

SELT PORTFOLIO

by Lisa Porostovsky

AUGUST 7, 1997

I. What It Means To Be A Language Teacher

The opportunity to be a language teacher has been very rewarding. I know that the students show up everyday because they want to learn, not because they have to. Most of the people that live here depend on learning English so that they will be able to communicate with the tourists.

This experience has shown me how cultures adapt to each others differences. In my case the language barrier. I have had to overcome a large hurdle since I have been here. This part of teaching has been very discouraging because of my little knowledge of Spanish. When looking at the positive side, I plan to study Spanish when I return back to the states. But the up side to having this problem is that I am better able to relate to how confusing and frustrating it is to learn a new language. So this allows me to be more patient and sympathetic to those that need it. I want everyone to feel comfortable in the classroom and not be intimidated by this learning experience, so they will continue to want to learn.

All my students are at many different speaking levels. Two of my students are able to understand and communicate in English well. Two girls in the group barely speak or participate in the class, which sometimes complicates group activities. The rest of the students are at the same speaking levels. By having different speaking levels I am learning to be very diverse with how I implement lessons and what I expect out of the students.

Social skills are the same and in some respects different compared to the United States. The student-teacher attitude for respect is seen as the same in both cultures. This is a very positive attitude because it shows that both cultures place a special emphasis on education and teachers. One difference I have seen is the attitude of the girls in my class. When I compare my female students in my ESL class to the same age group that I teach in the USA, I see a social difference. The females here are much more reserved within the class structure, though some are beginning to emerge out of their shells. Teenagers in the U.S. that I know are giggly and are always trying to capture the attention of the males in the group. In my classroom, they sit in back quietly

speaking among themselves. Joy or I try to ask them a question and if we were lucky we may get an answer out of them. If we do get an answer it tends to be quite reserved.

For the two students that have been very reserved, we have tried many ideas to see if we could reach them. Joy and I would try to communicate with them one on one. This would work for a brief moment. Most of their responses to us have been blank looks. By splitting them apart into two different groups I was able to break some of the silence bond. With only four days of class left I moved the three females together. Once I segregated the class, the three girls began to communicate with each other. I really wish that I had thought of this early on so that they would have had more of a relationship with the group. But as they say, everyday of teaching is a new learning experience.

Some skills are essential to being a language teacher or any other type of teacher. The one that I feel is most important is being open and friendly with your students. Your students need to feel comfortable with you being placed as the authority figure of the classroom. Importantly, you must not project yourself as being superior over the students. Your students should be respected as you would want to be. Patience is essential with being a great teacher. Patience will guide how successful you will be as a teacher. Superior knowledge of the language that you are trying to teach is mandatory. This is where I feel unsuccessful as a ESL teacher. The language barrier inhibits me from having fun with my students. It would be great to be able to joke and develop a closer relationship than I am able to.

I have many hopes for the students. The first one is that I hope they will continue to learn English. Next, I hope they will be able to continue their education pursuits so they will become better educated. The last one is that I hope they will also have the chance to experience another culture as I have.

Being a language teacher has meant a lot to me because I have gained a better understanding of myself and a new culture with a great desire to continue learning Spanish. By being in the classroom, I hope to make an impact on my students to continue being educated, and hopefully I have impressed upon them the want to travel to my country and use what our ESL course and future courses will teach them.