

Teachers and school at Deusa, Solukhumbu

Dev Chandra Rai – teacher of English

After visiting the school in October 2007, Marianne went trekking with a friend who had come to visit her. While at Deusa, she was able to enlist Dev Chandra to come as a porter/guide for the two-week trek.



Marianne and Dev Chandra: Gokyo Oct 2007

While on trek, Dev expressed his worries for his two young daughters' education. Dev, son of a local politician, had been fortunate in his education as his father had sent him to school in India. Returning to the district headquarters' town about 5 hours from Deusa to take his School Leaving Certificate, Dev's English in particular benefited from his schooling in Dehra Dun. Studying psychology at the university for a while in Kathmandu, Dev returned to Deusa without completing his course, fed up with city life and content to stay in the village as a farmer.

Dev told of the poor level of teaching – in particular English at the school. The pass rate of children taking their School Leaving Certificate was very poor.

When it was suggested that since his English was very good – much better than many English teachers that Marianne had already met, that Dev might consider teaching English at the school, Dev replied that he did not know how to teach. In response to this, he was asked what training or evidence could he see that the teachers at the school knew much better. Good point!

One very serious problem in Nepal is that the quality of teaching is very bad. Teachers receive minimal training; most teachers have a 'job for life' working at a government school and have little incentive to do more than stand in front of the class, reading the lesson from the books. There is a serious problem of absenteeism, laziness and beating children. In addition, teachers are very unwilling to work in the village schools, preferring if possible to work in the towns and in Kathmandu. There is always a shortage of teachers, with the government allocating about one teacher for every 50 students, regardless of the number of grades or classes. Teachers usually teach about four lessons a day, so rarely spend more than half the six hours of the school day teaching.

It was suggested that there might be no harm in trying to work as a teacher for a while at the school and seeing how he liked it. To overcome worries of not knowing how to teach English, Dev was sent a few useful books on teaching methods and teaching of English, which he read and put into good effect.

Following a few months working at the school as a 'volunteer' teacher, Dev accepted an offer to be paid by RAN to teach English.

English in particular causes Nepali students problems, as it is a compulsory subject that has to be passed in order to get through the School Leaving Certificate at the end of Class 10. As many teachers who teach in the village schools themselves come from village schools, where they have usually had a poor education, with little chance to use English, then English is often taught very badly.

In April 2008, as well as Dev teaching English, an additional science teacher was hired and two of the largest classes: Class with 90+ pupils and Class 9 with 79 students could be split to make more manageable class sizes. Rooms had to be found for the new classes, so rubble from a disused classroom was cleared to provide one room and a store room under the staff office was cleared of rubbish for another room. The students were recruited to help with the work and in a morning, two additional rooms were made free for the two new classes.



Class 10 students passing out rubble



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Dev playing: music lesson with Class KG

Although the official age for children to start school is 6 years of age, that almost half of the Class 1 children were under age and technically should not be at school at all. Their parents sent these children to school to get them out of the house, with older siblings bringing their younger brothers or sisters to school where often they fell asleep in the class or stared blankly at what was going on around. It was suggested that Class 1 be split into a kindergarten class and Class 1, so that the younger children would have to follow the lessons.

Science teachers

On appointing Dev Chandra to teach English, an additional science teacher started. The head teacher had identified weakness in not enough teachers to help him and another science teacher to cover the maths and science classes at the school.

Finding a science teacher willing to work in a remote village proved easier said than done. A newspaper advertisement in the national paper brought a few enquiries, though once aware of the location of the village, interest quickly disappeared. About seven applicants were shortlisted and interviews were arranged at a school in Kathmandu where teachers and a headteacher were helping to interview suitable candidates. Two of the shortlisted candidates failed to attend, no reason given. One candidate seemed very suitable and was offered the post. The following day however, he called to say that he had been received another offer in Kathmandu. The second choice candidate was contacted and seemed very enthusiastic. Then a few days later called to say that his wife did not want to go so far from the city. A third choice was then contacted, again seemingly enthusiastic. Next day, he called to say his parents advised him against going as it was so far.

Back to the drawing board and rather than advertise in the newspaper, which had not been very successful the first time, notice boards in all the science colleges and universities were plastered with notices: Wanted – science teacher for Solukhumbu. In the hope of attracting a local person from the region, the location of the school was very prominent.

Immediately there was an applicant, a science student from a village a few hours walk from Deusa who was very interested. Whilst not wanting to abandon his studies, he was unhappy living in Kathmandu and wanted to go back to the countryside, studying at a distance. Although he was not as well qualified as the previous candidates, he had passed all his exams with very high marks and on advice that teaching science to class 10 level could be done by any good 'Intermediate' level teacher, he was recruited.



Lila Kharki teaching Class 9 science



Ram teaching science to Class 9 (same classroom, but improved with charts etc.)

Personal reasons meant that Lila stayed one year only, so in August 2008 his replacement, Ram Kumar was appointed. Like Lila, Ram has no degree but had performed very well at Intermediate science and is a keen and enthusiastic teacher. From the Terai in the lower southern part of Nepal, he comes from the same district as the head teacher and other science teacher.

