

### **Chloe Ramambason – Helambu, Nepal, Summer 2013.**

During the month of September 2013 I volunteered in a small primary school in the Helambu region of Nepal. During my immersive stay I taught both English and biology to students between the ages of 5 and 17.

The Helambu region is very remote, and parts of it only accessible by foot. Therefore government schools are poorly funded and sparse. To add to this, the Nepali education system is greatly underfunded and there is a real lack of qualified teachers. The remote government schools less prone to inspection and parent complaints are thus often staffed by teachers who do not have qualifications. In some cases the teachers have not yet completed the mandatory parts of the Nepali schooling system.

The school I volunteered at had a government headmaster, and a government funded maths teacher for 90 children. Without Helambu Education and Livelihood Project (HELP) this school would struggle to provide these children with adequate lesson time. HELP funds another 2 teachers and provides volunteers who are able to teach the Nepali syllabus in new and innovative ways. I thoroughly enjoyed teaching grammar and vocabulary through drawing, singing and games.

During my stay I lived 45 minutes by foot from the school. I lived in a hamlet or collection of houses with the headmaster's mother. She did not speak any English, and initially I had not learnt enough Nepali or Hyolmo (the local dialect) to speak with her. However as the month progressed she learnt some phrases in English, I learnt some in Hyolmo and we became very proficient at communicating through gestures and exaggerated facial expressions. Key words learnt such as 'too spicy' and 'more please' centred on food allowed us to share some great meals.

On some nights students came up to the house to speak more English and learn more out of school time. We played banagrams, read Harry Potter and sang English songs such as 'Hey Jude'. The students taught me how to most efficiently wash my hair under an ice cold tap. They also showed me how to approach the very large buffalo kept at the house. I was lucky to have several older students who were almost fluent in English and thus learnt much about their home lives, and how this impacted their attitude to education. It was extremely refreshing to find a group of young people so happy to be able to go to school, and as a result very attentive to their studies. Several of the girls had not met a female volunteer studying biology at university and had many questions about English attitudes to women in higher education.

This trip was a wonderful experience during which I learnt things not only about myself, but also about learning and how to best achieve this. Being placed in front of 30 students who could not understand grammatical components of English language I have never questioned made me think about my language in new ways. This has also made me realise that learning can be accomplished via a large number of different tasks involving both visual and auditory components. I now use a variety of learning strategies in my degree as I understand the efficacy of some of these. The entire experience of living alone in a foreign country, somewhere far out of my comfort zone has showed me that I can cope with a large number of novel situations, and has thus made me far less apprehensive of what might happen. This summer I plan on travelling around Japan, and I will do so with the confidence that no matter how remote the region I am able to communicate with ridiculous facial expressions.