

Big help for Education Post Internship Report

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The countless hours of activity planning, speech writing, and rehearsing were all coming to an end as I walked through the arching entrance of Sanskriti Government Model School. The school is located in sector 20 Panchkula, India, a city nestled in the foothills of the Shivalik Mountains and bordering Haryana's state capitol of Chandigarh. Nearing the classroom, the anticipation was over and my pent-up excitement, converted to nervousness. Until then I had not felt any of the pressure about how I would manage the next two days conducting programs in speech and debate, karate, and energy, in an unfamiliar setting with 25 eleventh grade students whose first language was different than mine. Though entering with uneasiness, I left with a changed perspective on my life back home, a newfound appreciation for the opportunities I have, and not to mention twenty-five new friends that I will look forward to keeping in touch with in the years to come.

Students from grades one through twelve must perform at high levels to gain admission into Sanskriti Model School. The students, who are not able to afford many of the costs associated with attending school, are given free meals, uniforms, and supplies, but that is not what sets this school apart. What struck me the most was the school's dedication to giving its students opportunities that expanded beyond the basics, as there was an herbal garden fully planted by the students and teachers, a computer lab with some computers for students to learn coding, all thanks to help of NGOs which provide local schools with funding to give enhanced educational opportunities to local children. The reason I chose this school was because my grandparents live in nearby sector 8 Panchkula, so they knew about the school, and the principle was very welcoming.

My introduction speech began in Hindi. I let everyone know that my Hindi is nowhere close to perfect, but that I will try my best to communicate using a blend of Hindi and English. Sanskriti is an English medium school which means that the students are educated in English, yet communication between students and teachers largely takes place in Hindi, their first language. I broke the ice, evoked some laughter, and saw a lot of smiles, so the nervousness started its conversion back to confidence from then onwards. Making it clear that even though I was the one standing in the front of the classroom like the teacher conducting different activities, I wanted to learn as much from them as possible, and looking back I can say that is what I appreciate the most from this experience. Interspersed throughout the speech, I asked questions about their lives and interests, urging them to stop and ask me anything. We talked about what my life was like back home, and different aspects of America such as its holidays, currency, government, and famous places as I handed out pictures throughout. The students were definitely shy, but I could feel the initial barrier being broken down adding momentum to the day's activities. Everything was going so well to the point where only after three hours did I relent to the teachers' pleas for me to break for a few minutes and drink water.

The first activity I planned was related to speech and debate, a club that I am now the captain of at my school and have been a member of since my freshman year. The skills I gained from speech and debate really shaped me as a leader, and I wished to give the students some experience with the activity as well. After explaining the keys to public speaking and explaining the structure of a group discussion round, I laid out three debate topics based on space exploration, animal conservation, and technology so the students could argue what the topic they connected with the most. Group Discussion is the event that I participate in the Massachusetts Speech and Debate League, and the questions are usually separated into two parts which are both debated for equal amounts of time. I created three science related prompts "Argue whether humans should spend billions of dollars exploring space then decide where else would be the best use for this funding besides space exploration," "Argue whether animals should be kept in captivity for any reason and then decide what would be the best methods to prevent the extinction of endangered animals," "Argue whether future technology through machine learning and other development can replace the jobs in certain professions then forecast what the future of technology looks like and where it would be best used." It was in the moments that I listened to the discussions that I became profoundly impressed with the intelligence of the students as they cited statistics and referenced concrete examples to support their arguments without having anytime to prepare. The passion in the voices along with the general knowledge they possessed were praiseworthy, and I let them know just how impressed I was during the debrief, where I gave recognition to the students who were most active in the discussions and vocal throughout the day, and prizes that I brought everyone.

The next morning I was greeted so enthusiastically, with all the students raising their desks to say good morning with smiling faces. A few students even rushed to the front of the class to help me setup the Bighelp banner. In those opening minutes, I was touched by the politeness and helpfulness of the kids who I had only known for a day, but made me feel as if I was a long-time friend of theirs. I gave an introduction to Kenpo Karate, explaining my ten year journey to achieving my black belt and all the lessons, struggle, and feelings- frustration, motivation, triumph- that came along the way. I demonstrated basic moves of self-defense starting with the blocks with which we played a blocking game. I would call out the numbers assigned to certain blocks and if you did the wrong block you would have to sit down. The last one or two standing at the end of each game would receive a prize. I taught them basic techniques that I thought were useful, and easy to learn, but the students were so eager to learn more that I ended up teaching them ten techniques that they tried in the air against imaginary opponents.

I hardly noticed that I was speaking in Hindi quite a bit- all the nervousness about the language barrier was forgotten within a couple hours the day before. The kinks in my Hindi seemed to smoothen themselves out the more I spoke. When I struggled to articulate a thought, I would receive help from multiple students, and giggles from many more. The internship experience had really unfurled rapidly from the introduction speech. All the engagement and back and forth participation that I was hoping to evoke came and it made my time there all the more memorable.

The last activity I had planned was on renewable energy. My sister helped me pass out the supplies for a makeshift windmill that we would all be building. A small, but hands on activity that would be fun to do and an effective way to look at wind energy being transferred

to mechanical energy with a string pulling up a paperclip as we blew on the fan. The project helped me transition into my talk on renewable energy, and clean energy projects that were taking place in India. At the conclusion of the discussion, I handed out American coins as tokens for them to remember me by, and gave out my contact information so that they would stay in touch with me after the internship. We chatted and laughed for the last bit of time that I was there and as I was leaving the classroom one student Akash asked, "Armaan, so what time are you coming tomorrow?" I laughed and smiled, then made it clear that it was my last day there, certainly not the last time that I would be in touch. I was exhausted, but more sad that the two days were coming to an end, though, my internship was not done just yet.

I said good-bye to my twenty five friends and made my way to a classroom where I was met with 40 more students of Sanskriti, ranging from first to sixth grade. The final ceremony entailed a distribution of backpacks to kids whose backpacks were torn or ripped and were in need of new ones. As they came up one by one, I couldn't help but smile seeing the joy appear on their faces as they came and received the new bright red Bighelp bags. In these moments, I felt like I was actually making a difference, however small, in these childrens' lives by giving them new back packs and the sweet feeling that came over me was definitely a powerful capstone to the project that had begun three months earlier. The students showed themselves to me as being extremely thankful for the opportunities and access to education that they have. They listened attentively to my every word and demonstrated a true passion for learning. In talking to these kids, I learned of their dreams and aspirations- of becoming astronauts, game designers, and software engineers- which helped me realize that schooling and them being able to go to school were their only means of achieving their goals, and I could see how much they loved their school because it is a privilege that maybe their parents or other students could not experience. This revamped my appreciation for all the opportunities that I have back home. My youth internship made me realize how lucky I am to have the education and resources I need to reach the goals of my own. I could not have asked for a more engaging and rewarding experience.

I have to thank my mentors Madhavi Aunty and Rekha Aunty for helping me extensively throughout the process of drafting my speeches, planning my activities, and making sure that I was well prepared to have the most successful youth internship possible. Thank you to principal Renu Gupta and teachers of Sanskriti Government Model school for allowing me to come to the school, and for being so welcoming. I must thank my parents who helped me gather all the supplies I needed and my sister who was a huge help for taking pictures and passing out supplies during the two days. Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Chand Pasha Shaik and the Bighelp organization for giving me the opportunity to be a youth intern which has been an experience that I will remember for years to come.