

Prudence Ingerman spent four years in Ecuador as a Peace Corps volunteer in the oriente and as Coordinator of Materials and of the Youth English Language program for the English School of the Experiment in International Living in Quito. For the past 13 years she has been the Senior Instructor and Curriculum Coordinator in the Intensive English Program at Juniata College in Pennsylvania, USA where she was also involved (for five years) with planning and implementing the state approved ESL certificate program for PA public school teachers. One vital component of this program involved bringing the course participants to Otavalo, Ecuador, to engage in cultural and language immersion and also to teach and be mentored in the mini-school especially created for Ecuadorian children. Professor Ingerman has presented at conferences internationally and holds a MAT (ESL) degree from the School for International Training in Vermont, USA.

Summary of Assessment of English Language Instruction Puerto Ayora, Galapagos, Ecuador

Between July 15th- 22nd, 2009, I had the opportunity to meet with and assess over half the English language teachers currently employed in Puerto Ayora schools, both public and private. The assessment material was that used for placement purposes for international students at Juniata College, Pennsylvania. There were two parts:

ASSESSMENT

1. **Writing** - The teachers were asked to write a one-page response to a prompt (see attached.) Two readers assessed each writing sample using a rubric which measured content (/6), vocabulary (/4), syntax (/3) and grammar (/3).

Result – Of the eight teachers, one scored at beginner level (less than 300 TOEFL), six at intermediate level (approximately 400 TOEFL), and one at advanced level (approximately 550 TOEFL).

Note: College-age international students with a TOEFL score of over 550 are usually successful in regular college courses.

2. **Oral Skills** - Each teacher met individually with me and followed a four – part assessment in which the topics under discussion progressed from the familiar to the more academic. A second professor recorded and assessed, seated out of sight but near the teacher. Score was reached by averaging the two assessors’ results.

Result – Of the seven teachers, one scored at beginner level, four at intermediate, one at high intermediate and one at advanced.

PERCEIVED NEEDS of the teachers

NEED # 1 – Practice listening and speaking with native speakers

Recommendation:

a) With the large number of volunteers in Puerto Ayora and Bellavista, it would be a fairly simple matter to require the volunteers to be Conversation Partners 1:1 with an English teacher. They would meet one to three times a week at a mutually convenient time for 3/4 of an hour with a cultural prompt to get started (food, customs, holidays, work, family etc). The initial sessions should be held while walking or over a glass of beer/juice/coffee to reduce anxiety. It should be made clear to both participants that this is an English only session. Even with the turnover of volunteers, I believe this would be possible.

b) All the English teachers could form an English Teachers Association or an English Club. It could meet once a month. A few ideas for how this group might operate are:

1) An English speaking volunteer could give a mini-lecture on some topic of interest. The teachers could practice listening /note-taking skills and then break into small groups for discussion. The topics might or might not be related to English teaching.

2) Another possibility which I have found very effective is to ask the teachers to bring to the meeting some technique that really worked or really bombed. For new teachers or teachers working alone, this kind of sharing and feed back in small groups (to reduce anxiety) is refreshing and useful.

3) During vacations, volunteers could hold an English camp for teachers 1-3 hours a day. The program could include the collaborative creation of a science unit based on some aspect of the Galapagos, and then they could create material and plan lessons for the specific grades they teach. Reporting on the execution of these units could be a rich conversation topic in the monthly English Club meetings.

NEED # 2 - Increase language teaching techniques

Note: The photocopied English language curriculum from the Ministry of Education seems logical and well-organized. There is however a lot of content and not much guidance into how a teacher is to present the material, especially when considering the normal class size of 20 to 35 students in the Galapagos. The ideal language class has fewer than 12 students.

Recommendation: Find a bilingual ESL teacher to interview each teacher and observe them teaching. The observer would need to record exactly what strategies they are currently employing. From this a series of workshops could be created with the workshop facilitator modeling the new strategies and engaging the participants interactively, even perhaps observing them trying to employ the new strategies. Strategies in which all the students are engaged were particularly sought after.

Talk is currently underway with Elizabeth Smolcic and Penn State University, to bring the highly successful TESL certificate program (formerly from Juniata College) to Puerto Ayora. (This is a 12 credit program which begins with a few weekend sessions on campus in Jan – March, four weeks in Ecuador which includes cultural and language immersion and teaching in a mini-school, and one additional weekend session in August). Auditing the pedagogy courses and observing the classes of the mini-school should be an option for those teachers with high intermediate or advanced levels. Even those with lower language levels would benefit from observing the mini-school classes. Selecting a small number of these auditors could be a strong incentive for improving their English independently prior to the course start in late June. (2010 dates are June 23 – July 25th)

NEED # 3 – Increase vocabulary

Recommendation: There are countless ways to increase vocabulary and many are directly related to the preferred learning style of the student. . In general, a word must be revisited at least 7 – 9 times before it can be put in active use. I will describe two.

