

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

Taktse International School
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September 2014

U.S. 501(c)(3) agent:
The Marion Institute, Inc.
202 Spring St., Marion, MA 02738
www.marioninstitute.org

Sharlene Oyagi learned about the Global Citizens Summit for Youth ([GCSY](#)) at Harvard from her friend Yumi Kuwana, its founder. Sharlene invited Taktse students to apply, and generously sponsored Abhishek Subba. GCSY brings together a select group of international youth scholars and faculty for 8 days to discuss global citizenship, freedom and fairness in this ever increasing globalized and digitized world.

Global Citizen

by Abhishek Subba

As I sail through life, I sometimes bump into small openings to big adventures. Some of them I know for sure to ignore, but some bring an irresistible whiff of adventure. Global Citizens Summit for Youth (GCSY) at Harvard University was one of the latter. When I heard about it, I knew right away that I wanted to be a part of it. I did not know exactly what GCSY was, or what I would gain from it, but it seemed like a compelling opportunity.



I had to clear several hurdles to qualify for the program, including a TOEFL exam to demonstrate proficiency in English, and an essay for the application. From writing my essay in the cramped trains on my way to the TOEFL testing center, to enduring the sweltering heat of Calcutta to get my U.S visa, I knew this summit would be worth the effort.

I was going to spend the week I had worked so hard to earn at Irving House in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When I first stepped into the cool lobby area, I felt disoriented. There were many people milling about. None of them looked like students. At first, I thought I'd arrived at the wrong place, but then a (*continued on page 3*)

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Taktse at a Glance

Taktse International School was founded in Sikkim, India to provide a progressive, English-immersion education for future leaders. 35 students from kindergarten through 6th grade attended in 2006, the first year. The following statistics show how much Taktse has grown in just eight years.

K-12 Students	222
Boys/Girls	125/97
Boarders	61
Teachers	45

Taktse's students come from India, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand, and the U.S. They speak a variety of languages including English, Sikkimese, Dzongkha, Tibetan, Nepali, Hindi, Bengali, Thai, and French.



First Taktse grads start college!

TONERIDGE HALL



Taktse graduates Sagun Limbu and Simrin Tamhane arrive at Endicott College in Beverly, MA, and toast their fellow graduate and close Taktse friend Tenchung Namgyal, who is starting college at Mt. Carmel College in Bangalore, India.



Global Citizen (continued from page 1)

Japanese woman with a big smile and the energy of a lightning storm walked up to me. I knew she must be Yumi Kuwana, the founder of GCSY. She gave me a firm handshake and a warm welcome. I got a strong feeling that I would enjoy my time at Harvard.

Smiling, laughing people having quiet conversations, and sharing funny jokes and M&Ms, the scholars in the summit were eccentric, engaging, electrifying and enthusiastic about everything. From the very first moment, we all got along with each other like a key in its lock. Our bonds were strengthened by an Outward Bound experience on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor. The day was filled with



challenging and fun team-building activities. One group activity was standing on a blue plastic tarp and turning it around without setting foot on the grass. This required us to think outside the box, and although at first it seemed impossible, we somehow managed to do it. That gave us confidence that we, as a group, could persevere through the challenges in the days ahead.

My first challenge was adjusting to the open-ended Harkness method of having discussions at a round table where everyone participates. Each conversation felt like it was driven by a madman, veering in all directions. Even though I had read the materials thoroughly the night before, I felt disoriented. However, although I was thousands of miles away from Taktse, I was already thinking about literary devices, writer's purpose, switch in tone, and provocative language—all the jewels I had received in my English classes. I also realized how much of my culture I was carrying with me. At first, when I came to the summit, I wanted to be colored black and white, representing no nationality, no ethnicity, and no tribe from the Himalayas. But as I voiced my opinions in the discussions, I began to see myself as colored saffron, white and green—the colors in India's flag. I was influenced by my culture, as the others were influenced by their cultures. Realizing that I represented my community felt like seeing my own face in the mirror for the first time.

The diverse group at GCSY brought unique and authentic perspectives on different issues. Is the suffering of one worth the happiness of a thousand? Is the Honor Code more important than the Student Code? Questions like these would erupt like volcanoes in the back of my mind as the discussions progressed. After my first day around the Harkness table, I felt that



every one of the scholars was hungry to learn, which eventually led the discussions to topics we all wanted to explore.

