

CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

Project Location: Boudhanath, Kathmandu, Nepal

Institution Name: Manasarovar Academy

Dates of Project: 10/07/09-14/08/09

Approx Amount of Teaching: 30 Students, 4-6 hours per day, five days per week

The Tibetan suburb of Boudhanath is located just 11km away from the centre of Kathmandu and is a UNESCO world heritage site due to it being home to Nepal's largest stupa. Manasarovar Academy was established ten years ago by three women. They began with just eight students, but due to demand they have since expanded and now have 200 students. They decided to start the school in order to provide a higher standard of education than was being received in government schools. The students are mainly of Tibetan origin; however, those from Nepal also attend. The majority of the students at the school are only able to attend because they have been sponsored by someone from abroad. The school also has approximately 30 boarders who live there full time.

This summer, two of us volunteered at Manasarovar Academy with us teaching together. We taught classes 3, 4 and 5, with their ages ranging from 8 to 13. The children were all fluent in English, thus enabling us to cover a wide range of topics with them. The school gave us complete freedom over what we taught. We covered poetry, history and geography. As a geographer myself, I was particularly proud of them when they all produced some wonderful geography projects. At the start of our geography lessons, they had very little knowledge of different countries and their locations. By the end, they could label the key aspects of a world map, knew many geographical facts and were able to produce a project on a specific country. In addition to teaching full classes, we also tutored a thirteen year old boy who was really struggling and was thus in a class of five year olds. Although progress was slow, the exams that they took once we had left showed a dramatic improvement in his English which I am very proud of. In addition to this we taught them sport two mornings a week before school. Normally they would not have been able to do sport as there was no one to teach it. During the evenings we taught them drama, with them impressively learning songs, dance routines and their dialogue in less than two weeks. They then performed their play to the rest of the students and some of their parents. This was a great achievement and clearly demonstrated the dedicated and enthusiastic nature of the children. We also took the children to the local reading room which they thoroughly enjoyed. This helped to improve their ability to read English, as well as teaching them how to research a topic. By the time our teaching reached a conclusion, the children had all improved in all aspects of English.

The hard work and devotion of both the students and the teachers was really inspiring. I had a truly amazing time teaching in Nepal and I was extremely sad to leave such wonderful people. The project was extremely rewarding and I can't imagine a better way to spend the summer. I will forever be extremely grateful to ELST for enabling me to have this opportunity.

CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

Project Location: Boudhanath, Kathmandu, Nepal

Institution Name: Manasarovar Academy

Dates of Project: 09/07/09-16/08/09

Approx Amount of Teaching: 16-35 Students, 4-6 hours per day

Boudha is a suburb of Kathmandu situated to the North-East of the city centre. Its massive *stupa* is one of the holiest sites for Buddhists in Nepal, and is one of the largest stupas in the world. Many Tibetan refugees have settled here, and there are around 50 *gompa* (monasteries).

Manasarovar Academy was set up in 1999 to educate children whose parents are unable to pay fees. A few local Nepali children attend the school, but most students are Tibetan refugees. The school started with just 8 children, but now there are around 300 ranging in age from 3 to 12, with a few older children who began their schooling later.

Together with another ELST volunteer, I taught at the school five days per week. Our main job was to teach English to classes III, IV and V, and we did this through classes in English Literature, Geography and History. Over the course of the lessons, the children worked on projects, and to enable them to do research for these projects, we took them to the Reading Room which was set up by Joanna El Nemr.

On two mornings a week we would arrive early for breakfast before teaching sport, and after school each day we had drama rehearsals for our rendition of High School Musical, performed by Classes IV and V. We also tutored a child named Yeshi who had spent 7 years at his previous school yet upon arrival at Manasarovar Academy had to be put into the Kindergarten class as he had learned so little. Teaching him was a challenge but we were rewarded at the end as in the school exams which occurred at the end of our placement, he attained his best ever marks!

In the evenings, I also gave English lessons to some monks whom we met near the beginning of our placement, and in return they taught me some Tibetan. Seeing the results of the work I put into planning the classes both for the monks and for the children was extremely rewarding and it was so inspiring to see the determination of the students to succeed despite their circumstances. I am very grateful to ELST for enabling this project to happen.



Morning Sports

High School Musical!

Kindergarten kids

CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

Project Location: Boudhanath, Nepal

Institution Name: Manjughoksha Academy, Manasarover Academy, Himalayan Society for Youth and Women Empowerment

Dates of Project: 13/7/2009-21/8/2009

The Manjughoksha Academy was established in 1995 to serve Tibetans and others who have a close cultural and religious link with the Tibetans, and is run by a husband and wife team. The majority of the students, now numbered at over 300, are Tibetan refugees together with Mustang, Gurung and Tamang children etc., and the classes serve classes from nursery, which is ages 3-4, to Class 10, who are 16 years old, though ages vary due to students starting schools at different times. The school aims to impart a modern education with emphasis on the all round development of the children, as well as safeguarding the Tibetan language, culture and traditions through daily studies, recitations of Buddhist texts and on hand practice.

