



Name of Volunteer:	Stefanie Schönberger
Project Sector:	English Lessons
Project Name:	Drubathara School
Project Location:	Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu, Nepal
Project Duration and time of stay:	5 weeks, 27.11.2019-31.12.2019

Short Summary of Volunteering Project

The aim of the stay at the Drubathara School was to teach English in several classes. Further, I also carried out a workshop on the menstruation hygiene for girls and tried to clean the school surrounding as well as to raise the awareness of the importance of waste management.

Preparation Beforehand

As I was travelling in Nepal before, I did not prepare much for the volunteering. However, it was very helpful for me that Chay Ya provided a Dropbox link, where I could find some material that I could use for preparing and organizing the lessons. Further, some watch outs and personal experiences were shared with me and that helped tremendously.

Journey and Arrival in Nepal

Before I started the volunteering, I had already traveled for two months that's why I knew a little bit of Nepal. As Budhanilkantha is just 8 km outside of Kathmandu city center it was easy to go there.

Project schedule and experiences on site

When I arrived at the school at the end of November, I was very warmly welcomed by the principal, the staff and the children – I immediately liked it there and I was curious about the

upcoming time. I tried to introduce myself in Nepali, but it turned out to be a great laughter for the classes.

As I wanted to get a deeper insight into the Nepalese culture, I stayed with a host family at the beginning. The family was quite proud that the principal had asked them if they want to host the foreigner and they felt very responsible. Nepalese people are known for their great hospitality and this family did not even want to take one single Rupee for the stay with them (accommodation, food, etc.) They were very caring and tried to fulfill every wish that I had. I did not really have a room on my own and for taking a shower hot water had to be boiled beforehand. I felt quite uncomfortable as they cared so much and I lacked some privacy as well as personal freedom, that's why I moved into a lovely guest house close by.

The first days were very hard for me, I had a sore throat, the kids were very noisy and chatty during the classes and I had the feeling that I cannot manage them. This was very disappointing for me. I could not understand why I am able to solve complex negotiations back in Austria and here in Nepal I cannot manage the classes. I remember one break where I was sitting right next to the toilet, I closed my eyes and I felt so tired, my throat hurt and I thought about quitting the volunteering as it did not benefit the kids and myself, but then I remembered two or three statements, where the kids expressed their gratitude that I was there, that they learned this or that and I decided to stay.

At the beginning, I had 4 classes a day, where I was teaching English. The children were about seven to 14 years. Their level of English was very differing and as they were used to recite, our Western teaching methods were quite strange to them (like critical thinking, presentations, speaking, discussions, ...) On an occasional base, I also went to upper classes, where the teens were about 14-15 years. Especially the younger girls liked to talk to me and ask questions about my life, the Austrian culture, etc.

We were covering several topics like sports, describing yourself/your friend, hobbies, family, and later the environment. One of my personal highlights was the girls' workshop about the menstruation. As the students did not ask many questions and I knew that the topic is kind of a taboo in Nepal, I prepared some cards where the girls were able to ask questions anonymously. I was so surprised how many questions were asked and the upcoming discussion. I recognized that most of the girls don't really know what is going on in their bodies and why they have body cramps, why they feel tired, what they should eat, etc. As most of the children come from families with a lower income, some of the girls use a piece of cotton instead of a sanitary pad as they cannot afford it. I was glad that Chay Ya did inform me about it beforehand so I could prepare how to wash the fabric and how to handle it. Further, I was very shocked to hear that some girls stay at home as the toilet facilities are not sufficient at school → there was no bin at the girls' toilet. Moreover, some girls are afraid that they get their menstruation at school and that they do not have any sanitary pad with them. That's why we bought a bin and some sanitary pads that the girls can use. In a couple of weeks, the classes will be moved from the temporary setting to the building that Chay Ya helps to build. Luckily, there will be toilet facilities on every floor for girls and boys and hopefully a bin in the girls' toilet.