It's hard to describe all that took place in that week in Harvard. The discussions and the reading were intense. It was exciting to discuss topics like deforestation with new friends. It was engaging to listen to distinguished speakers like [Howard Gardner](#) and [Bruno della Chiesa](#), even though I was scratching my head at times. GCSY was a lot of things, but the one thing it'll always be for me is a cultural medium where questions, ideas, and leaders are nurtured.

Beyond My Village

Years ago I was chasing a chicken in my village, Phodong. Following it out the yard, across the road, and into the jungle, this chicken taught me that my world was a lot larger than I had thought. Each time, it would run a little farther before it waited for me to pick it up and bring it home. Returning home, I would be chastised for staying out too long, getting my clothes dirty, and worrying everyone. But I kept going, discovering streams I could wade in, blade-like leaves, a rock with an ancient and forgotten message.

Now I can see beyond my village, and my state, and I have seen many different lands. I have visited the headquarters of Google, India, and sketched Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi, attended the International School of Asia, Karuizawa near Tokyo, Japan, and participated in the Global Citizens Summit for Youth in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

– Abhishek Subba





Summer Homework: **CREATE!**

*by Pintso Lauenstein
Principal*

This year, Taktse decided to try something new. For summer homework, we told the students:

***"Just create.
Create anything.
Whatever you want."***

Kids from kindergarten to 12th grade came up with an amazing range of creations from pencil holders to poetry, frogs to friendship bracelets, rockets to submarines, and more!

Don't miss this [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyFe_Tiz5dQ&feature=share) of students describing their creations:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyFe_Tiz5dQ&feature=share



Lisa Smulyan, Professor and Chair of Swarthmore College's Department of Educational Studies, visited Taktse with her husband Michael Markowicz in June, 2014. She provided professional training for Taktse teachers and staff, and worked with them to develop a study abroad program for Swarthmore students.

A Swarthmore Educator visits Taktse

by Lisa Smulyan

“What makes someone a good Taktse teacher?”

“Flexibility.” “Willingness to try new things.” “Being collaborative.” “Knowing your content material.” So began a professional development session with Taktse’s committed and competent faculty members.

What struck me about Taktse was the level of energy, engagement, and dedication to learning and thinking, from kindergarten students to faculty and staff. It’s an amazingly productive and positive place to learn, one comprised of people who are indeed flexible, collaborative, knowledgeable and willing to try new things.



During my two weeks at Taktse I became involved in teaching and learning through a range of projects. I taught a lesson to 6th graders on how to write a paragraph, working with Ms. Parmeela to think about engaging students by starting with what they know and allowing them to generate the rules and structures by analyzing examples. I met with upper school biology, geography and history teachers and their mentors to brainstorm lesson plans that begin with activities that arouse student interest and end with students applying what they know to new situations. (Want to teach about nutrition? Ask students to imagine they are trainers for Brazil’s World Cup team. What would they tell team members to eat right before and right after a big game? Why?)

I worked with both upper and lower school teachers to brainstorm what makes a good teacher and especially what makes a good Taktse teacher. From these ideas, mentor teachers and I developed a list of professional goals for Taktse teachers that can be used for self evaluation, hiring, and mentoring. The mentors and I also experimented with a problem solving process that allows them to share their expertise and knowledge with one another in their work to support teachers’ development.

I also challenged some of the 11th and 12th grade students with conversations about applying to college—conversations we will continue, with Ms. Malisha’s support, over the next year.

Taktse’s faculty, students and staff welcomed me into their community as a fellow teacher and learner. I look forward to our future collaborations.

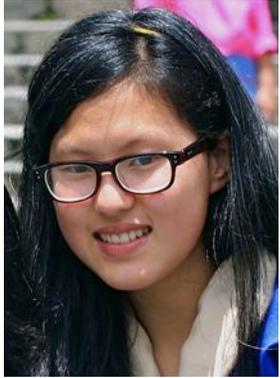


“If you wanted to hide, where would you go?” I asked. “Behind the bed!” “Under the bed!” “Next to the bed!” the kids replied.

“Well if you were a chameleon, you could change your color and hide in lots of different places and no one would see you.” And so I began my read aloud of *The Mixed Up Chameleon* by Eric Carle with engaged and articulate 5- and 6-year-old Taktse students.



In the winter of 2013, three Taktse students visited the United States for the first time. Through a connection made possible by Taktse friend Terryl Dozier, they had the good fortune to meet Dr. Maya Angelou at her home in North Carolina.