I covered Class 3s English lessons while the Principal and his wife were absent, preparing them with revision classes for upcoming exams. I also covered private study lessons, as well as occasional Computer lessons for the younger students, and in the last few days, as the exams began, I became an invigilator, going on to mark the English exams for classes 3, 9 and 10.

Manasarover Academy was founded in 1999 by three women who had dreamt since childhood of opening a school, recognising the need in particular for education for Tibetan children. From originating with a handful of students in one classroom, the school now serves 283 students in a huge building. On Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday mornings I taught sports lessons with three other volunteers. We usually structured the lessons around one sport, beginning with a warm-up exercise or game, then moving on to skills exercises which were organised in groups with the children doing each for 10-15 minutes, before ending in a game of the sport. In the evenings, we taught Drama to Classes IV-V- another volunteer and I wrote a condensed script of *High School Musical*, and together we taught the students the songs, choreographed the dances, and worked on their acting, which culminated in a tremendous performance to their parents, and then to the other students.

The Himalayan Society for Youth and Woman Empowerment (HSWYE) is a relatively new establishment, only opening a couple of years ago. The CEO, Doma Lama, a member of the Tibetan Government in Exile and an incredibly inspiring woman, opened the institution because of her belief in the need to educate Tibetans as the only option in their struggle with the Chinese government – the Tibetan community needs educated representatives to engage in talks with the Chinese. HSWYE provides free lessons in English and Buddhist scriptures five days a week, catering to all abilities and all ages – children, monks, nuns, those that have retired, parents and grandparents are all eager and committed to their studies. On Saturdays, various Buddhists, educated to a high level and usually holding a PhD in their religion, hold talks on the Buddhist scriptures. Workshops on personal hygiene, sexual health, personal development and careers are also held, and talks on the Buddhist scriptures explained in Nepalese are a regular occurrence. Myself and another volunteer taught the Basic One class in the mornings, covering the very basics of the English language. During the rest of the day we worked on developing a coursebook for the different English classes, that would lead on one to another, and could lead to the students eventually taking the JetSet exams in English. The coursebooks had individual lesson plans for future teachers and volunteers to work from, as Doma Lama felt that the constant change of teacher, as well as teaching style, was disruptive to the students learning.

In the evenings I also taught some monks from the local monastery, especially in the last week. This was a funny and rewarding experience, and, as with the students at Manasarover and HSWYE I was stunned by how eager, hardworking and dedicated they were. I interviewed the headteacher at Manasarover, Doma Lama from HSWYE, the monks

and a gentleman who at 74 could remember a time before the Chinese had entered Tibet. All told me incredibly inspirational stories of leaving Tibet and their struggle since, and I was moved by their endeavours to improve their community's situation, as well as their positive attitude and constant laughter in the face of such adversity. My experience in Nepal was humbling and unforgettable, and I can only thank ELST for this lifechanging experience.

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I covered class 9 and 10 English lessons while the Principal and his wife were absent, preparing them with revision classes for upcoming exams. I also covered private study lessons, as well as occasional Computer lessons for the younger students, and in the last few days, as the exams began, I became an invigilator, going on to mark the English exams for classes 9 and 10. Due to miscommunication and misunderstanding with the school, we organised a new placement and left the school after three weeks.

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I love volunteering, as it is a way to develop a genuine, reciprocal bond with the local people of a country you are visiting. The highlight of the trip would be meeting a local lama, a Rinpoche of the monastery where I taught the monks. He was just a little boy, and like Mr. Bean, but was also able to discuss compassion, and forgiveness and the foundations of one of the World's great religions with great wisdom. This only came about because of my relationship with the monks, which again had developed due to the amount of time that I was able to stay in one area and the understanding of local customs and cultures I had gained through my work. I loved recognising my students in the street, children from the school and their mothers from the NGO. The most rewarding moment was watching the children perform the musical we had written and rehearsed so hard for, in front of their parents. Within the NGO, everyday the work was hard and frustrating as the adults we taught constantly forgot their new vocabulary. However, on the occasion when one of them surprised you and said something perfectly, or spelt it perfectly, it was always moving.

I underwent some personal difficulties towards the end of my volunteer session due to my health, and had to return to England to get treatment. I have learnt the hard way about our human vulnerability and how harsh the developing world can be. My health problems were a reminder of the misery of poverty and the reality of life for many in third world countries, where thousands of people die everyday from preventable diseases and lack of access to decent medical care. I was able to visit doctors in Nepal without considering cost, and within the UK was given excellent care by our National Health Service. I feel so fortunate that I have mostly recovered and will be able to return and finish my journey one day. The lasting damage to my vision is not the souvenir I would have chosen, but has made an indelible impression on me and has inspired me to continue to travel the developing world in a bid to understand it so I can spend my future creating sustainable solutions and a better world.