

Learning report

I have been to Sri Lanka for volunteer service in January 2019. The trip has been exclusive and unforgettable. We have been to a small and poor village called Panama, which is located in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, for school volunteering, including volunteer teaching, pipeline making and wall painting.

On the first day, we arrived Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, at midnight after taking 2 flights. We continued to travel to Panama on the next day. It was a very long journey and we took nearly a whole day to travel from the westernmost to the easternmost of the country.

When we reached Panama, we were already welcomed by the local students, teachers and parents. I could feel how happy and anticipated they were from their faces. In the welcoming lunch, my local buddy introduced a lot of indigenous food to me and she brought me to walk around the school. The school is dilapidated with very few facilities. There is a small playground, where a lot of students like to play, according to my local buddy. Unlike schools in Hong Kong, there are no libraries, music room, etc. There is only a small laboratory with limited apparatus.

Next day, we started our teaching session. We taught them some simple English songs, like Baby Shark, My Bonnie, etc. Most of the classrooms do not have a door and therefore we can easily hear the noise from the classrooms beside. Although the environment was very noisy, the students were very patient to listen to us and even jot down what we have taught. I could feel that they enjoyed singing the songs.

The students there were so enthusiastic that they would surround us and chat with us at the recess. Although we had great language barrier, they still wanted to stick with us. We taught them Chinese and English and they taught us Sinhalese, which is their local language. We also played some simple games together. I could feel how inclusive we were in the community and I was pleased that we were so popular among them.

This makes me reflect myself. When I was in primary school and secondary school, there were NET teachers but we seldom chat with them. We were not as enthusiastic as the students in Sri Lanka. I should chat more with the NET teachers in order to have cultural exchange. And I know the teachers would be glad if we could chat more with them and introduce more about Hong Kong culture to them. Now, we also seldom get along with the non-locals in HKU, maybe because of the language barrier. However, although there is language barrier among the students in Sri Lanka and us, we could still get along well. Hence, I think language barrier is not an excuse for us not to come in contact with the foreigners.

Teaching for just a few days could not make any significant effects to the locals and therefore we also decided to paint the wall and construct the pipelines in order

to produce some long-term effects. There were not many places to get water in the school. After we made more pipelines, it becomes more convenient for the students to take water. Besides, we also painted the walls, and painted a drawing which shows Hong Kong's distinctive culture – Tram.

During the process of wall painting and pipeline construction, the local students helped us a lot. We needed to dig before we put new pipelines. Nonetheless, as we seldom dig in Hong Kong, we were not strong enough to dig and we did it so slowly. They were so strong that they could dig very quickly. Besides, they helped us to take water when we were painting. They were willing to help and I could feel how helpful they were.

The school volunteering programme in Sri Lanka was really so amazing and it is totally different from schools in Hong Kong. Students in Hong Kong usually are indifferent. They would not actively help the others and seem to have no interest in the foreigners. Although Sri Lankans may not have a wealthy life, they are wealthy in their spirituality and we have plenty to learn from them.



