

North South Foundation Experience July 2018

As the renowned Roman philosopher Seneca once said, “Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for kindness.” In today’s world, the scale of life is heavily unbalanced when looking at those that are born into a happy or wealthy life compared to those who are less fortunate. Taking this into consideration, the fact that I am born into a life with a happy, healthy family and financial stability makes me feel extremely lucky to essentially be me. But, does this justify not taking responsibility for my human counterparts that are born underprivileged? The answer is yes; as a member of the future generation, I consider it my moral duty to provide basic necessities for those who suffer while others prosper (taking into account the actions that led to the end result). In our society, we are so caught up in our busy lives that we tend to forget all that we have today. From our phones, alarm clocks, televisions and even family, we are blessed in today’s world. What did we do to deserve all of this, though? Why do we live with luxuries when others do not even have the opportunity to have a decent education? My goal was to make an impact on the world by giving the children something that they can never lose: education.

The North South Foundation provided me with a life-changing experience during my trip to India in July of 2018. I taught a workshop consisting of Essay Writing and Public Speaking in today’s world. I wanted to make the workshop as interactive as possible, so I prepared meticulously to make sure the kids felt comfortable, open, and attentive. My choice in the topics of the workshop derived from common logic. I had opportunities to teach subjects such as english, reading, math, science, etc. but essay writing and public speaking attracted me for a few main reasons. First, the children already had core curriculum classes that taught them main subjects to some extent. Secondly, I wanted to teach them something unique and more importantly, something that they had to master to become successful in today’s world. Essay writing and public speaking are the two most common forms of communication in today’s world, and to excel, students need to be able to communicate well. Whether it be for a job interview, a competition, or just getting a job done, one’s communication skills are what sets them apart. An amazing part of this process was creating my own syllabus and lesson plan. I did not have any pre-set rubric, and I made my own lesson plan. To make sure that the lesson was effective, I talked with an essay writing professional at the University of Missouri-Columbia (Head of Essay Admissions), and he approved my lesson plan while giving me tips on what I could improve. The satisfaction that I received from my experience is still unexplainable, and I learned so much about humanity, teaching, and kindness. The North South Foundation Ambassador Program was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I will always cherish.

Day 1:

I taught at AZAD Matriculation higher secondary school in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu. The school, itself works hard to give an educational opportunity to all kids. For kids that cannot pay, the school covers most, if not all of the student's fees. Both my father and grandfather helped organize the workshop, including times, topics, etc. My first day of teaching was on July 13, and I went there sometime after lunch. The school, itself, was on the outskirts of the city, so it was about a 20 minute drive to reach the school. As I walked into the school, I met with the principal and correspondent, who welcomed me and led me to the class. The class had about fifty students, who were all around the age of 15 or 16. Even though it was a co-ed school, all the boys sat on the left side of the class, and all of the girls sat on the right side. I immediately identified the differences of school in America and India. The first difference was the use of chalkboards rather than whiteboards in the United States. In America, we are accustomed to smart boards and whiteboards. We never use chalkboards, but that is what they use in India.

Another key difference in the classes was the level of respect given to the teacher. As I entered the classroom, the students all stood up and said, "Good afternoon sir!" I was very pleased, and it allowed me to relax a little bit. I started class with the students sitting in rows of benches in front of me, a chalkboard behind me, and various teachers in the school sitting behind the kids. Prior to the workshop, I had prepared by creating a 5-day outline. I planned to cover the basics of essay writing for two days while covering the basics of public speaking for another two days. I then planned to wrap up the program with a public speaking competition on the 5th day. On the first day, I went over the general structure of a formal essay. I explained that an essay starts with an introduction that must capture the audience's attention. To make the workshop as interactive as possible, I asked the kids about different ways one can write an introduction. They came up with many ideas that they wrote down in their notes. I then moved on to the body paragraphs. I explained to the students that the body paragraph must contain the main information regarding the subject of the essay. Thus, like this, I went on to explain about the thesis/topic sentence and conclusion. I made the lesson as interactive as possible and incorporated activities. At the end of the class, I opened up the floor for questions about anything. I was both pleased and amused that 90% of their questions were about life in America. For them, America seemed like a dream, and it made me think about how lucky I was to live in America. I ended class and left home giving them homework to practice essay structure.

I learned so much from that first day. I conducted the class in about 50% English and 50% Tamil, but I wanted to stretch myself more and try to talk in more Tamil the next day. I also learned a lot about the kids, their lives, and their comfort zones. This helped me put together a visual representation in my head of what future classes would look like. Thus, my 5-day plan was constantly changing both before class and during class. I was pleased, but astonished to learn that the students had never been taught how to write essays. It made me feel thankful that I had chosen this as the topic for the workshop.

