

When I heard about the APNA program, it was a week before I was to be in Mumbai, India. The second I heard, my immediate reaction was, "I'm going to do it!". I was thrilled by the thought of teaching in Mumbai. The very next day, I sent in my APNA Application and the day I went to India while I was waiting in the airport in Amsterdam, I received an email that my application was accepted. Thrilled, I started searching for municipality schools near where I was staying in Andheri East. Once I got to Mumbai, I called my aunt and asked her if she knew if I could teach at any schools. She suggested that I could teach at Madhav Rao Bhagwat High School where she was vice principal and where my mother taught for a brief period. She explained that many of the children there came from very poor families and were the children of maids meaning their source of income was low and had no prior experience with English. She helped me set up a meeting with the principal of the school and a week later, it was time to meet with her.

Before going into the room to meet with the principal, I was extremely nervous. The school was a Marathi and English medium and most of the kids in 4<sup>th</sup> standard and below did not know English, I had no prior teaching experience, and I had never been in an Indian school setting. At the meeting I set up a folder with documents. I introduced myself and where I had come from and first explained what NSF was and what APNA was, I also explained why I was a good candidate for teaching and slowly started ease into the conversation. Before the meeting, I had prepared a sample syllabus for two different classes: Public Speaking/Debate and Spelling Bee. The principal seemed to like the Spelling Bee curriculum a bit more than the Debate so it was decided that I would conduct a Spelling Bee workshop for the 5<sup>th</sup> standard starting the following week. I would receive one class period per day for 4 days. I then asked what medium I would have to teach in as it was a mainly Marathi school and she replied "Marathi medium, these children just started to learn English last week". That was when I started to get really nervous. I thought to myself, "what if they cannot understand my American accent, what if they do not understand the material I will teach?", I let myself become bombarded with fear. This fear fueled my passion to make the first day with the kids really great.

That first day I walked in with my mother who would act as my assistant that day. We met in the principal's office who then took us down to the fifth standard classroom, since it was morning school, I was greeted with a sing-song tone from the entire class, "Good morning teacher". I smiled to myself thinking how different my school in America was. The principal explained who I was, then to call me "Risha-tai", that I was from America, I would be teaching them, and that we would have a lot of fun as a class. To get the children excited about the class, I decided to hand out some mechanical pencils and colorful highlighters. They seemed to love them and they decided to trust me and like me more. I first greeted the class and had them fill out a small form that asked them questions about their name, who they wanted to become when they were older, and their favorite English word. I also explained that they could write in either English or Marathi. The form itself was in English but to my surprise, over 75% of the responses were in English itself. While I was preparing for the first day, I kept hearing the principal's voice in my head, "they started learning English last week". That led me to keep the

list simple. For the first day, I decided to teach them about colors, days of the week and animals. To my surprise, they knew how to spell all of them! I decided to continue with my lesson plan that I had in store for the next day, I taught them about the months of the year. I was so impressed with them that I decided to play 3 different games. For colors, I divided the class into teams based on their rows, I would spell a color on the chalk board and all the kids in the room would have to hold up as many objects as they could of that color and each item equaled one point. To my surprise, they had so much fun with this game that they became so loud that I decided to add a penalty, anyone who talked would take away one point from their team. After that game, I taught them hangman and they also loved that game. After playing hangman, I realized our time was up for the day and that we had even gone over time into the science period. The science teacher to my amazement even came up to me and my mother and asked us to teach the children the science words because we did such a good job that day. We received their science book and we were told to prepare a word list from the first 2 chapters. I left the first day feeling accomplished and great!

The night before the second day of teaching, I compiled a word list taking words from their textbook. I walked into class feeling confident and great. I was again greeted by a hearty "good morning teacher!" I took part in the kid's prayer period that took place for 15 minutes and started to teach. I first started out by saying how great they did yesterday that we decided to make a harder list for them using their science words but to my surprise, they did not know any of the words that came from the second chapter. One student informed me that they were going to learn about it later in the day. This made my day very difficult as they did not know any of the words. I decided not to let that pull me down and taught them what a prefix and what a suffix was. I went over basic prefixes and suffixes and then talked about the list. That same day, I taught the students how to break down words, so they could spell more easily. I finally explained that there would be a test the next day, so they would have to study, and the top 10 students would move on to a spelling bee on the last day. We spent so much time going over material that there was no time to play the games I had planned so I left that day feeling rocky and a bit shook up. My confidence had drained over the course of the teaching period.

The third through the last day, I conducted a competition and gave out awards. I was shaken by the class the previous day and the night after my class, a million thoughts were running through my head. I vividly remember thinking, "what if they don't study, what if they didn't understand a word I was saying, what if they are confused?". I came back the next day to conduct the competition and almost everyone knew all of the words. Before the competition started, I did a small review where I had the students assign each other a word that they had to spell for their row to get a point. We turned it into a game and the students loved it. When the competition started, I felt really great about the impact I had made in this underprivileged classroom. After the competition, I had the Principal, Science teacher and English teacher come in to help me hand out awards. I feel like this experience was very rewarding for me as well because I learned so much about my culture and schools in India. I would not trade this experience for anything else in the world.

