7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

“Are you even *that* Indonesian?” a small kid asked as he listened to my broken Bahasa that I spoke with a tinted accent. I took a step back in doubt, wondering why I was affected so much by what he asked. *Am I that Indonesian?* Is there a line between being *that* Indonesian and *just* Indonesian? Growing up as an expat kid, I’ve had challenges connecting with my own background. As I made contact with a sea of different cultures wherever I lived, I felt out of touch with my own, and witnessed many other individuals struggle through what I do too: language.

Although I lacked the accent, perfect pronunciation and mountain of vocabulary, I had the motivation, love for my culture, and desire to help the Indonesian community. I felt that my way of feeling connected to my ethnicity was to help others feel connected to theirs and wanted to use my bilingualism to benefit others.

I jumped at the opportunity to teach Indonesian expat kids in Oman Bahasa and volunteered at the embassy. Teaching young kids to speak their native language, something which I think is important to allow them to connect with their background, I learned how they had trouble feeling part of the Indonesian community. Seeing myself in them, I wanted them to embrace their culture through language. Consequently, I lead classes by conducting activities such as baking and arts and crafts to integrate Bahasa into day-to-day \_\_\_ as I believed that this was an effective way to get them to speak Bahasa in ‘normal settings’ and to not feel like they’re learning a foreign language, but their native language. Their home language.

As the hardships of the pandemic hit, I held weekly online classes for a group of Indonesian refugees and migrant workers from Timor Leste to teach them to speak English. Despite communicating with them through a screen, I could see how enthusiastic and curious they were. Through the speakers of my laptop, I could hear how eager they were to learn and I felt touched to have the opportunity to use my bilingualism to help the Indonesian community from anywhere in the world, whether it be here in Oman, or in Timor Leste.

As a person who has lived outside of their home country for almost their whole life, I realize that language does not have to be an obstacle to feeling part of a community. I hope to bring my enthusiasm to the diverse community of the University of California, travelling around the world while on campus.