

“If you can speak, you can influence.

If you can influence, you can change lives.”

-Robert Brown



~a perspective from Avishi Agastwar

Using these powerful words, along with my twin sister, I crafted a Spelling Workshop and Competition through the auspices of NSF, that would give students in India valuable Spelling and Vocabulary skills they could use their entire life.

When I first heard of the NSF opportunity to educate students in India, I knew this was a great forum. I have always thought about giving back to my parents' hometown, the community which made my parents the successful human beings they are today. My summer could be spent for doing something meaningful and worthwhile.

Spelling and vocabulary are absolutely critical to public speaking in today's innovative world. Look at some of our world's greatest leaders: Prime Minister Modi, President Barack Obama. What do they all have in common? As much as they are intellectuals, they are amazing public speakers. This was why, through teaching the students wide ranges of abilities from word structure to greek/latin roots, the students could have a better understanding of effective communication to give voice to their thoughts and ideas that would later shape an ever changing society.

“One child. One teacher. One book. One pen can change the world.” *~Malala Yousafzai*

Educating even one student unleashes a bucket full of opportunities for their future, and would lead to a better society, as they would be able to contribute more effectively. Education not only enhances knowledge but builds character which shapes lives. This is why, I think this is an important mission which I undertook, to share my knowledge, and educate others.

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” *~Nelson Mandela*

I wanted the Spelling Workshop and Competition for the students to be something special. I was hoping to make the lessons from workshop stay with them long term; whether it is skills of confidence or competition, or learning how simple the English language could be.



The NSF experience started when I decided which school would be ideal to hold a Spelling workshop, in Kanpur, India, my parents' hometown. Seth Motilal Inter college, being an English Medium School, seemed like a good place to hold the program. My grandparents also knew the principal from before, as they had been holding the Vishnupuri, Kanpur NIELIT examinations in that school.

“Meeting the Faculty”

Consequently, we figured out a time to meet with the principal(Mr. Mishra), English teacher, and manager of the school to discuss the NSF experience I wanted to bring to their school. When I came into the principal's office, the principal greeted me with a warm smile. I went through all the details and itinerary of the program, and the principal was more than delighted to host it at his school. What surprised me, was his confidence and enthusiasm for the workshop. He was also very open and free as to when and where I could hold the workshop.



We decided upon a large hall, where I would be teaching important English techniques and vocabulary to 80 students, specifically fifth and sixth graders, for three days. This workshop would last for two hours each day. On the fourth day would be the Spelling Competition, to test and assess the students' knowledge. The fifth day would comprise of an award ceremony, to honour the winners of the competition.

I spent a lot of time creating a lesson plan, and powerful content to engage the students in the workshop I would give them in the first three days. Though NSF provided me with most of what I needed to teach, I needed to organize it and structure it in a way, that students would understand, since I was teaching fifth and sixth graders, and the NSF content was designed for higher level middle schoolers. I created games and quizzes throughout my lesson plan, as well as reduced pace of the workshop, so I could be sure the students would learn them.

“**Dream...Lead...Inspire...But never Stop Learning!**”



Beginning with these words, I introduced who I was to the eighty students who had all eyes on me in the large room. I gave an overview of who I was and what we would be learning in an interactive way throughout the workshop.

After I introduced myself, I wanted to know more about the students I was teaching. I was hoping to connect with the students, and learn more about who they were. So, I confidently asked the eighty students to raise their hand one by one, and give a brief summary of themselves.

I was expecting low participation since I was a new teacher to them. However, right away, I was awestruck by their enthusiasm. First, a small boy stood up and confidently gave his name and told me he was “interested in science.” Suddenly, the whole room burst into commotion and everybody was trying to stand up and introduce themselves. Their way of calling me “ma'am,” or “didi,” or even calling me by my name, “Avishi,” (which I was surprised they remembered) seemed really extraordinary.



I played some more games with them, like charades, to encourage more excitement, before we began our two hour workshop. In charades, two students came up to the front of the room, where one student acted out a word I gave them, while the other student guessed. The students found these games fun and interactive, and I could understand them better.

"If you are not willing to learn, no one can help you. But if you are determined to learn, no one can stop you." ~A Scholar

The determination to learn, was the key thing I noticed in the students.

Eventually, it was time for me to begin teaching the lesson plan I had ahead of them for the day. I started off with giving a more detailed overview of everything we would be learning in the workshop. I taught the students what adjectives, nouns, and adverbs were, through my comprehensive powerpoint. I also taught the children the basic rules of plural nouns, and later quizzed them on the rule they learned. For example, I'd give a rule, and later I would ask: “What is the plural of hero?” The class would enthusiastically erupt and chant the answer: “It is Heroes ma'am! Heroes!” I was amazingly astonished by their enthusiasm to learn. The enthusiasm was contagious.



The students had this respectful and fun aspect to their personality, which made them truly fun to be with. When it was the end of the workshop day, I started packing up my bags to leave, when one student quietly came up to me to ask for my autograph. Suddenly, out of nowhere, all eighty students were rushing around me to get my signature. I kept telling the students that I had to leave, but to my disbelief, these students wouldn't leave until I gave them what they wanted.



