

A report on teacher training in Laprak

English as a medium of instruction(EMI)

Richard Van Neste

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Trainers

Laxman Acharya

Headteacher at Mahendra Jyoti school

IPP (Immediate Past President) NELTA (Nepal English Language Teachers' Association) member

Years of experience of teacher training with British Council.



Krishna Parajuli

NELTA secretary

Lecturer of English at Drabya Shah Multiple Campus and Head of English Department

Richard Van Neste

Volunteer with Gorkha Development Scheme (GDS) and Gorkha District Health and Development Scheme (GDHEDS)

Teaching English at Mahendra Jyoti

Experience of informal education and providing facilitation training to volunteers in Kenya and South Africa



Participants

32 teachers participated in the training from 11 different schools

Organisers

GDS/GDHEDS Provided £90 for: transportation, accommodation for one night in Barpak for the three trainers, and porter for equipment on return hike
Laxman and Richard were volunteering on behalf of GDS/GDHEDS
£90 was under the predicted budget!

NELTA (Nepal English Language Teachers' Association) Provided: Certification, human resources, projector, materials

Manikama Devi Secondary School, Larpak Provided: Accommodation to trainers and trainees, venue, hospitality

Ganesh Himal Association Provided: Funding

Review and feedback

The journey to Laprak was great fun! For me at least... For the latter half of the journey, I chose to sit in the back with Vhabi Gurung. We chatted away about his work as a headteacher in Barpak and his dream of two years to hold this training. I joked that, sat atop bags of rice on an extremely bumpy road, the rice would become beaten rice by the end of the journey! A joke that seemed to go down very well in the back of the 4x4.



Photo credit: Krishna Parajuli

We stopped to look at the view over Barpak, the town renowned for being the epicentre of the earthquake. It was almost impossible to see the earthquake damage from this vantage point, but Laxman did notice how I was a “changed man” – barely recognisable as my pale skin was caked in dust! On the last part of the journey to Laprak, we saw many clusters of ‘temporary structures’ – people still living under tarpaulins or tin sheeting often simply propped up by sticks and weighed down with bricks. It’s hard to imagine living through a winter or monsoon in Laprak in such a shelter and what it must be like for the young, old, sick or for pregnant women. We got a taste of the monsoon weather when everyone in the back had to take hold of a tarp as we sheltered from a heavy shower to ‘arrive in style’ in Laprak!

Laprak is a small village on a steep hillside with cracking views of the mountains above (when the weather is clear enough). There are plenty of steps and a labyrinth of beautiful stone walls. The weather was mild during the day but cooler than Gorkha at night – cool enough to need a jumper for the first time in ages!



The hotel we stayed at provided simple and comfortable accommodation but most importantly, all the rooms were centred around a dining area. With many of the teachers having walked long distances to join us to stay in Laprak, this provided a great opportunity for us to socialise to build relationships and practice English.

We heard hard-hitting stories about the moment the earthquake struck. Vhabi showed me a video shot overlooking the hillsides on the opposite side of the valley from Laprak. You could hear people shouting and crying in fear as many landslides raced down and consumed the hillside. Within seconds, there was nothing to see but dust! Later, I was told a distressing story of how a group of young children were out in the woods collecting herbs when the tremors and landslides started and how these children never returned. It was awful to imagine the impact on this tightknit community.

The teacher training took place in a community building donated by a French NGO. Since we wished to deliver some PowerPoint videos and to share some YouTube videos, we really needed power to the building. Laprak has a small hydro plant and a committee can decide which buildings receive power at any given time. The committee was therefore asked to give us power for a set period of time each day to help us with the training.



Laxman, Krishna and I worked together on lesson plans in the evening and helped each other prepare posters and materials. We each delivered one session per day over the three days of training (total of 9 sessions) but co-facilitated; supporting each other as and when needed.

We focused on 'learning through doing' – practicing the activities that teachers could use directly in the classroom. Teachers learnt icebreakers, songs and group activities in sessions such as: encouraging reading/writing/speaking, use of mobile phone technology, grammar and pronunciation.



The standard of English of the teachers was lower than I had expected and they were also teaching younger students than I had thought they would be. This of course meant it was necessary to carefully tailor our training to their needs.

