

Teaching in Nepal with HELP

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During August and September of 2014 I travelled to Nepal with the charity HELP(Helambu Education and Livelihood Project) to volunteer as an English teacher for four weeks. HELP has a partnership with some UK universities, from which it receives volunteers each summer, these volunteers are sent to the foothills of the Himalayas to teach in Helambu and the surrounding regions. Alongside this they provide teaching resources, teacher training, school building and a 'school-in-a-bag' project. This project aims to provide local children with all the equipment they need in their school career—pens, paper, etc.—so that even those whose parents can't afford to supply them with equipment can go to school. The charity involves native English speakers to volunteer as teachers as they consider teaching of English to be very important and the local level of English is quite poor, among both the students and the teachers.

I was placed, alongside two other volunteers from Pembroke, at Shree Bhotenamlang Secondary School. The school caters for 500 children from the age of about 3 up to 17. As well as teaching English we also taught Science and Mathematics as the level of understanding of these subjects to be quite low among the teachers and all three of us are studying sciences. The teaching of maths was relatively easy despite the language barrier as it is a very symbolic subject that can be expressed with a limited number of technical words that are used around the world.

The level of English among the students ranged considerably, in the younger classes it was essentially zero, to whom we aimed at teaching the alphabet, English numbers and some simple vocabulary—such as the weather—that could be described using pictures. The higher classes had enough English that you could hold simplistic conversations with them about certain topics, however, the ability within these classes was substantial and it was necessary to set work that was appropriate for the broad range of ability. I taught the eldest class in the school English, which was one of the few classes where it was possible to roughly follow the curriculum—for the younger classes the government provided textbooks were too advanced.

The school had recently be provided with some basic science equipment and we found one of our most useful roles was sorting out this equipment and performing some practical demonstrations using it, especially as there didn't seem to be any qualified science teachers in the school.

This was an incredibly enjoyable experience for me and having witnessed the work of HELP first hand I am glad to have been even a small part of what they do. During my stay I was put up by a local family and I found living their life and bonding with the family, we became especially fond of the grandmother who spent much of her time around the house, not only enjoyable but also informing about how people in other parts of the world live. I am very grateful to college for financially helping me to go on this trip and I hope that others in future will also be helped in a similar way by travel grants.