

Self- critique and notes on the initial English class:

1. Heterogenous group made it difficult to gear towards expertise levels. Bored some, left others in the dust. In retrospect, offering at least two different level classes would have been wiser, but not practical time-wise for me.
2. Classes were 2 hour sessions, twice a week, Mondays & Wednesdays. Consider either Mondays and Thursdays (more time between classes for the teacher and the students) or 1 – longer class midweek. The time goes quickly. Two classes per week is probably most beneficial for the group. I kept attendance and awarded certificates to those who completed the class and attended at least 80% of classes.
3. Gear lesson theme and vocabulary towards areas of interest for the group, e.g. marina, hotel or general areas of interest such as holidays, shopping, etc. E.g., we studied parts of boats and nautical terms as one lesson.
4. More review would have been better than introducing new subject matter, but I felt compelled to give them as much information as possible in the limited time we had.
5. Pronunciation is critical. Several students had a good vocabulary, but it was not understandable when spoken. Work on “V”, TH, SH, CH sounds not used in Spanish. Stress clarity rather than speed in conversation.
6. Share cultural differences and colorful expressions with the class; they love it. Example: “pigging out” or “awesome”. They like to hear about the differences between the U.S. (or any foreign country) and Ecuador.
7. They were good about doing homework and worked hard at it. This keeps the lessons in front of them and keeps them thinking about English between classes. After awhile, I automatically gave a homework assignment which I didn’t do in the beginning.
8. In retrospect, I would have charged a small fee (\$15-20 +/-) for the class which I would have refunded to them or perhaps used for a party or dinner at the end of the class. More than 20 signed up for the class and about 5-6 regulars finished up. The small cost would have placed value on the course...does free mean no value? The dwindling numbers may also have been a result of aiming at only one level.
9. Advanced group needs work on English sentence structure, e.g. adjectives before nouns (pretty woman, not mujer bonita), verb placement, adverb placement, etc.
10. Though Spanish is not necessary to teach the class, it certainly helps. I spoke in Spanish and English the first few weeks, translating into Spanish whatever I said in English. After 3 weeks, we talked only in English for the most part. A better understanding of Spanish and its structure, would have made me a better teacher. A good bilingual dictionary is critical. I had one which went into detail on both Spanish grammar (which I didn’t know) and English grammar (much of which I had forgotten).
11. I didn’t have access to TEFL books, but I did borrow several workbooks from students. I found them pretty boring myself and fairly inadequate. Probably good for high school kids, but non-relevant subject matter and activities for adults.
12. I gave a final exam on the last night which consisted of a paragraph they had written and corrected in class. They practiced reading in advance and then presented to the class on the final night. We asked questions about their topic and they answered. Certificates of achievement were handed out after the presentations. We celebrated with snacks & champagne!!!

My students were hardworking, devoted and serious about learning English. All in all, this was the highlight of my time in Ecuador. I learned more Spanish and more about the Ecuadorian people in this 6 week period than in the previous year of living here.

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