

Tom Seaman's Second Report of 29/03/12

28th February

Having been here for a decent period of time, I feel I have time to assess the way in which the school organises the teaching of English and determine its good points, and those which could use a bit of tweaking. The main problem from my point of view is that the classes are of such mixed ability, it is extremely hard to cater for all levels at the same time. If you do something that will test the more capable pupils you find the others are out of their depth and of course if you do something simple you can bore the capable pupils. The answer in the long term would be to timetable lessons for the whole grade at the same time and organise the classes according to their English ability, a shorter term solution is, however, harder to come by. The Headmaster once again kindly arranged a trip for me at the weekend, this time to stay on a tea estate near Nuwara Eliya, known as 'Little England' for its cooler climate. The town itself is very nice, with many old English style buildings combined in with the organised chaos of a functional Sri Lankan town. The only criticism would be the amount of tourists who over the years have clearly shaped the town into a more of a resort than a genuine Sri Lankan town.

7th March

A couple of days ago I suggested to the Headmaster that we changed the way in which my timetable was organised. Now, instead of taking the whole class away from their teacher, the class is split in half, a less able group and a more capable group, they alternate between me and their teacher so I can cater for their needs more appropriately. Their normal teacher will be concentrating on the textbook and I will be focusing on spoken English. On the sports side of things I'm going to Colombo with the cricket team for the next couple of days, also the rugby coaching has become slightly more intense as next weekend there is an all Island 7s tournament in Galle. Last weekend the English population of Bandarawela doubled as a previous English teacher of two years at the school came back to stay for a month. It's nice to be able to talk at full speed again, and he, having been here previously for two years, knows the place quite, so is organising for me to meet people and go places, so I'm going to be pretty busy for the last month.

19th March

After a couple of weeks teaching with my new timetable it seems to be going well, the pupils are getting their dose of textbook English as well as a more conversational style at regular intervals. Seeing as the classes have been halved the students also get the opportunity to do more speaking in the lesson, and are more exposed to the language on an individual level. The trip to Colombo, although unsuccessful on the cricket front, was a lot fun, I had forgotten just how hot Colombo is, however it is the humidity that really gets you, especially on the eight hour journey with seventeen people in a van that only seats fourteen. The trip to Galle for the 7s was also brilliant, we got to the semi-final of the shield, and considering the proper training only started a week before and you never get the whole team at one session, they didn't do too badly. What really made the trip however was that the pitch was literally right next to the beach, and in heat comparable to Colombo, a swim in the sea is most welcome. I expect to be very busy in the following week as preparation for the college English day on Sunday will be in full swing, and judge will be a professor of English so the standard has to be high.

27th March

As I expected I was extremely busy last week with the preparations for the school English day, taking small groups or individuals and helping them with the pronunciation and ensuring the rhythm and clarity of their English was up to standard. The main problem is trying to get them to slow down, as naturally when speaking Sinhala or Tamil, they speak very quickly, and all the vowel sounds are very short, so the main task was getting them to slow down by making lots of pauses at the right places, and lengthening the appropriate vowel sounds. Another barrier that has to be overcome on the pronunciation side of things is the fact that in Sinhala and Tamil the tongue is used at the back of the mouth all the time, whereas in English we bring our tongues forward a lot more. Anyway, the day went well and everybody involved seemed happy with the event. I can't believe I'm into my last full week at the school already, time has flown by. The end term tests start in a couple of days time so I've been doing a bit of basic exam technique in my classes, as structuring letters and essays into a coherent argument is nearly as important as the actual content.