Day 2:

On the second day, I reviewed the topics from the previous day while teaching the kids how to strengthen their essays. After collecting the previous day's homework, I went over simple ways that one can sound more formal. I gave tips like using compound sentences, better vocabulary, and proper use of grammar. The structure of the class period was similar to that of the first day. I incorporated many interactive activities into my lesson and I just had a good time with the kids. It was especially fun for me because the students responded very well to me because of my age. Since I was around the same age as many of the kids, we talked in a more comfortable tone than if there were a teacher. I talked much more in Tamil which helped me stretch my language skills in a broader aspect. I was glad that I could speak Tamil, because it probably would have been impossible for me to be as effective as I was if I had only talked in English. This made me feel grateful for the ten years that I spent in the Tamil Sangam of Missouri's Tamil School and Tamil Virtual University which I graduated from. I once again assigned homework to the kids. The homework was always something fun or interesting, and not necessarily hard. This time, I requested the kids to write an essay to their teacher or principal about anything. Some kids wrote about how they could improve the school while others wrote that they were thankful for education. Once again, as class ended, the kids bombarded me with questions about America.

Day 3

On the third day, I began my lesson plan about public speaking. I introduced the structure of a speech, and how it was similar to that of an essay. I then offered a chance for different students to come and speak about different topics. The students learned what to do and to not do during a speech. My goal was to teach the kids skill-oriented techniques, like taking notes and turning them into a speech or being able to create a speech without any preparation. Many of the skills associated to public speaking are those of essay writing. I introduced how good speakers show confidence and display professionalism. The students learned many valuable lessons as we finished class that day.

Day 4

On the fourth day, I mainly reviewed the basics of public speaking from the previous day. I went on to explain to them how to tackle the challenges of public speaking like fear and shyness. Not only did I want to help the kids in public speaking, but also, I wanted to give them life lessons and show a boost of confidence. I then gave the kids sample prompts for which they prepared by taking notes and then presenting in front of the class. It took a lot of courage for some of those kids to come up and speak in front of a large group of people because they had never been exposed to a situation like that. The final portion of class, I spent time going over what would happen the next day. I planned to have a public speaking contest in which volunteers would come up and speak about a subject that I chose. The judges for the contest

would include me, the principal of the school, and the assistant principal. I would give the prompt to the kids and give them ten minutes to prepare. I would then take volunteers to come up and speak about the class.

Day 5: Competition Day and Validity Function

The fifth and final day consisted of the public speaking competition and validity function. The prompt that I gave the students was generic, but one that I would enjoy hearing responses from the kids. The prompt asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up, and why?" About 8 or 9 kids participated in the competition. They all talked extremely well for students who had just learned the fundamentals of public speaking in the last two days. It was amazing to see them nervous at first and then gain confidence to express their ideas and views to others. These children from villages and rural backgrounds dreamed of travelling the world, becoming doctors, or inventing the next groundbreaking innovation. With enough dedication, motivation, and opportunities, I have no doubt that many of the students will reach their goals. I have contact information with many of them and will keep in touch over social media to see how they progress in their lives. Three students stood out to the panel of judges during the competition, and these three kids received prizes during the validity function.

The function itself was held in grand fashion, especially for a school on the rural outskirts of the city. The correspondent personally attended the function, and so did all the teachers in the school. They thanked me profusely, and all gave speeches. My grandparents and family attended the event, so it made them very proud of me for what I had accomplished. I wanted to give all of the students a little gift and memento, so I gifted all of them pencils and notebooks. For the winners of the competition, I gifted them books about essay writing and vocabulary. The school gifted me a certificate and a trophy that thanked me for my efforts. They also honored my parents and grandparents, who helped organize the entire program.

Overall, I have learned so much from the NSF APNA program. It was an even more rewarding opportunity for my parents who admired the ability for me to build my skills while teaching something valuable to kids. Some things that I actually admired about the school was the lifestyle of the kids. Their schedules incorporate time for them to go outside and get enough exercise daily, which is not required in the United States (high school). Furthermore, they eat their meals on the ground, sitting cross-legged. This is scientifically proven to increase blood circulation. I appreciated activities like these. For a school that does not have substantial wealth, they were amazing in their ability to teach good values to kids. The students at the school had dreams, and I truly believe that their good values as humans will push them towards their future. I stretched myself in another language, and it has allowed me to understand that my fluency in Tamil is adequate enough to excel in a foreign country. I understand a new perspective of life and how others strive for something that we consider necessary like education. I will always remember this experience, and it has inspired me to continue doing good in this world.