Remembering Dr. Maya Angelou

by Tenchung Namgyal

It was such an honor meeting Dr. Maya Angelou at her home. Having read her book Know Why The Caged Bird Sings for our 10th grade literature exams, we came to know how much she went through, and the obstacles she overcame. But when we actually met her, we were awed by the power she exuded with her shaky voice and fragile hands. How could we put in words the confidence her poem Caged Bird had given us in our English class at Taktse, when we were asked to stand on our desks and

recite each verse? How could we communicate that we understood what it feels like to be treated as inferior and to be discriminated against? How could we tell her that she freed us with her words, stories, and humor? We urged her to visit us in Sikkim. She didn't, physically at least. But in a way, she has already visited, and lives in each one of us. May you rest in peace, Dr. Maya Angelou. You are a caged bird no longer.



Looking for Dr. Maya Angelou

by Sagun Limbu

I wonder what her last words were. I wonder whose name did she whisper with her last breath. I wonder if it was painful. Or a silent content of her soul finally letting go.

Dr. Maya Angelou, I say her name and the memory clicks. Memory of me as a 14 year old who loved books. Memory of climbing on my desk with wobbly knees while my beautifully eccentric English teacher, Mrs. Denjongpa, urged me to scream the lines of Caged Bird for the whole school to hear.

*The caged bird sings
With a fearful trill
Of things unknown
But longed for still.*

This was one of my best English classes. Who knew that four years later, Mrs. Denjongpa would come again and ask me to recite the poem. This time, sadly, to commemorate her death. This time, the whole school did hear it.

My footsteps have travelled from my desk in ninth grade to following every word in her novel and finally, to her home in North Carolina. I have been blessed to sit beside



her, see her face up close, witness her kind lips turn into a smile and her shaky fingers turn the pages of her manuscript. I have heard her read.

She read. I listened. I listened with all the raw passion and focus of a 17 year old. What struck me most was that our visit seemed to mean as much to her as it did to us. She had a map of Sikkim laid out in front of her.

Maya Angelou made me realize the power of connection through writing. Had it not been for Mr. Lauenstein's connection to Mr. Terryl Dozier, and Mr. Dozier's connection with Maya Angelou, this would not have happened.

Maya Angelou made people remember how she made them feel. And she made me feel worthy. The caged bird has finally taken flight. I bet the sky was longing for this bird too.

I'd like to think her last words were: *Still, like air, I rise.* Because she does.

She rises. She rises. She rises.



Amalia "Molly" Siegel is a student at Dartmouth College. She spent her spring semester teaching English, math and music at Taktse. Check out her blog at: springinsikkim.wordpress.com

Taktse Farewell

by Amalia Siegel

I can't believe it's my last night at Taktse. Tomorrow at 6:00 a.m., I'll begin the long journey home. I have received incredibly kind treatment the entire time I have been here, but this week I have especially come to appreciate the warmth and hospitality that people have shown me here.

On Thursday, I went out for a special dinner with three 5th grade girls whom I have been tutoring in the hostel every night. Throughout my time here, I have seen them improve in reading and writing. It was wonderful to see their enthusiasm for reading grow. They were reluctant readers at first, but lately they have been begging me to read with them every night. If I had a positive impact on just a few students, I will consider my time here a success. These are just a few of the many students that I made connections with. I will certainly miss them!



Friday was my last day at school, and it was a special and busy day for me. In the morning, I led a music assembly for the whole school. The 5th grade class performed "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?" a song from the Disney movie Frozen, which they learned in music class this week. Then, the Ukulele Club performed "Leaving on a Jet Plane" and "Everybody" by Ingrid Michaelson.

During the last two periods we organized an "Authors' Day" for the 4th and 5th graders. Students came dressed as their favorite book characters, and everyone shared at least one piece that they had written. We decorated the A/V room and displayed the writing pieces for everyone to browse through. Most writing pieces were either memoirs or descriptive writing. After sharing, we had a grand party. The students all brought home-cooked food, and of course I stuffed myself because I wanted to be supportive and try all of their creations!



By the time the party was over I was completely full, but there was more food in store. During Professional Development, the teachers had a farewell cake for me. I did not eat any of the cake, but I cut it and posed for pictures. Even that, however, was not to be the end of the celebrations. After Professional Development, I was whisked up to the hostel where the students had prepared a special surprise. One of my fourth grade students took it upon herself to organize a hostel party with herself as MC, complete with shared tucks such as choco pies, popcorn, Wai Wai (uncooked ramen noodles), chocolate bars, and potato sticks. Students toasted me with juice boxes. One group of girls even sang a song for me: "Let it Go" from Frozen, which I had taught them. It was all very sweet.