As I had difficulties in teaching in the noisy classes, I requested some help of two teachers in Austria. They gave me some tips and tricks which helped me a lot. Further, my schoolteachers pointed out that most of the time as a teacher, you do not always see a progress, and even a sleeping student can listen carefully – you never know... She also explained that under these circumstances (high number of students, temporary classrooms) it is very difficult to transfer knowledge, but that I should not give up. I was lucky that I did not give up as the pupils were so thankful and grateful when I departed.

One of the most unforgettable experiences was that I celebrated Christmas at the school. I was so surprised that some classes had prepared a small celebration with a cake, carols and confetti for me. There are no words for that – I really enjoyed celebrating with them 😊

As I said before the children are used to recite, so when we spoke about the environment in our lessons, they correctly answered in a chorus that one had to REDUCE, REUSE and RECYCLE waste. One day the children wanted to go outside to play a game or simply to warm up as it was so cold in the classrooms and I just agreed when we clean up around the school. The area looked like a garbage dump. To my surprise, the kids had immediately agreed and even more surprisingly, they took their tasks very seriously. Everybody was picking up plastics, small pieces of paper and some girls started to broom the schoolyard. We were all in the flow of cleaning up. As there were no garbage bags, we used big bags or boxes that we found at the nearby construction site or on the pedestrian. The children carried some of the full bags away and at the beginning I saw one of them inside the school building. Two hours later, I recognized that all the garbage and dust that had been collected, had been dumped down next to the toilet into the nature. I was simply shocked. We had been tidying up for two hours and then the garbage was just carried from one end to another and thrown into the nature. I should have told them exactly what to do with it. In theory they knew that you should not pollute the environment, but in practice they are used to deposit the rubbish everywhere outside. Even the school staff who was watching the process of cleaning and dumping at the other end, did not say anything. It was normal for Nepalese people. So I tried to clean that up with another class.

Although it was a bit disappointing in the beginning, my day was made when I saw one of the girls who picked up a small piece of plastic at the schoolyard to put it into the bin later. This made my day, at least one person understood the importance of using the bin 😊

Reflections, Comments & Recommendations for future Volunteers

At the beginning, I had some problems adapting to the school system, to the noise of the children and I had high expectations on myself. I highly recommend seeking help from friends, teachers and Chay Ya whenever you feel lost. Further, never give up – sometimes it seems that no one listens but later you recognize that the children watch you all the time. I could not only broaden my horizon, but also develop some further soft skills within the five weeks at Drubathara school, I won't miss that experience in my life.

Impressions

Children queue up for lunch



The school kitchen



There is just one place where the garbage collected at school (and one bin in every classroom)



The washing up at school



Temporary classroom made of corrugated iron



The girls toilet (approx. 1 cabin for almost 300 females)



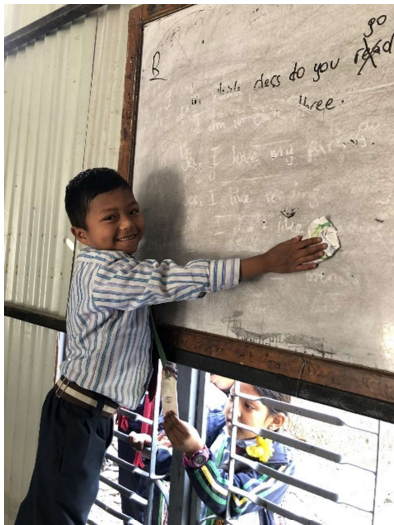
Once a week a music teacher comes to school – I liked to watch those classes whenever I had time.



Children from the kindergarden tried to warm up in the sun as it was getting colder and colder



Getting support from a young boy who cleaned the board



Girls enjoying the swinging rope



Breaks are most of the time used for playing



Cleaning up around school



An unforgettable Christmas – celebrating with some classes



With a donation of 600 Euro sports, playing and educational material was bought as well as music instruments and football dresses

