

BigHelp Post-Internship Report 2019-2020

By Eshita Velidande

Hi! My name is Eshita Velidande and i am a rising 11th grader living in the United States of America. I recently went to India and conducted a two-day workshop at Zilla Parishad High School, a government school in Raikode. Raikode is a small village in Medak District of Telangana. I was introduced to this school by Vijayalakshmi Madam, who was a former teacher of my mother, she had informed us about the struggles the students and teachers have to go through everyday at this school. And I decided to do this school, because i thought i would be able to spread my knowledge and furthermore benefit the students that go there. I went to the school on July 22nd and 23rd.

Day 1: July 22 2019

The day began with a school prayer at 9:30, where the students sang the Indian National Anthem, Telangana National Anthem, and school pledge. After the prayer, I spoke to the whole school, explained my purpose of visit and about Bighelp organization.



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As I walked into the 10th grade class, there were a lot of people in the classroom as the teacher combined the whole grade (English medium and Telugu medium students) into one class. I saw the students' faces of curiosity, excitement, and nervousness. These kids didn't know that I was feeling the same way. I was curious to know about each one of them, their lifestyle and most importantly the help they needed and the school as well. I started by introducing myself, where I lived, my lifestyle, my academic life, my social life, and my hobbies. Many of them smiled when I told them that I ate Indian food in America, that I celebrated Indian festivals and that I had Indian friends. Many of them were shocked that I have learned Kuchipudi, an Indian dance form, and played badminton. I guess they were very shocked at how many similarities we both shared. I ended my speech by saying, "I came here not only to teach you guys, but to become your friend, someone you can trust". I looked to the left and saw a girl's, named Jagadevi, eyes light up.

After my introduction, I started with an icebreaker game. The students had to pick a ball from the bag, if it was a pink ball then they had to answer my question to them. If it was a green ball then they had to tell me something about themselves. I asked some students about their goals in life, what they wanted to be, favorite movie actor, and favorite hobbies. Many of them wanted to be a teacher or a soldier/policeman. I also learned that many students' parents were farmers and that the students came to this school from neighboring villages.



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During break time, many of the girls came up to me and asked me a lot of questions about what I was studying and how America was. I found out that a girl (Nikita) had a lot of interests similar to me, she loved biology and played sports as well. I was introduced to so many girls and instantly all of us became great friends. They showed me around the classrooms and we all sat in the English Medium classroom. Many of the girls told me to sit on a chair and that they would sit on the floor, but when I refused and sat on the ground with them, everyone gasped. I was overjoyed by the love that I had received from the girls. During the break, I also had the opportunity to meet with the school headmaster and the assistant headmaster, where they had explained how the school needed help and also the school development in Telangana. I learnt so many new things from our conversation and it was very shocking. The Raikode school lacked a lot of basic necessities a government school is supposed to have; a compound wall, water bore, toilets, necessities for young girls. Many of the students had to walk to the boys hostel nearby to use the toilets, it was also very easy for students to skip class since there was no proper wall/infrastructure around the campus, and there was no electricity for the fans to work in the classroom. These were some of the many problems that the assistant headmaster had mentioned. And I was shocked by the lack of funding and attention the government was giving to the schools. I also learned that the government is constructing model schools, which is kinda similar to a private school. There was a Raikode model school in walkable distance next to the government school, Vijayalakshmi teacher said she would introduce me to the headmaster of that school. Also very close to the government school was a residential school that was constructed by the State Government. Residential schools are built to provide housing and education for orphan girls. It was very fascinating to me that there were a lot of different types of school in India, whereas in America we have public and private school systems. I feel that the Telangana Government is doing a good job with providing facilities, but it doesn't fund them enough for it to last. And this seemed to be a problem with that a lot of headmasters were telling me about.

After break, I went back into the classroom to start my first topic; growth mindset. Growth mindset is a type of mindset where one becomes more open minded to help expand their knowledge and improve. I started with a small test in which it gave statements that the student had to either strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree to. Based on that, at the end, we gave out a score chart so we could identify if a student was growth mindset, growth mindset with fixed ideas, fixed mindset with growth ideas, and fixed mindset. Fixed mindset is when people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. Most students were between growth mindset with fixed ideas, or fixed mindset with growth ideas. I was able to explain to the kids about growth mindset why it was important, how it can help them in the real world, characteristics of growth mindset, and how gaining general knowledge is important. While explaining these, I gave real life examples so that they could understand it better and relate to it. Many kids were taking notes and answering the questions I asked correctly. I moved

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onto my next subtopic of communication, and I explained to them the importance of communication, how it would help in the real world, and how becoming better communicators can help expand their knowledge. Many of the students were very interested, and after during lunch many of the kids came up to me and said that this topic interested them a lot and they learned something new.