On Saturday I was treated to a special farewell lunch with Ms. Rinzing, the resource coordinator, and Ms. Subani, the 5th grade teacher. We had delicious Indian food and afterwards went shopping for some last-minute gifts to take home. Since I brought a suitcase full of books for Taktse on my way over, I had an entire empty suitcase to fill with goodies to take home.



During my last week here, everyone has constantly asked me, "Will you come back?" or more often "When will you come back?" The answer is always a definite "yes," followed by, as people say here, "after some time." Thank you Taktse and Sikkim for a wonderful three months. I can't wait to come back! And so, armed with a good luck amulet for safe traveling, I begin the long journey home. See you soon, USA!



For the Love of Books!

by Amalia Siegel

Libraries, libraries! Books and more books! Taktse has a large and growing library, but it's a challenge to keep it organized, and choose new books to keep every student interested in reading. Taktse teachers just completed a massive reorganization of the classroom libraries to make sure that every classroom has its own library of books to get kids excited about reading. Previously, the class libraries had many books that were not appropriate for the reading levels of the students. Even with Taktse' focus on reading, the literacy teachers noticed that there are still too many students who are not reading at their grade level. Students need a wide variety of easily accessible books at their reading levels in the classroom.

First, we created a master list of good books at all reading levels for teachers to select for their classroom libraries. It seems like a simple task, but it required an assessment of every single book in the main library and the classroom libraries. This took many hours and a lot of judgement calls. We culled out the books we felt would not get kids excited about reading.

Taktse follows the Fountas-Pinnell system for guided reading. At the beginning of the year, each student is assessed and assigned a reading level from A to Z. This helps students choose appropriate books. Less than half of Taktse's books were leveled already. We had to figure out the levels of the rest by looking them up online. Sounds like you could just rip right through them, doesn't it? Not so. With Taktse's intermittent internet connection, leveling the books was a lengthy undertaking. I spent many late-night hours finding the levels of hundreds of books. Eventually we got through them all. But there were still several hundred books which had to be leveled by hand, which took a lot of skill and a little guesswork. Finally, a list of approximately 1,500 hand-picked, leveled books was finished.

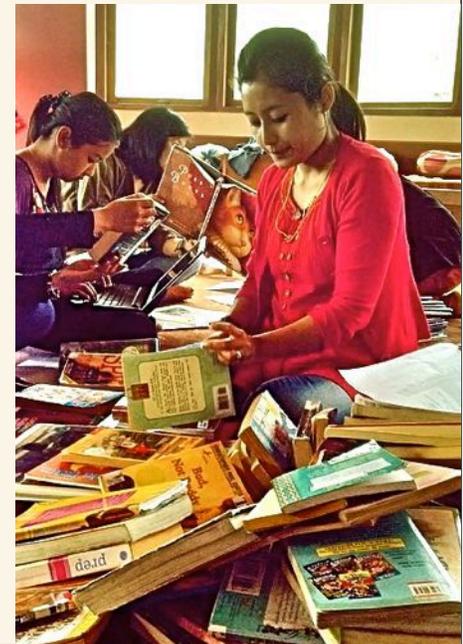


With the help of hostel students, teachers brought their entire classroom libraries (some in excess of 200 books) up to the main library, to exchange them for books on the master list. We sorted all the books from the classroom libraries and the main library into piles by level so teachers could easily select appropriate books to take back to their classrooms. Finally—choosing new books! It's like Christmas for teachers!

Conversations went on while determining the levels of the books, such as: "Hm, I think this book is level M." "I know it has big font, but look at those words. It looks more like a Q to me." "You really think it's harder than Mr. Popper's Penguins? I saw Tenzing reading it, there's no way it's a Q." "Does it have sex or violence?" "No....actually, wait. Yes, it does." "Then it has to be X, Y, or Z."

Ms. Rinzing and Ms. Srijana (the two librarians), Mrs. Denjongpa, Jane Randolph, two recent Taktse graduates and I led this project. While it still remains to be seen whether this exchange will get more kids reading, this was a great start. We now know which levels of books we need more of, and teachers have books in the right range of levels. They are more aware of which books they have in their class libraries, so they can recommend books to their students more easily. It's one more step in creating a functional system that gets kids of all levels reading enthusiastically.

