

Suma Appalaneni - NSF APNA Youth Ambassador

Last year, (2014-2015 school year) on a school trip, my friend and I went to help out at a haven for women and children. There, we helped out to teach an ESL (english as a second language) workshop. The head teacher of the workshop approached the words not pronouncing them exactly as they were spelled. She broke them down to show how the common population said them. Her reasoning for this was that she wanted the women to be able to adapt seamlessly in their workplaces. She explained that correct pronunciation and grammar indicated an educated mind.

Throughout the next couple of days, as I thought about this, it reminded me of how my cousins who live in India spoke english. Their pronunciation was technically correct, but it clearly showed that they were of foreign descent. The way that they formed sentences was very different from the way I form mine. In a constantly changing and evolving world, correct grammar and pronunciation are a necessary skill that everyone should have the opportunity to learn. Soon after this, (2015-2016 school year) I learned of North South Foundation and their ambassador program. I immediately knew that I wanted to give the small town children in India a better chance at a big future.

I promptly reached out to Mr. Gade who helped me obtain the right materials and guided me through the process of preparing for the 3-day spelling bee workshop. As I was preparing for this workshop, I was intent on teaching at a small town school. I strongly believed that I would be able to make a bigger difference in their lives, so I decided to volunteer at small school in the village where my mother studied as a child.

When I arrived at the school on my first day to teach, I was greeted by 70 students, all eager to learn. The first day I started to cover topics regarding prefixes and suffixes, and throughout the workshop moved through topics such as root words and latin roots. At the end of some classes, we had extra time, so I encouraged to students to ask me if they had any questions about anything. Immediately the students began to ask questions about America, and what it was like living and going to school there. One student asked me if there were trees in America. My first instinct was to laugh because I thought that he was joking, but I soon figured out that it was a serious question. In that moment, I understood that for those kids, just interacting with someone from outside the country was so beneficial.

Being in a small, remote village, the children hardly have any exposure to the outside world. The larger cities in India are becoming more developed, so kids have a greater understanding of what other continents are like. In small towns, children are shielded from the bigger picture, so interacting with me and hearing my American accent came as a shock to them. It was harder for them to understand what I was saying even though they understood english.

At the end of the teaching sector of the workshop, I held a small spelling test on a list of words I handed out on the first day. I chose 20 of the 50 words from the list I handed out and chose 5 new words which weren't on the list as bonus words to initiate a challenge. The students were all seated in a large classroom with a blank sheet of paper and a pen. As I said the word over the mic, they were to write it down. Even though I had been saying the words during classes in previous days, it was still difficult for the students to understand my accent the

day of the test. As I said the word, teachers positioned around the classroom were repeating it, so it would be easier for them to understand. The way the teachers were pronouncing the word was very different from the way I pronounced it. As I was grading the tests afterwards, I came to understand that the students spelled the word exactly how the teachers said it. The students had misspelled the words because the teachers had mispronounced it.

Despite the difficulty of the words and the complications with pronunciation, most students scored highly. The next day, with the help of the school administrators, we organized a small awards ceremony and invited the local media. The 3 students who scored the highest were given small prizes which I donated on behalf of NSF. First place was given a dictionary, and the 2 students who tied for second place were given geometry sets. The remainder of the students were given candy.

This workshop would not have been possible without the help of many people, so I'd like to extend a big thank you to everyone who helped make this possible. It was an honor to take part in a wonderful experience like this. Seeing the joy on the student's faces when I came in every morning is something I will always cherish. This workshop was a phenomenal adventure, and I am so grateful to have been a part of it.