

1. Report of experiences of the “Volunteer School for Water”

Expectacion of the voluntary

I am an environmental educator in Germany, so I have some background with teaching environmental topics, also with water protection. So for me finding this voluntary opportunity was one of the best to find.

I was happy when I was told that the classes are in English, as my Spanish was really basic once I started. For everything else I had no idea about the age/grade and status of the knowledge in English neither than in the topics of water protection of the pupils until my first class on Thursday, the 16. October 2014.

Situation by entry

The first meeting of Felipe and two other voluntaries was very nice and informative (in general about the project and Cuitiva). In the morning we went together to Cuitiva to meet the teachers of the school and schedule my timetable and as well to meet the mayor of Cuitiva and move into his Finca.

The next day was my first class and I arrived almost 1,5 hours late at the school in Llano, because Marcelo, who always took me there, as it is half an hour driving from Cuitiva, was always late. For the first day I was really nervous, if he'd ever arrive and called him twice, to hear if he was still coming. Arriving at the school I got another surprise, as the teacher right away asked me to take over and kind of left (for the kitchen to take a coffee break – as I found out with the time she would always do that as she neither could handle her class very good). So my first day I was only in this one class, which turned out later to be the hardest class – but for the first day it was ok – I had a lot of energy and motivation and the pupils were also much more interested on the first day.

Objectives of the voluntary

I have done an environmental education project in Germany before: A two days training of pupils mainly from 3rd and 4th grade to become energy detectives. I rescheduled this project into a 7 week project in English for the pupils of Cuitiva to be a “water detective”.

Experience

The project is not only about teaching at school but much more about living with the local people in Cuitiva. The people are really nice and interested, inviting me, asking me lots of questions. I was living in a small Finca of the major of Cuitiva. The Finca is very basic but very nice, with a small kitchen, bathroom, TV in the bedroom and a big livingroom with a fireplace. However the fireplace is build wrongly so I could not use it (or the whole house was full of smole) and a cold shower. So it can be quite cold, especially at night (which starts at 6 pm here).

The schools have a lot of interest in classes in english, as even the teachers don't speak english, so the level of english of the pupils is quite low. So the classes were more spanglish than in english and in general much more basic than I expected.

So my spanish really got so much better in these weeks teaching in the school, as the kids only speak so basic (or none), so I had to prepare everything in spanish as well. And also communicating with all the people living here, as no one but me speaks english (only 2 weeks Adeline accompanied me).

Recommendations

I am not sure if the major of Cuitiva really supports the project from his own will, as we had to run so much after him for organising the bus for the beach - clean up days we made and he never seemed happy with our work either. However in the end he thanked us in pulic at a final speach at school. Would have been nice if he would have supported us more within the project time or would have shown some interest. Maybe it can be managed something with him in advance to make the work more esay.

Also, I think it would be good to put some more time and effort in collecting all materials which the volunteers prepare for the classes, so that not everyone has to prepare the same stuff over again.

And maybe some communication inbetween the project and the volunteers, and at least two volunteers togehter in Cuitiva would help to make the project more sucessful, as for example I would not have made the "beach-clean-up" days if another voluntaria, Adlina would have arrived and had the same idea as it was a lot to organize and defenetly too much for just one volunteer.

2. Report of the activity

I make a course with songs, games, experiments and an expedition and in the end of the course everyone will be a water detective.

I go to school at 7:30 am. At 11:00 am is lunchbreak and after that I finish the class at 12 am.

The classes are so different here: there are usually 3 different grades in one class, like for example 1st, 3rd and 5th grade. And sometimes plus/ even the preschool and up to 30 students in one class. So I had to get used to prepare different things for the different grades and also that the class as I know it from Germany, with lots of hands on activities with the kids where not always possible. However, I have some really nice and motivated pupils and the classes are really fun. We do experiments with water, paint, play and all bilingual. And in the final week go for a "beach-clean-up" day with all the pupils/schools. I think the pupils really learned a fair bit, both in English and for the topics of water protection- however it would definitely be much more if the project would just be focused on one of those aims as it is sometimes a bit hard to combine them (especially as the English is so basic and the water protection topic can be quite special/hard).

However, with one class I have problems. They are the smallest, a class of kids from preschool, 1st and 2nd grade and the one that is half an hour (by motorbike) away from the village - so really rural. I think this is a little bit of the reason why they don't have discipline. But the main part is that the teacher is not motivated at all, waiting for her pension in 2 years not enjoying teaching anymore. For this class I tried so many games and things to manage them, but it didn't help. Some pupils all the time disturb the class, throw things at each other and me sometimes, hurt others, plus scream, so that the class (at least with nice games) was not possible. I am really sorry for the pupils who wanted to participate, screaming "silence" at the others. Here also it would be much better to do just English or the environmental topics (which in the final classes I did).