The File-Card System - in which the card is reviewed many, many times until all eight sections of each card are filled in. The card should not be filled in all at once. Example is written in italics.

<p>FRONT of the card</p> <p>(The word, in context) <i>He is always seen with his nose in a book.</i> /bʊk/ Noun (pronunciation and part of speech)</p>	<p>(A picture or definition)</p>
<p>(Any derivatives and their parts of speech) <i>To book – Verb</i> <i>Bookish - Adjective</i></p>	<p>(Any collocations) <i>To book a reservation or rebook a flight</i></p>

<p>BACK of the card (a translation)</p> <p><i>libro</i></p>	<p>(A mapping of frequent word use)</p> <p><i>Cook</i> <i>Guide + book + worm</i></p>
<p>(Any synonyms or antonyms) <i>S – publication, novel, work, tome, edition</i></p>	<p>(A few example sentences) <i>She booked her flight for Panama yesterday.</i> <i>I can't believe how many books he needs for this class.</i></p>

Double-Column Notebook method:

NOUNS		p. 1
Spanish	English	
A albóndiga	meatball	
B bandera beca	flag scholarship	
C califacción	heating system	

Each page is divided the long ways and there are alphabetically arranged sections for nouns, verbs, descriptors (adjectives and adverbs) and useful expressions. Students also need a strip of sturdy paper the width of one of the columns. To review, students cover their native language (Spanish) first. They look at the English and produce the Spanish word. Once this is done successfully (this means at breakneck speed with no pauses), then they cover the English side, and try to produce the English word just as swiftly and with correct pronunciation. Adding words to this notebook is a vital part of the Conversation Partner sessions. The notebook can be used by students before class as a review, during class if they finish work quickly and should be added to with words from reading, films and other conversations.

Teachers would also benefit from keeping a daily journal in which they write a reasonable amount in English (depending on their level) each day. These can be observations, opinions, reflections etc, and the teachers should make a conscious effort to use new words and expressions. This kind of free, uncorrected writing, has a liberating effect. If done regularly, the writers will note a gratifyingly increase in amount written, depth of content and improvement in grammar.

NEED # 4 – Improve grammar

Recommendation: Creation and memorization of relevant and natural dialogues which become skeletons upon which richer vocabulary can be inserted or hung, can become very empowering activities. Focusing on the meaning and use of verbs rather than rote memorization of grammar forms is more useful. Summarizing the day's activities in the journal also helps to focus on past tense forms. Use of a holistic technique such as Strategic Interaction (di Pietro) encourage use and analysis of real language in non-threatening collaborative mini-dramas.

NEED # 5 – Improve / Increase teaching material

Recommendation: It seems at the moment that each teacher is creating his-her own material and re-inventing the wheel many times over. This is an area which could be vastly enhanced. There could be a centralized resource center for all English teachers, or at least for all the English teachers in one school,

a place where games, films, books and picture files could be borrowed and the resource person could act as a consultant for the teachers. This could be a volunteer. In some cases, there are two English teachers in one school who never talk with each other and are preparing almost the same material.

There is a huge body of free lesson plans and practice activities available on internet sites such as Dave's ESL Café. Just googling "Free ESL lesson plans" produced about 10 sites.

SUMMARY OF CLASS OBSERVATION

On Monday, July 20th, 2009, I was invited to observe English language instruction of four classes at the Loma Linda Adventist School in Puerto Ayora. All four classes relied heavily on the Richmond ESL series Catch and each student had a copy of the appropriate level workbook. In all four classes there was no posted preview of the class content, nor language objectives although it seemed that Teacher B had some clearly in mind.

Teacher A taught 27 eight year olds in grade 3 for 45 minutes and then immediately, 17 seven year olds in grade 2. In both classes Teacher A relied immediately and heavily on the student workbooks. She copied from the books to the whiteboard, elicited and then wrote the correct answers for the children to copy. There was very little effort to control the constant talking of the students and physical pandemonium which prevailed. At the half-hour post teaching conference, Teacher A thought that her major problem was pronunciation. Although there were many grammatical errors (You finish read, yes, no? You don't talking now. What meaning-write?) and pronunciation challenges with short vowel sounds, when we went over what she thought she was teaching, she was able to see that she was doing all the work and the students were unfortunately not learning more than how to copy. She was very eager to learn a few strategies for engaging all the students and doing a little on-going assessment of learning.

