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The Ambassador Program for NSF Alumni

A recollection and reflection

Despite having lived in a variety of places ranging from the busy and populated roads of Hyderabad in India to the quiet suburbs in Fairfield in the United States, I continued to reside in a safe and comfortable bubble, unexposed to the poor conditions of underdeveloped areas. These kinds of places, however, were the ones which give the best kinds of knowledge and experience. This summer I went on a trip to India. This time, I went not only to have a fun time and to get reacquainted with friends and family, but also for the purpose of teaching kids. Kids who don't have the opportunities I am lucky to have. As the famous Napoleon Bonaparte said, "Ability without opportunity is nothing." The kids I taught had great potential, yet they didn't have the right tools to help cultivate their skills. In addition, they had other priorities such as helping their parents with farm work. So with help from the North South Foundation, I gave kids in grades 6 through 9 two hour English lessons for three days.

I desired to inspire the children. They are growing in an environment where education may not be the first priority, which is alarming. I wanted them to understand that education was of paramount importance. This was quite a challenge. A foreigner coming into their school barely a year older than the students asking for their attention and willingness to work while nervously stammering the rehearsed script is no way to teach a lesson. I knew what I wanted to teach and I had the lessons planned in a presentation, but for some reason, a vexing feeling of uneasiness stirred inside me. Adding to the problem was the fact that the students, try as they might, would not be able to understand my American accented English while I felt too uncomfortable speaking in their native language, Telugu. So the night before the classes, I nervously looked through my files, hoping that my final efforts of revision would pay off.

My parents and I had previously consulted with officials and a former teacher who all had agreed to help out. They all had told me that there was no reason to worry and that the

lessons prepared would work out just fine. Despite their assurances and reassurances, I was incredibly stressed. The day of the first class, we got up early and got ready. Two of my cousins were also coming, which made me feel better. My mom, my cousins, my brother, and I all piled into the auto rickshaw. It was a little uncomfortable but it served me well since it averted my attention from the looming lesson.

The ride was over too soon. We were in the class, and I was already teaching, all within ten minutes of getting into the vehicle. I had just shoved my negativity and pessimistic thoughts away and just started to speak. It was great. The words came out easily and my mom did a fantastic job of translating. The first day went smoothly. Other teachers sometimes would come in and help move the class along. Although the others had told me multiple times prior to the



lesson that it was not going to be so hard, I was still surprised at how much I had over-prepared. I began the lesson with a brief introduction, and then launched into suffixes and prefixes. Over the next three days, I shared information about roots,

suffixes, prefixes, spelling rules, and patterns. On the last day, we gave a quiz to the students to see how well they learned. Afterwards, we held an award ceremony. The kids all received certificates. In addition, we gave English to Telugu dictionaries. The top three scorers on the quiz and two of the most active participants in the program received an additional award. After all, the main goal was to inspire and improve the kids' learning experience.

Throughout the lessons, the kids paid attention and took notes. Occasionally a question was asked. Although they all were students which any teacher would be lucky to be able to teach, there were a few kids in particular who were more actively learning and participating, which helped me to understand the teacher's point of view and how much easier it would be if



the students cooperated. I was fortunate to have such great kids who weren't rude or pessimistic. Anyway, before I get too off tangent, I just would like to say that this has been a fun experience. It was

amazing to see the impoverished kids all laughing and joking around while learning. I learned about appreciating and seeing the humor in life. While I was giving them lessons in English, they were giving me life lessons.

I may even continue these immersive sessions with the school kids through the internet.