**How to start a Bitcoin Education project**

Example: Mi Primer Bitcoin (El Salvador)

*This is just one experience in one local context. But, together with other singular experiences each with their own local context, best practices may begin to emerge.*

**Before: Inspiration, Motivation & a false start**

I was in New York, visiting my parents and recovering from hernia surgery, when the pandemic lockdowns happened in 2020. My physical therapy was just to walk a little farther each day and, on those walks, I would ponder the state of the world and where we went wrong. My conclusion was that the problem was a lack of self-sovereignty and critical thinking skills which lead to a negative incentive structure and negative second and third order effects. The solution was to push the world toward individuals having agency in their own lives, and that once people felt in control of their own life, they would feel more confident about not just accepting whatever future may come—but creating it, building it. The means to that end was mass independent, interactive Bitcoin education, especially in locations that benefited the least from the existing financial order.

That was the theory.

At the start of 2021 I moved to Ecuador, a place I had previously lived, and attempted to begin. I tried to teach friends who could in turn teach their contacts and even sponsored an online stranger to teach in his own community. The stranger was a scammer and teaching friends was difficult and them teaching others proved impossible. Showing rather than telling and making the learning interactive was an important part of the methodology, but the pandemic was still ongoing and there were still fears (and laws) that made forming in person groups difficult.

It wasn’t the right time; it wasn’t the right place.

Then El Salvador announced they would adopt Bitcoin as legal tender.

Within a week I decided to move there. Over the next two months I spent a lot of time thinking about the why and trying to learn from the experience in Ecuador. I fleshed out a plan and got great feedback from friends. They mostly told me I was crazy, and the project wouldn’t work, but the best feedback is often that which challenges. They did sharpen ideas. They did help me workshop names. They genuinely helped.

Perseverance is something that comes up over and over with My First Bitcoin, from before it even really existed. I was deeply committed, open to new ideas but committed to the core mission.

**Beginning in El Salvador**

By the time I landed in El Salvador with a one-way ticket in August 2021, one month before the Bitcoin law would go into effect, a few things were already set up. I had sold whatever possessions I could in anticipation of not having income for a time. The project had a name, website, mission statement, discord group and basic curriculum for an intro class. Two friends from far away places—one who I met in jail and another while hiking the Himalayas—arrived in El Salvador around the same time and, being bitcoiners, really helped sharpen some ideas and recruit others.

I wanted to land in El Salvador with as solid a plan as possible, but also estimated there was a significant chance that Mi Primer Bitcoin would fail for unanticipated reasons. A second presumption was there would be lots of other great projects starting and if MPB failed then I would join a better organized effort toward the goal of making El Salvador into a positive example of Bitcoin adoption for the world. That positive example would speed up adoption elsewhere, with the long-term outcome of reimagining the dominant and failing incentive structures.

My first week was in El Zonte (Bitcoin Beach). With the law coming into effect soon there was a lot going on and I found it difficult to connect with the Bitcoin Beach project but easy to connect with other Bitcoiners visiting and wanting to witness history. That second group, including my two friends, gave great feedback and added tangible work, such as creating a logo and helping to recruit Salvadoreans to get involved. It was always the goal that the teachers should be local and the education community-led but they were bursting with ideas of how to facilitate that and eager to support.

Another reoccurring trend is the help and support of others.

I moved to San Salvador a week before the law went into effect. The largest city and capital seemed like a logical place to get started. I spoke with every Salvadoran I could about Bitcoin and if they might be interested in learning more and teaching others.



*Napo and Victor making their first lightning transaction.*

I invited groups of Salvadoreans to my AirBnB to learn about Bitcoin. The first group that came was four people, two invited by a Bitcoiner I met in El Zonte. A third was Napo, my Uber driver earlier that week. The fourth was Victor. A friend in New York had introduced me to her work colleague who was based in San Salvador, after hearing my intentions over coffee that person referred me her yoga instructor for another coffee and more chatting. Victor was the brother of the yoga instructor.

The first days of the project was casting a random and wide net to try and involve a diverse cross section of curious Salvadoreans.

I wouldn’t recommend this for others, it’s worth highlighting that the local context was that the nation was the first to adopt Bitcoin as legal tender so while the knowledge base was near zero there was a lot of curiosity. El Salvador in late 2021 was a unique place.

**First Class**

The first official class was soon after the more informal meetings at my AirBnB. Victor was the teacher; the venue was his sister’s studio in a break between yoga classes and only one student showed up—Napo.

Again, perseverance was key.

Within two months we had hundreds of students and month and within two years thousands a month.

The original idea was to have paid classes in the US and Europe which would subsidize free classes in El Salvador. I had recruited friends for the first part but while a couple managed to hold a class or two, no funds were ever raised. Early costs were paid by donations—the very first were from myself and friends. In any case, early expenses were low.

The original design was to have a flat hierarchy and make each teacher responsible for not just teaching but finding a venue and recruiting students—they would be paid based on per student taught. The first classes were just a 90 minute intro that explained what money was, why it was, then what Bitcoin was, and how. Every student downloaded a lightning wallet as part of the class, practiced receiving and sending sats, and kept the sats at the end. The first class was a $10 bonus, which we then dropped to $5, then $2, then $1. Each teacher initially got $5 per student taught with a max of $30, so a class of 6 would cost $90 at first and then quickly dropped to $60.

[Now we pay many teachers a monthly salary, and our cost per student is much much lower]

In those first weeks and months everyone was a volunteer.

**Some lessons:**

There were a variety of others in El Salvador at the time interested in starting new Bitcoin projects. Every single one failed. Every other attempt prioritized fundraising and legal structure while MPB prioritized getting started and worrying about the rest later, to put another way: proof-of-work was the only winning strategy.

Having a good structure is meaningless without first putting in the work. Successful complex systems are never born, rather they evolve out of successful simple systems [Gall’s law]. Also, if we want to create a better future, we have to reimagine success. Prioritizing sponsors and legal structures might be recommended in the fiat world, but in the new one we are creating proof-of-work is what matters.

Fiat is permissioned; Bitcoin is permissionless. The path of least resistance would be to follow the fiat playbook of prioritizing sponsors and legal permissions, but that would change nothing. We will only change the world if we pioneer new paths and resist cooption by the world we are trying to replace.

Another lesson is perseverance. An earlier, less thought-out version failed in Ecuador. The funding part of the plan failed. The very first person to arrive to my AirBnB for those early meetings was a drunk shitcoiner. The first class only had one student. All those instances would have been reasonable places to stop.

Finally, in hindsight the randomness of early recruitment would be hard to replicate in another environment. Once we started having meetups it led to many new people volunteering—that’s almost definitely a more efficient way to recruit for a new project, to start with a meetup.

So in sum, the lessons were to prioritize proof-of-work and persevere and adapt through challenges and setbacks.

* *John Dennehy*

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