After lunch, I conducted a team building activity that would teach them teamwork, communication, and creativity. I gave each team marshmallows and toothpicks, and told them to build a tall structure that would be able to hold a ping pong ball. And if they needed bigger marshmallows or tape it would cost them (fictionally) 10 rupees. So whoever made the tallest structure with the least cost would win.

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Many of the kids were intrigued with the marshmallows, they took some time to familiarize themselves with the supplies. I told them to try to create basic structures to help them, for the groups that didn't understand, I showed them a triangle structure and a square. I was amazed at how quick the students grasped a simple concept, 10 mins later I was seeing cubes being built and triangular pyramids. Many of the kids were starting to build their structures. Some students' structure were falling apart. It was very interesting to see the kids and how they persevered through adversities. After 40 mins, we all re-grouped again, and I asked one person from each group to come up and explain their building process. As I recall, a student named Jagadevi said, "We had built our structure last minute as the timer was going to end and at the last second it got destroyed as if a tsunami came and hit it." Another student, Nikita, said, "We had gotten a good structure going on as we were building, but in the last 5 minutes it fell down, and I thought that we would lose. Then my friend, Dhoni, encouraged us all to try again and we came up with this structure." And another student, Suresh, said "We used toothpicks, marshmallows, and lost money by obtaining the bigger marshmallows but my friends and I managed to construct this structure." I explained to the kids that, "Everyone goes through adversities, but through teamwork and communication you guys were able to end up with a final product." After discussing the structures, I measured and calculated , and at the end Vishnu's

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team had one with a structure of 7cm and with no money used. Everyone congratulated the team and the day had come to an end.



Fig2: Winning team of the marshmallow activity

Day 1 was very exciting, by the end of the day I was able to make a lot of friends with kids and not only share things about my life but learn a lot about their lifestyles as well.

Day 2: July 23 2019

On the second day, I went to school at around 9:30 am to participate in the morning prayer. I was able to meet the headmaster of the residential school near the government school, and visited some of the classes in that school.

When I went back to my classroom, I have introduced myself to the kids again, and went over everyone's name. We did a small icebreaker game, where I asked questions about what the kids had learned in the previous session and awarded them with chocolates. Many of them talked about communication and teamwork, I was extremely happy everyone understood the topics from yesterday.

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Fig 3: Game played on Day 2, with Vishnu and Nikita

Then we had a discussion about water; how we use it in our everyday lives and how it helps us as human beings. I told them about the different benefits of water. And also showed them a graph of how much water we actually had on earth. I spoke about the importance of conserving water, and some ways that people use it. Many kids were talking about using wells, bores, some form of container to collect the water. I told them about rainwater collection, something we used at our home. Whenever it rains, it flows through a downspout and collects in a big container, which my parents use to water their garden. I showed them a picture of it, a lot of people were amazed at the creativity and new technique.

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I showed the students on youtube an experiment I found on homemade filtering of water with sand and charcoal. After this topic, the whole school gathered together and I gave the students their backpacks, took pictures, and said my goodbyes.

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This internship was a beautiful experience and I would like to thank Bighelp for giving me such a great opportunity. I was able to connect with the students, and made forever cherishing friendships with everyone. It was very hard for me to let go and not be able to see my friends again. In America, we do hear about situations like this and makes us want to help, but it is truly a different experience when you are physically in that environment, seeing everything with your eyes. After this experience, it has inspired me to do more of these workshops, and spread awareness to situations that I observed. I had learnt so much from the students, but one thing I learned was that even if the kids didn't live lives like us in America, they still had a good attitude towards life and had their motivation to persevere. I noticed this especially through the marshmallow activity and growth mindset. During lunch on the 2nd day, I had showed and taught the girls some steps in Kuchipudi, so many of them were eager to learn and so excited. I had really seen how genuine they were from the inside and out, they were so loving and welcoming and I don't think I have met such people in my life. The amount of positive energy in that environment had mentally changed me and also motivated me to become a better version of myself.

I would like to thank Chand uncle and Bighelp, for giving such a splendid opportunity to kids in America, to really be able to witness the lifestyle of Indian schools and kids, also being able to share our experiences and further encourage awareness. Also my mentor, Sana akka, thanks so much for helping me out. I would also like to thank Vijayalakshmi Madam for introducing me to the Raikode school and the wonderful students. I had the most amazing time of my life and I hope to do more of these workshops in the future!