I'm glad I participated in this project because I learned how much work goes into a seemingly simple task. "Re-arrange the classroom libraries" doesn't seem like such a huge task, but then you discover all the layers of complexity that go into something like this. It was wonderful to work with a team of teachers, librarians, administrators, and students who are so dedicated to reading and learning. The library is at the heart of the school. It's here that the students love of reading flourishes.





Thank you, Grace Ruhp, for your very generous donation of engaging books for Taktse students of all ages!

Vision for a Sustainable Future

Taktse is proud to partner with Sungevity to promote clean solar power for a more hopeful future. Sign up for Sungevity's solar energy lease program and they will donate **\$750** to Taktse. Plus, you'll receive a **\$750** credit! Click [HERE](#) to get a free quote!

Sungevity leases solar panels in the following states: AZ, CA, CO, DE, MA, MD, NJ, and NY. For a reference, contact Paul Lauenstein at 781-784-2986, or lauenstein@comcast.net.



Share Taktse with a Friend

Do you enjoy receiving the news from Taktse? Do you have a relative or friend who might also like to receive this newsletter? If so, please send their name and email address to Lonnie Friedman at: lonnie.friedman@comcast.net.



Megan Young Wiese of New York and her three children spent over a month at Taktse.

Conversations at Taktse by Bryson, Owen and Caroline Wiese

Among the highlights of our experience at Taktse were the “conversation seminars” conceived to facilitate cultural exchange and encourage dynamic discussion. Every afternoon, six to twelve students gathered off-campus at the Netuk House to debate a variety of topics chosen by students. We discussed subjects ranging from the influences of technology and the necessity of government to pop culture and social media in India.

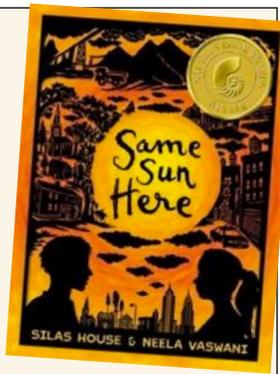
The participants came from Sikkim, Nepal, Singapore, Bhutan, Assam, and New York. The diversity of backgrounds led to very interesting discussions, especially regarding the merits of democracy versus monarchy. A student from Bhutan saw value in his kingdom’s highly effective monarchy, while Nepalese students said that their country was better off now that Nepal's monarchy has been replaced by a democratically elected government. Another student, from autocratic but efficient Singapore, was able to point out faults in the chaos of the democratic system: “there were pigs in the street when I arrived here.”

Sikkim’s proximity to Tibet led to fascinating comments when we moved on to violence as a form of resistance and protest. Our understanding of Himalayan, Indian, and world culture has been enhanced through these discussions. The Taktse students feel the same.



Taktse Wish List

Please support Taktse students by donating books and ebooks to stir their imaginations. See Taktse's book wish list at Amazon.com. Amazon gift cards help too!



Other valuable teaching aids:

- [Simple Touch Nooks](#)
- [V.readers](#)
- [Legos](#) (Taktse kids LOVE Legos!)
- [littleBits](#) (discount available)
- [Digital Microscopes](#)
- [iPads](#) (any version, new or used)
- Apple (Mac) computers (especially laptops)
- Apple Store gift cards for educational iPad apps, educational movies and TV shows
- [Engineering is Elementary curricula](#)
- Subscriptions to magazines such as National Geographic, National Geographic Kids, Scientific American, The Economist, Discover Magazine, Hopscotch for Girls, Boys Life, Odyssey, Faces, Science Focus, BBC Knowledge, Click, Make Magazine, and Parents Magazine.

Mail subscriptions to: Taktse International School
PO Box 90, Gangtok, Sikkim, India 737101

Donated items can be sent to:

Taktse International School
c/o Lonnie Friedman
4 Gavins Pond Road
Sharon, MA 02067

Are you acquainted with authors of children's books? Help us connect with them, so our students can write them letters! You can send their contact information to: lonnie.friedman@comcast.net



Are you a teacher?

Taktse is seeking experienced high school teachers in physics, chemistry, literature, writing, economics, math, history, geography, and A-level examinations; elementary and middle school teachers; and librarians, educators and teacher trainers who can work with us for three to nine months.

Taktse is in session from March to December. Food and lodging are provided. An honorarium is negotiable, depending on experience. For more information, see: taktsefellowship.org, or email Ms. Rinzing Bhutia at rinzing.bhutia@taktse.org.



World Cup at Taktse!

