

Sarah Howden (English) – Shree Narayan School, Nepal, Summer 2014

In August and September I spent four weeks teaching in a Nepalese school with Helambu Education and Livelihood Project (HELP), a grassroots organisation based in Kathmandu. I stayed with Aiti, an English teacher at the placement school, and her family. The village, Ichok, situated in the mountainous Helambu region, was home to around 4000 people. I taught five periods a day at Shree Narayan lower-secondary school, a comparatively large school with 400 pupils and class sizes ranging from 25 to 50. The youngest students, aged 3 or 4, spoke almost no English, so our teaching concentrated mainly on songs, drawings and acting. Teaching a kindergarten class of around 40 students, we also discovered the power of stickers as a reward strategy. With older children, I taught alongside a Nepalese teacher. The textbooks were often at a far higher level than the children themselves, and there was a vast disparity between children in the classes. Lessons tended to be pitched at the most able students, so I focussed on interactive lessons in which all the children were encouraged to engage by writing and drawing on the board, and speaking alone in front of the class. The teaching style also centred on repetition and rote learning, meaning the children struggled with creative exercises. I enjoyed setting more imaginative tasks and seeing them rise to the challenges, from posters to stories to writing poems, rather than just reciting grammar from the board.

The charity, CU HELP, was clearly doing amazing things in Ichok and the Helambu region as a whole. We saw the impact of their excellent 'school in a bag' programme, providing school resources to children unable to afford them, and the charity had also provided several of the teachers at Ichok school. We were given the chance to offer suggestions as to how our fundraised money should be spent in our individual schools. For me, these included the provision of dictionaries to enable composition, and more teachers to provide more targeted support for children who would otherwise slip through the net in such large classes. It was great to see the difference in the children's confidence and creativity by the final days of our placement.