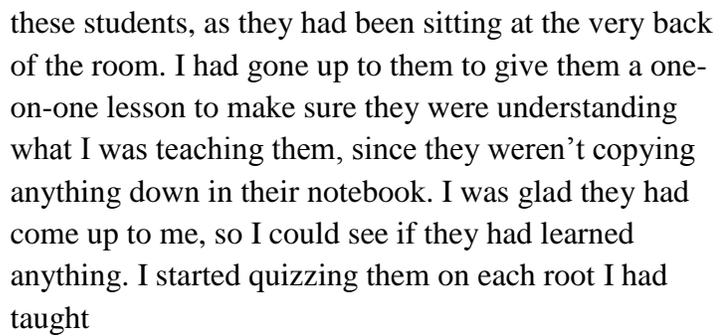
On the third day of the workshop, I handed out the Spelling words that they would have to study, for the upcoming Spelling Competition. I taught the students greek/latin roots, so it would help them in vocabulary and spelling. On a powerpoint slide, I would show them a greek/latin root such as the root “spect,” then pictures of words containing “spect,” such as “spectacle.” Using these techniques, I would ask the students what “spect” meant. I taught a few roots at a time, then kept quizzing the students to make sure they had mastered the meanings. After I had taught them the roots, I asked them to copy down the definitions into their notebooks, and they listened obediently.

“Tell me and I forget, Teach me and I remember, Involve me and I Learn.” ~Benjamin Franklin

At the end of the class, two students came up to me and wanted me to quiz them. I recognized these students, as they had been sitting at the very back of the room. I had gone up to them to give them a one-on-one lesson to make sure they were understanding what I was teaching them, since they weren't copying anything down in their notebook. I was glad they had come up to me, so I could see if they had learned anything. I started quizzing them on each root I had taught them(aqua, spect, chron, etc), and to my surprise, they answered them completely accurately!

The Chemistry teacher at Seth Motilal Inter college also happened to be watching, and noticed the proficiency of the two students. He gave me huge smile, and I felt amazingly good, that the students were actually understanding and learning what I taught them. I felt like I was actually bringing value to the students' time.

“Hard Work Leads to Success!”



a

The fourth day was the Spelling Competition. After I went over the rules of the test, such as “no cheating” and “no talking,” the students worked strenuously to tackle the 25 words I had given them. Each word was pronounced two or three times, and then the students got the chance to write the word down. The students took the test seriously and were quiet the whole time. At the end of the competition, I threw light upon the NSF Scholarship



program, and told the students that they could inform their parents about it, so they could be ready for the futures that lay ahead of them. I told the students details of the award ceremony, and stressed that it would be a time for students to reflect on their accomplishments of everything they had learned and achieved.

“If you can **dream it**, you can **do it**.” ~Walt Disney

From the beginning of the workshop, I had been preparing to make the award ceremony extraordinary, to make the students feel really special about their experiences. The award ceremony was definitely the most exotic part of the program. It was held in a huge hall that was open to all guests and had a beautiful green lawn that shown upon the outside of it. It had this beautiful, spacious stage, where the distinguished



guests sat at a dias, to present the certificates and prizes to the winners. Though the the Honourable Mayor of Kanpur had eagerly agreed to grace the occasion, he couldn't make it because of a last minute teeth infection. Still, numerous other distinguished guests came such as Professor Dr. Dinesh Narayan, and Mr. Pandey, The NSF Coordinator, Mr. Raghavendra Verma, as well as the principal of the school, Mr. Shri Ramakant Mishra were also there.

Several reporters of the press came too, and asked many questions of the program, as well as took many, photos of the ceremony. Reporters from the Dainik Jagran, a popular Indian newspaper, as well as the Amar Ujala and Ashok News were there. We had also hired a photographer to take the pictures of the ceremony.

“2016 **North South Foundation Program.**”

We had gotten a huge banner made, which had all the details of the program, and which was set at the center of the stage. A microphone stood at the side of the stage, where all the guests and I made speeches and awarded the certificates. The students sat at the center of the hall, while the English teacher, other teachers, the manager, parents, and several other people sat at the back of



the room. My grandma, Dr. Hemlata Singh, compered the ceremony, and gave an inspiring speech to start off the ceremony.

After that, Mr. C.D Singh, Mr. Raghavendra Verma, Dr. Dinesh Narayan, Mr. Bapu Pandey, and Mr. Shri Ramakant Mishra made great speeches about the importance of everything we had taught the students.

Most importantly, we presented flowers to the chief guests and the principal, who sat together on the dias on the stage, and we gave a memento of the program, that was a beautiful golden and black trophy with the words printed at the bottom: “2016 North South Foundation Program.”