Tez Lama – Primary teacher

Girls from a school in Abu Dhabi raised some money in January 2008 which was enough to pay for a well-qualified and experienced teacher of English from Darjeeling. Mohan Shrestha was asked to help the head teacher for a year, to run the school more efficiently: the head teacher being an excellent and enthusiastic teacher of maths, but dispirited with the poor environment and challenge of managing at the school, he made a poor manager. Before leaving in April 2009, Mohan recruited Tez Lama, another teacher from Darjeeling to join the school to help improve the primary level teaching of English. Huge

improvements have been made in the teaching of English at secondary level but English at primary level was still very poor. Children have to start learning English from Class 1. Tez Lama started teaching primary English in November 2008.

Other projects at the school

On the first visit in 2007, it was observed that there was only one boys' latrine for 600 children (the teachers had two toilets however). Most of the children used the fields surrounding the school and for the girls, there was little chance of any privacy.

After explaining how unacceptable this was, villagers who met members from a German NGO working in the area were able to raise the problem of lack of toilets at the school, resulting in MedHimal building five well-constructed toilets for the school.



School toilets

Although two extra classrooms were made available by clearing out a disused classroom and a store room, this was not sufficient and plans were made to find some land adjacent to the school that maybe a farmer would be willing to sell to the school. When girls at a school in Abu Dhabi decided to have a dress-down day at school and sell ice cream, they raised 3,000USD that not only paid a teacher's salary for a year, but also contributed towards the cost of buying land next to the school, from a local farmer, also the village's shaman.

At least two more rooms were needed – though four would be better, so one could be used as a science lab and another as a library/music/resource room.

Within a few months, the nine wards that make up Deusa VDC came up with the money needed for a building, by allocating all of their quarter budget for the school. This was unheard of – never had all nine wards worked together like this before. The secondary school is the only school going up to class 10 within 4-5 hours; the lower secondary school at the far side of the village (2 hours away) only going as far as class 8.



New building under construction (October 2008)

A building was proposed and has just been completed. The budget raised was maybe half of what was really needed to build four good sized rooms, but a compromised was reached with a two storey block with a large classroom at the top and two smaller rooms downstairs. The large Class 6 (about 70+) students can not also be split into two more manageable classes. Class 5 with about 60 children will be able to use the large new classroom, while the lower rooms mean that one room can be used as a science lab, which is planned for the summer.



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Roger with students working on the water supply

At the same time that new classrooms were being built, a volunteer for the US visited the school and healthpost to help fix some water problems. The tank that supplied water to the toilets at the school was overflowing and flowing as a small stream in front of KG's classroom. This was fixed with the assistance of students supervised one morning by Roger, who then went up to get running water set up into the healthpost and toilets there.

On the land beside the school, it is hoped eventually to be able to build a small hostel for students and maybe some of the teachers. Accommodation is a problem in the village, where houses are widely scattered over a large area and there is very limited lodgings available for teachers who come from outside the village. The far end of the village and lower secondary school is situated up to two hours away, which means students after class 8 are obliged to walk a long way – or drop out. It has been estimated that a hostel would cost about 20,000USD to build.

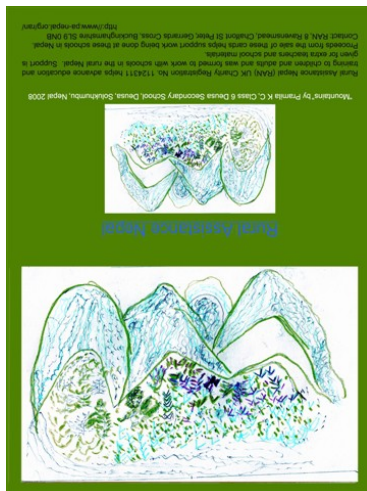
To help provide stationary and books for the school, coffee is being sold to raise funds. Arunjit Rai roasts coffee over a fire (electric roasting is only available in Kathmandu) and volunteers bring 10-15kg sacks of roasted beans to Kathmandu to be sold to friends. The profit is used to buy stationary and dictionaries for the school. In 2008, about 50kg of coffee was bought from Arunjit, providing him with a much higher price than the local market (there is no local culture of coffee-drinking), with a profit of over 200USD and 175USD going to the farmer.



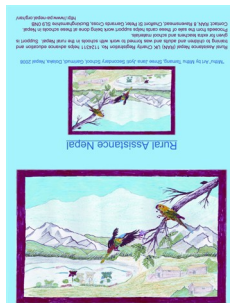
Arunjit Rai roasting his coffee beans

Encouragement is being given to villagers to grow coffee as a future cash crop. Although transport is a problem, with the nearest road being a few days' walk away, a road is being built that will link Saleri with the main East-West Highway and it is expected Deusa will have a road in the next two years. Coffee being planted now will start producing berries in two – three years, so farmers are being encouraged to plan for when they will be able to transport produce more cost effectively in the next couple of years.

Children from the school in Dolaka sent some drawings of their school and village; children in classes 6 to 10 had class competitions to draw pictures on the theme 'My home' and from these, a dozen pictures were used to print cards to sell to raise money. Some were sold in time to be used as Christmas greeting cards and so far over 100USD profit has been made, with just half the cards sold so far.



Mountain scene from Deusa



Birds and mountains from Garimudi



View down to the school, looking down from Deusa to the Dudh Kosi river below