Teacher B also taught back to back classes: 22 kindergarten students and 26 first graders, also for 45 minutes each. Teacher B clearly held the students' attention through song, physical movement and excellent classroom management techniques. In both classes students were obedient and quieted immediately with a small song prompt (previously drilled into them). Clear modeling with creative visual aids and oral practice was done for any tasks directly related to a subsequent writing or pasting activity in the workbook. Teacher B did spend quite a bit of time with individual student exchanges however the other students, though idle, were quiet and attentive for the most part. At the post-teaching conference, Teacher B eagerly and gratefully accepted suggestions/activities which might engage all the students all the time.

Note: Teacher B studied education in her home country of Argentina and has a nearly native ability with English.

There is no doubt in my mind that other ESL teachers would benefit greatly from observing Teacher B.



WORKSHOP – Tuesday, July 21st, 2009

Eight teachers attended the two-hour workshop. Seven had been previously assessed for writing and oral skills. The eighth was clearly at an advanced level orally.

We began with Silent Interviews as an ice breaker (pairs and pantomime). After they orally and briefly presented their partners, I showed them what mini-lesson opportunities emerged from these: final M in I'm, interference with absence of final Spanish S and English 3rd person S, and various confusion with he/she, his/her. I showed how posting a short plan on the board helps both the teacher and students stay on track. It also makes the expectation for the learning transparent. I urged them strongly to have a very clear learning objective for the students which might be actual language (vocabulary / verb forms etc) or it might be learning a classroom management strategy or a learning strategy. This is the WHAT of the class. They then must learn to develop interactive participatory strategies which engage ALL the students ALL the time to implement the HOW, and have a clear idea how they will ASSESS the learning, preferably in an on-going manner. I feel this was new learning for them and would need much reinforcement and further modeling and perhaps working 1:1 on individual lesson plans to really effect some change.

I modeled and practiced adding more real language to the rather dry presentation of just rooms in a house. After drilling the 4-5 room words, and 3-4 verbs, then in pairs, one student can pick up a card from each pile (one room, one verb). The other student asks questions using a prompt from the board, "Where are you? (I'm in the kitchen) What are you doing? (I'm singing!). The teacher can get a LOT of mileage out of these simple cards, altering the prompts to include: Where is he/she? What is he/she doing? Am I... are we... etc.

I also modeled and practiced using the well known Tic Tac Toe game for vocabulary with teams of three vs. three. They caught on quite quickly but then were challenged to come up with the vocabulary needed to play the game (Our turn? Your turn. That's correct. That's not okay. We won! Let's play again). This vocabulary needs to be explicitly taught and modeled with a few quicker students.

The last half of the workshop was dedicated to the Grammar Review. This was a test, of grammar structures usually learned in Beginner classes (7 structures), Intermediate classes (9 structures) and Advanced classes (7 structure). The participants were given half an hour to complete the 23 elements.

Note: Because of the rich information this Grammar Review gave about the language ability of the participants, in hindsight, it should have been done on the same day as the earlier assessments.

After half an hour, the participants switched to a red pen and were free to get help from anyone to complete or correct their work.

RESULTS:

Levels of Teachers, according to prior assessments	THERE WERE 23 ELEMENTS IN TOTAL	Grasp of Grammar according to amount completed
Level I	Of the 11 grammar elements completed, 2 were correct	18 %
Level III (Teacher A)	Of the 14 elements completed, 4 were correct.	29 %
Level III	Of 14 elements completed, 7 were correct.	50 %
Level III	Of 14 elements completed, 8.5 were correct	61 %
Level III	Of 13 elements completed, 8 were correct.	62 %
Level III	Of 16 elements completed, 12 were correct.	75 %
Level V (Teacher B)	Of 21 elements completed, 20 were correct.	95 %
Level V	Of 23 elements completed, 22 were correct.	96 %

Final Conclusion and Recommendation:

Clearly there are two basic needs for these courageous Galapagos English teachers:

Firstly, they need more exposure to English conversation with native speakers. This I have mentioned earlier in this document (Conversation Partners etc)

Secondly, they need on-going English classes with an experienced ESL/EFL teacher who can simultaneously model best practices of language teaching. For all teachers who are levels I to III, I strongly urge the teaching of the following grammatical structures (those which challenged the most teachers in the Grammar Review): (At least, this is a place to start.)

Comparative/superlative of adjectives	Basic word order and word order with direct and indirect objects	Conditionals II and III
Key words to determine correct use of verb tenses	Present Perfect Form / meaning and use	Pres. Perfect continuous Form / meaning and use
Question forming in all tenses and for Y/N and WH forms	Review of order of adjectives	

For the two advanced level teachers, I strongly recommend that funds be made available to allow these to attend the in-country portion of the TESL certificate program (described elsewhere in this document) which will be held June 23 – July 25th 2010 in either Otavalo or here in Puerto Ayora. I am sure that tuition fees could be waived if funds for travel, room and board (with a family) could be provided.

Prudence Ingerman

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