Finally, it was time to award the top ten winners of the Spelling Competition, the top ten honourees of the award ceremony. I went up to the podium, and adjusted the microphone. I started off by calling the first winner, Hemant Kumar, who had successfully mastered 20 words

out of the 25 that I had given the students. The student stood up and humbly came up to the stage to receive his certificate and prize. Before the ceremony, we had gotten each of the certificates laminated and the prizes wrapped for professionalism. Like this, each of the top ten winners came up, beaming, and received their prizes. The top ten winners then stood together at the center of the stage with all the guests and I, while the parents, reporters, and teachers took pictures



of us. One thing I will never forget, was the smile on the winners’ faces, during all of this. It must have been such a memorable experience for them: earning a prize and coming on the press for academic accomplishment at such a young age.

“A teacher affects **eternity**. He can never tell where his **influence** stops.” ~Henry Adams

After we had given all the awards, it was time, finally, for my sister and I to give our speeches at the end of the ceremony. I started off with the quote, which I put at the beginning of this essay, because it signifies the importance of why I taught the students spelling and vocabulary. “If you can speak, you can influence. If you can influence, you can change lives,” by Robert Brown.



I went on by thanking everyone who had joined my sister and I at the ceremony(the press, the distinguished guests, the principal, the students, my family, parents, teachers) then went on to say my perspective, my views, my experiences, on teaching the students.



I emphasized the importance of public speaking, and the importance of having the determination to learn. This was a profound aspect for the students. I emphasized how the “Indian culture is throbbing in my veins, and is a part of me.” I emphasized how this was the reason I had spent my time in India, giving back to my parents’ community. I emphasized how my first experience of participating in NSF had completely changed the way I competed, the way I studied, and most of all, the way I spoke and communicated my ideas. I emphasized how this was the reason why I had wanted to bring the experience, the workshop, the competition, to the students, or more specifically, the fifth and sixth graders of Seth Motilal Inter College. I emphasized, how even though most of the students weren’t placed in the top ten, they had still worked really hard to master the Spelling Words, and had been engaged with the program, I had held for them. I emphasized that our world’s greatest leaders were great speakers, and I inspired and motivated the students to use their skills to go far in life. I emphasized that I want to continue teaching students in India, and continue being a lifelong NSF ambassador, as well as standing up and fighting for what I believe in.

After this, my sister gave an influential speech that, at the end, thanked everyone who had made the Spelling Competition and Workshop happen, like the principal of Seth Motilal Inter college, my grandparents, the manager of the school, etc.

At the end of the ceremony, we served all the distinguished guests refreshments, in the principal’s office, and discussed how everything had went. We gave each other our final blessings and wishes, and the principal hugged and thanked us for doing the program. We thanked the principal for hosting the program. As we were finally leaving, everyone, including Seth Motilal Inter college’s school guard waved us goodbye and left us with grinning smiles. Even the English teacher, was there, as he gave us a nod, and we left. We had gotten so many close connections with the school throughout the program.

“A Sigh of Relief.”

After the entire NSF program ended, I reflected on everything that had happened to my sister and I during the past couple of days. I was overwhelmed by how much effort I, and everyone else had put to make it amazing success. I went back to the school to give the principal a thank you present for hosting the program at his school.

Outside of the Seth Motilal Inter college school gate, I saw a crowd of parents that had formed over a large green board that was put outside of the school. I made my way to the front of the crowd, and saw, in white chalk letters, what was written. It was a story of the NSF Spelling Competition and Workshop that my sister and I done. I was so grateful to the principal, and the school, for putting up the board. At the bottom, was a list of the newspapers that it had come on.

The next day, I saw that our story had come on the Dainik Jagran Newspaper, the Compact Newspaper,



the Ashok Newspaper, and the Amar Ujala Newspaper.

As I am still recollecting on what happened, what strikes me, is how I imagined the workshop to be like in the beginning. **I never imagined**, that the principal would be so helpful in getting everything, including the projector, to work, for the series of powerpoints I would be showing to teach the students. I never imagined, the manager, the Chemistry teacher, or the English teacher, as well as others, to get so involved in the program. I never imagined to be treated like a proper teacher throughout the program (by the faculty or the students), as I was a seventh grade student myself. I never imagined that the students I would be teaching, to be so enthusiastic, and serious, both at the same time.

With great power, comes great responsibility.”

~Spiderman

To me, this quote, articulates the importance of helping others. Personally, I define the power, as everything I take for granted. Being in the US, gives me access to so many educational opportunities, and a yearning in which I am capable of doing anything. It is what motivated me to participate in the NSF APNA program, which was an irreplaceable milestone in my life.



In the future, being a NSF Youth Ambassador, and being of Indian Heritage, I hope to continue giving back to my community, and educating as many people as I can. Through education, through motivation, through competition, I aspire to encourage other students to achieve anything and everything they dream in their life. There is nothing more powerful than inspiration, passion, and the ability to achieve anything.

All in all, I strive to help others in social causes, in any way I can, and hope to see further student involvement in learning English.

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.” ~Mahatma Ghandi

That is the change I wish to see in the world.

