, my learning throughout my 4 years degree and some personal ideas.

I will start talking about the physical aspect of my classroom organisation proposal that will be for a 4 school year. And it would look like this:
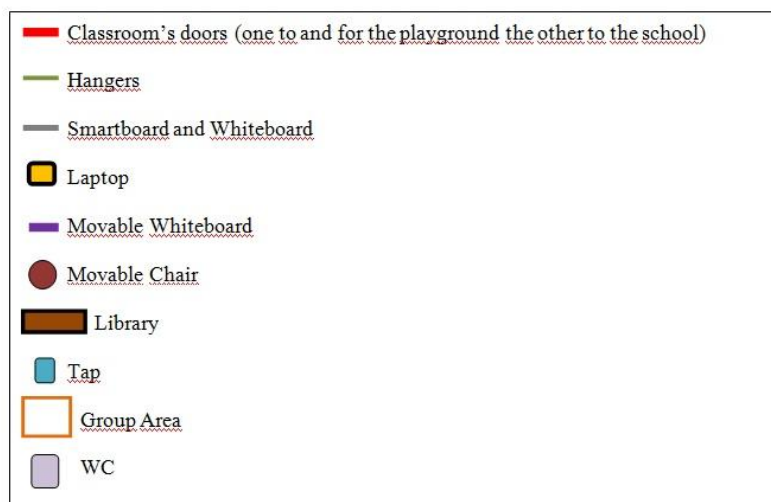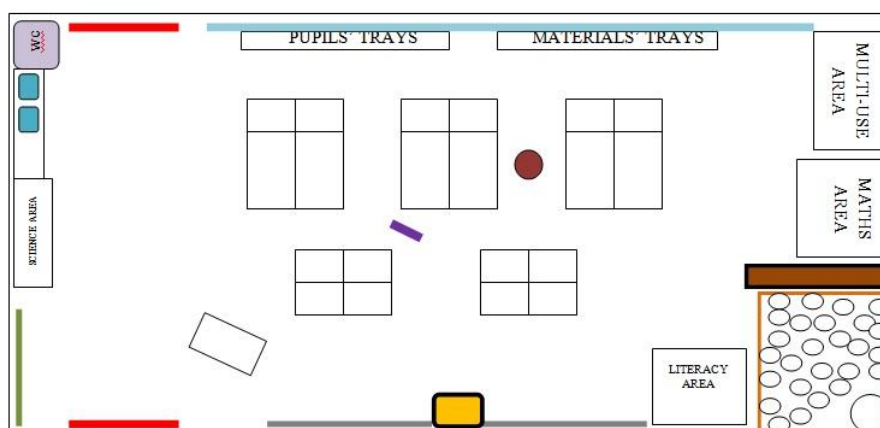
As it can be seen in the image, I propose a classroom with as much natural light as possible and with lot of space so that children can move and administrate materials, spaces and objects.

If we observe the image we can see a movable chair and a movable whiteboard, this is due to make easier work adapted to the children needs. With the movable chair the teacher is at the same level as the pupils and she can be between tables and having a

look to what are they doing and help them. And, the movable whiteboard is useful to explain or establish activities of different level to the children that need it, it is helpful to personalise the teaching and learning. Throughout all the classroom we can fin different areas or learning centres that although they would be used by the teacher for the lessons and to carry some activities related to each subject, children could make use of them.

As you enter in class, you will find that there is another door just in front of you, that door is for going to the school corridors and areas, while the door through what you are entering is for coming to class and for the playground. This is an idea that could be carried out if it is possible, if not having just one door as always is not problem at all.

On the left, we will find the hangers in which children will put their coats, jackets, scarves, etc. Next to the hangers it is located the "Science Area", in which there is a big table in which experiments and other activities will be carried out. Moreover, in the wall above this area would be placed displays and mediators that would be useful for them such as the scientific method, its steps, and how to fill each step.

Next to the "Science Area", there is a space that could be called the "Hygienic area", there are two taps, and a little of space in which children can wash their hands when they come in from the playground and also there would be one glass or cup for each child. If having two taps or even one is not possible children will have to bring to class one bottle each and leave in a space that will be just in the same place. In this way, they could have a drink in their glass without sharing it. And beside this space, it is the toilet of the class, to which children can go between classes but never during a lesson, unless emergency.

