

# Jasper Zandstra aims to provide education for all

Hailing from the town of Leeuwarden in the north of the Netherlands, Jasper Zandstra's life has been intertwined with the world of teaching since he studied English and Education in both Amsterdam and Glasgow, Scotland. After teaching in the Netherlands for one year after his graduation, he decided to give Mexico a shot, and now runs a successful English teaching company in Mexico City.

## Fantastic country

Initially, Jasper's plan was to stay in Mexico for a single year, but before he knew it, one year had become four. "After teaching English in a high school in the Netherlands, I was tired of the Dutch education system," he recalls. "There were too many rules and too many stifling regulations, none of which gave teachers the freedom to actually teach. This led me to for work in another country instead." During his time at Glasgow University, Jasper made some Mexican friends who told him many great stories about their home country, directly contradicting the bad reputation which is often portrayed in the media. That recommendation was all he needed to hop on a plane and check out the country for himself. "Personally, I really like living here. It is a fantastic country with a lot of possibilities. The lifestyle, the food, and the weather are all awesome compared to the Netherlands."

## EFA Education

Shortly after his arrival in Mexico, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) hired Jasper as an English teacher. His job allowed for enough free time to also teach private English classes on the side. "As time progressed, I got more and more private students and hours, so at some point I had to ask some friends to help me cover the classes," remembers Jasper. "Eventually, I had enough private hours that I could live off them, so I decided to focus on that." This decision was the first step towards the formation of Jasper's own company, EFA Education.

EFA Education hires native-speaking, qualified English teachers to teach the language to students of any proficiency. While EFA's customer base is mostly Mexican, some of its students work at Latin American embassies, or simply want to work in an English-speaking country like the US. "As well as English classes, we also help students prepare for exams and interviews," explains Jasper. "Companies in Mexico are

beginning to conduct interviews in English, so our mock interviews are designed to enhance preparation. This gives us both sides of the coin; we have the interviewees who want to make a good impression, and the company which intends to perform the interview. As more large companies in Mexico start doing this, the smaller companies are following the trend, which is good news for us. As for my teachers, I try to offer them the freedom to teach the way they want to, provided their style is effective. All I ask is that they write a short summary of each class so I can see how things are going. I believe that this level of trust is what teachers need in order to flourish."

Jasper hopes that, within five years, EFA Education will become one of the top five suppliers of English language teachers in Mexico. This ambitious goal will likely be assisted by the word-of-mouth culture that tends to make or break businesses in the country. "If our students are happy with their classes, they will tell their friends about us - that is how we generate a lot of new business," Jasper points out. "These kinds of recommendations and introductions are extremely important for any company operating in Mexico."

## Education for All

The EFA acronym stands for Education for All, a concept centred on the idea of providing free private English classes for those less fortunate in society. Jasper explains his reasons for forming the EFA initiative. "I once knew a Mexican English language teacher who could not even communicate with me in English. I was shocked that this person was responsible for teaching public school children, and I felt that it was unfair for these kids to be denied a decent level of English language education. I realised that they had hardly any chance, particularly as they would never be able to afford private classes with a native speaker." The free EFA classes are open to anybody and are funded by the company's private classes. Jasper explains that as more private classes are acquired, his company will be able to instigate more projects of this nature, further developing the availability of English language education for those who wish to learn, whatever their background.

## Differing cultures

While there are many differences between life in Mexico and life in the Netherlands, Jasper thinks that the former trumps the latter on many fronts. "In the Netherlands, life is safe and secure, we have access to whatever we need, but we still complain and take everything for granted," he states. "Here in Mexico, life is not that secure for most people, so everybody is more willing to work hard for a good life. Since living here, I have learnt that the two countries are not really that different. Yes, the climate is different, yes, the food is different, and yes, the landscape is different, but in the end we are all just human beings looking for a good life. I believe that if life is good, then there is no need to complain. If you have good health, and if your family is doing well, then life is good; we should learn from the Mexican culture and never take that for granted."

For more information regarding EFA Education, please refer to the company's website: [www.efamexico.org](http://www.efamexico.org)

**'We aim to be the biggest supplier of English language teachers in Mexico'**