Just as I have found with students themselves, the standard of English is a little better than it first appears, as low participation at the start was due to both their English standard *and* their confidence, which grew and grew with each day of the

training. I expected the confidence of the teachers to develop over the three days (as it did), but I was pleasantly surprised to hear from many participants that they believe their standard of English had also improved, merely by practicing and socialising for three days.

There was a breakthrough moment for me on day two! Although all of the sessions had gone well (and were continuing to get better and better as participation grew), I felt a bit of a 'block' in my attempts to socialise and speak English with some of the teachers, especially the women who would often sit aside from the men as is common in Nepali society. Half way through day two, our session was disrupted by dancing and music from members of the Laprak community. We watched as they performed traditional dances in the square at the heart of the village, right outside our training building. I wondered whether it would be appropriate for me to get involved in the dancing! With a positive response from the teachers, I grabbed the attention of the most excitable male dancer to make me feel more comfortable about joining in. The local community and teachers were delighted! I was delighted! Although I don't claim to be any sort of dancer – my 'moves' were a real hit.



Later that evening, so many of the teachers (especially the women) came to me to tell me how wonderful my dancing was – “ekdam ramro” (very beautiful). At dinner, there were lots of conversations in English and the women were far more involved. Later, the door was open to one of the hotel rooms where many of the women were sharing. There was clearly a gathering in this room of both men and women so I asked if I could join. After trying out my new Nepali phrases, I was asked if I knew any Nepali songs. So, I had the chance to sing ‘Bistarai bistarai’ (‘Slowly slowly’ – a popular current Nepali song) again, the first two verses of the Nepali national anthem and the national anthem of England (Jerusalem). Before going to sleep that night, I had ‘very serious words’ with Laxman. I told him that “I would advise that future volunteers be encouraged to dance on day one to break the ice!”

On the final evening of training, there was heavy rain so we expected that travelling from Larpak all the way to Gorkha by vehicle would be impossible since the roads in the Larpak area quickly become a rutted mud bath! Our fears were confirmed when it started pouring with rain just as we finished the training at midday on Sunday (final day). The rain was so heavy, deep rivers ran the gauntlet of the Larpak labyrinth and we were forced to wait it out in the porch of the community centre. Plenty of time for a group photo with certificates and one of Laxman, Krishna and I with our tikas and topsis!



Photo credit: Krishna Parajuli



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The rain later cleared and we were able to hike for 4 hours back to Barpak. I was really grateful for this 'misfortune' as I relished the small challenge of the hike and the beautiful scenery. Reaching the top of the hill above Larpak to descend down to Barpak, the clouds cleared to give us some spectacular views of the mountains as we were lost in a landscape of vibrant fresh green trees, undisturbed by the site of settlements. It was necessary for us to overnight in Barpark to make an early start on the two-hour hike to catch our local bus.

There is a new settlement under construction in Larpak, which we saw on the hike back to Barpak after completing the training. Over 550 new homes are being built. They are small and simple, but are being built after concerns from flooding and landslides in the years before the earthquake. The 'deal' is that anyone wishing to take one of these plots must supply a large proportion of the stone for the construction. We saw many people hewing stone in the area

for this purpose. In return, the government will give the land for free and provide some of the materials for construction.



The new settlement lay among meadows of wild strawberries! I was delighted to be able to pick free and refreshing fruits (however small) – a real treat. This got me thinking about hiking songs... The first band to spring to mind was The Beatles, as I rightly expected my colleagues to know of them. “Strawberry Fields” of course!

Waking up in Barpak the following morning, we were a little nervous when we were still descending down muddy slopes and heard the sound of ‘our bus’ hooting in the distance as a final call to passengers. Fortunately, we made it - no trouble!

Laxman, Krishna and I were so happy with the way we delivered the training, worked together and the impact we made. Having reported this back to NELTA, discussions are now underway to see if further proposals could be submitted for NELTA and GDHEDS to work together to deliver teacher training, perhaps even whilst I am in Gorkha!

I would like to thank: GDS and GDHEDS for supporting this project; Laxman, Krishna and NELTA for inviting me to join as a trainer; the event organisers and other funders; Krishna for sharing his photos; and most importantly – the participants!