In the side of the windows, we can see that there are pupils' trays that are for personal use of children. Each child will have one tray in which he/she can keep their personal staff, as reading books, some toy, and it would be also used for keeping the undone or unfinished work.

Following our tour we reach another block of trays. This one are materials trays, for instance it would be one tray with scissors, another with small whiteboards, another with pens for the whiteboards, another with white paper, another with crayons, another with glue, another with colour paper, etc. These trays can be used by pupils whenever they needed and if the activity that is being carrying out needs some of this material.

It is at this point where we find the "Multi-use Area" that it will be used for itinerary displays or activities such as *Christmas, Holy Week, Human rights week or some readings reviews* among others.

Then, it is located the "Maths Area" that will be used to do activities of this subject but also in which there will be materials useful for resolving problems or helping pupils. Needless to mention is that in the wall will be mediators and displays to what children can look if they need it.

Just next to it is the library in which pupils not will only find Spanish and English books for reading, but also interesting books with information of science, maths or art. So that it can be a point of searching information and can be seen as an interesting point and not only as a reading point.

The library is strategically situated next to the "Group Area". This space will be use for group reading but also as a space in which relax, read individually and also making group. It has been thought to make the children conscious that their classmates are friends and that we are a group and we have to help each other.

Beside this beautiful area we find the "Literacy Area", here we can find displays and mediators in the wall but we can fin also the class book that we are reading together and some useful vocabulary or activities that will help in the understanding of the book, as well as in understanding English.

Continuing with our itinerary through the classroom we reach the wall in which we can find the whiteboard and the smart board. These boards will be used for explaining contents to pupils and making group activities. Between the whiteboard and the smart board, we can find a laptop used for play activities or video in the smart board, but also it can be used by pupils with the teacher's permission.

Going back to the image, we can see in the image that there is a table at an angle (in purple), this table will have some material for the teacher but it is not the place of the teacher. In this classroom the teacher has not got a special desk where children go to show the activities. Moreover, in the low part of this table it is like a small cupboard in which each child has one folder with its name. In this folder they keep the finalised work and possible exams so that parents can see what their child does at class.

As to the tables' distribution, they are in group of six except eight pupils that are in fours. This is due to making work easy. In the tables of the front, that are in fours, there would be sat the children with more difficulties to understand the contents. However, in each group would be pupils that don't have any difficulty In that way, they would help one to others and will carry out the key competence of "Learning to learn".

Along all the classroom would be mediators and displays that will help children to carry out the activities, there would be mediators and displays of all the necessary things so that they know where to look depending on what they need. These mediators will be made up by the pupils as *Montessori pedagogy* defends.

Regarding the methodology and when this learning centres will be used; as by law timetables/schedules must be fulfilled the use of those learning areas must be in the time of each lesson.

In other words, I will use each learning centre or area in the time destined to each subject. They will be like a support for the lesson and content, I mean that in every lesson children can stand up and go to the area they think they are needing in that moment.

In this way, I will favour their autonomy and sense of initiative as well as the entrepreneurship which is a key competence of our curriculum. These learning centres and the arrangement of the classroom will also beneficiate the intellectual development of pupils, because as Vygotsky says social interactions with classmates favours the innate abilities that children have.

In addition, this classroom organisation proposal favours the *discovery learning* of Ausubel, and even *meaningful learning* because children will discover the contents and give them sense using the learning areas or centres. Also, as Agazzi sisters, which based their work in Froebel's theories, defended children in this classroom organisation can develop spontaneously because they can go to the area they need when they need it.

9. Conclusion

This work has made me conscious of how important spaces are in a school, but also in a classroom. Thank to the experience that I have had in two different schools and two different countries I have been able to choose the things that I have liked and the things that can be improved.

In my classroom organisation proposal I have tried to include things of both systems and both classroom organisations making as a result my own proposal.

Furthermore, I have to say that with this proposal I have also tried to make clear that the autonomy of children in really important and that we have to left them to make some decisions, that is why I have included in my proposal areas or learning centres and displays and mediators so that they choose where to look depending on what they need. It is in this way we combine the traditional theorical classes, in which the teacher explains the content, with a new way of teaching that is getting popular in most educative models of systems.

It is true that the spaces of our classrooms don't give teacher the opportunity of innovate or change the classroom organisation, and also that our educative law do not give us the chance of choosing some important elements which are essential if we want to adapt education to 21st century.

Moreover, in my humble opinion, I believe that we have to make teachers conscious that changing classroom organisation could be done with the spaces and resources we are given. Just changing the arrangement of the class and the way of working, instead individually by groups, and some other ideas we could have a new classroom.

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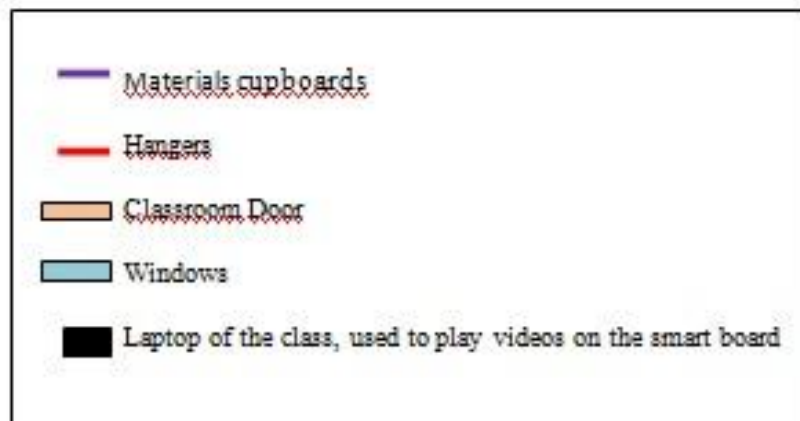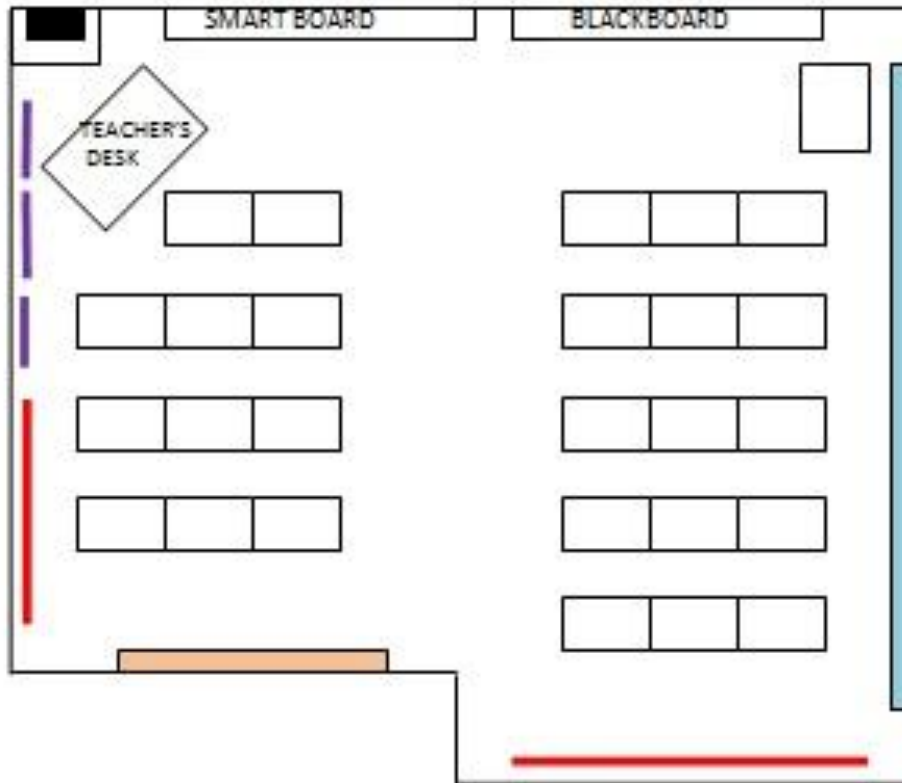
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11. Annex

Annex 1. Classroom organisation of the school of my first teacher trainee in Spain

Annex 2. Classroom organisation of the school of my second teacher trainee in England

■ Door (from the corridor)	■ Children's trays
■ Bathroom WC	■ Windows
■ Hangers	■ Teacher's desk
■ Door to and from the playground	
■ Shelters or cupboards	■ Teacher armchair
■ Computers	
■ Materials	