Title: Rural Innovation in Nepal
Name: Nimesh Ghimire
Image/Video: https://vimeo.com/131204250

Between January and June 2015, Peace Innovation Lab (founded by Nimesh Ghimire ’15 in 2013) worked on a number of steps to promote innovation and creative problem solving at the grassroots in two districts of Nepal: Lamjung and Palpa. Nimesh writes, “We are in the final stages of strengthening the existing makerspace in Lamjung, where Peace Innovation Lab (PIL) has been running its activities for almost two years.” Recent outputs include 52 hands-on, interactive courses for Grade 9 and 10 students designed by two PIL Fellows and a pledge by Microsoft Innovation Center in Nepal to donate 20 desktop computers to the Lab. The Rural Technology Lab (RTL) – the second iteration of the PIL – in Tansen, Palpa was set up in May 2015 in collaboration with MIT’s D-Lab along with support from the Project Pericles Fund of Swarthmore College and the US Global Development Lab. Nimesh describes, “The goal of the RTL is similar to that of a community makerspace, except its focus will lie more on collaborating with local entrepreneurs to brainstorm and prototype affordable technology solutions to local enterprise related challenges.” The inaugural Palpa Design Summit -- hosted by the Rural Technology Lab in May 2015 -- brought together 13 engineers and 5 local entrepreneurs for a five-day, hands-on experience to work on improving and/or creating low-cost technologies (e.g. designing and/or improving low cost ginger processor, etc) that directly support local enterprises. Looking back upon their experience so far, Nimesh reflects, “Treating local community as ‘share-holders’ has been one of the core focus of the project – to ‘design with the end-user.’ We have learned that engaging the locals, including local governance groups and community leaders, as shareholders helps design the project from the ground up and ensures ownership of the project. Further, having a core local person to run the Lab, supported by a local advisory board comprising of important local stakeholders, has been critical to gathering local support required to run the project. This collective, local engagement has been critical in helping our team navigate local adaptive challenges associated with project design and delivery. We have learned that forging collaborative partnerships across the spectrum – i.e. from grassroots to regional to national – right from the inception of the project is very critical to paving way for scale up of proven practices and models. Through this collaborative network, we have been able to share ideas and learning from the field, tap into national collaboration (Govt. of Nepal, National Innovation Center) to explore further partnerships with organizations doing similar work and work together to create scale-up frameworks for similar model within Nepal.

Links: PPF page

Title: Teaching English and Science, Learning from Experience
Name: Fatima Boozarjomehri ’17
Image:

As part of her internship with Koodakekar, a network of NGOs based in Iran that support street children by combating illiteracy, increasing access to education, and engaging in educational reform projects, Fatima teaches children English and basic science. Fatima reflects, “My experience exposed me to children who came from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds. Not only was I learning to work with students whose families came from low
socioeconomic class, but I was also working with children who were experiencing extremely high levels of social stigma due to differences in their culture and heritage, their families’ health status, and their physical appearance.” The students had outstanding progress with the curriculum. Fatima explains, “For their age group, and with the stress they live with—children working for hours on end, still not coming up with enough money to help feed their family, most of them suffering from malnutrition—their improvement in school was extraordinary. The students absorbed the material even better than we had expected in the few weeks at the end of the school year in which we introduced the new curriculum.” Relating her academic work to her internship experience, Fatima notes that her internship field work contradicted findings from a project she completed in the “Transition to Writing” class at Swarthmore College. She writes, “When I was doing research for the project [about rural Iran], I came across studies that stated that impoverished communities, along with not having the facilities and access to education, do not value it and don’t work towards it—mostly because they, themselves have not received education and don’t see the necessity of education in their lives, thus they do not see an urgent need for it in their children’s lives. [However,] I did not find this to be true in the population I worked with. The families here are extremely eager to send their children to school if they can financially afford it and are very consistent in following through, making sure their kids are completing their homework...This attitude shocked me because none of the papers I had studied [previously] referenced this type of behavior. Some families even went so far to take...money out of the amount they usually put aside for food, so that they can sign their kids up in school.”

Title: The Stage of Life
Name: Michaela Shuchman

The Stage of Life, the Lang Project of Michaela Shuchman ’16, is an acting curriculum designed to introduce middle school students in Philadelphia to the life skills gained through the study of acting. In the 14-15 academic year, Michaela implemented her project at a public charter school in Philadelphia, Jackson Elementary School. While each individual student created and performed her/his/their own monologue in the fall, the class came together to write a play for the end of the school year. Michaela elaborates, “the students started out writing individually based on their experiences and then were thrown into the deep end by having to perform solo on a stage. Though this was a scary moment for most, when they proved to themselves that they could do it, I saw firsthand how quickly the students’ confidences grew. Then, the students came together to write a play. They took the skills they had learned writing alone and applied them to writing together. By the time they got to the performance of the play, having studied acting all year and conquered the monologue festival, they were completely ready to show their work.”

“This year has solidified my beliefs even more that theater is crucial to have in schools,” says Michaela. Highlighting the impact of the Stage of Life, Michaela shares this story, “[One particular student] started out the year very defiant. He wouldn’t participate in any of the activities and looked like he was in physical pain when I would ask him to do something on his own. [His classroom teacher] would often take him aside to reprimand him for not being respectful. During the monologue festival in December, he didn’t have any of his
monologue memorized and had to be prompted the entire time, even during the show. However, even that was a step forward from where he had started the year when he wouldn’t get on stage at all. Then, throughout the second semester, he really started to come out of his shell. I always could tell that [he] was very bright and saw things very clearly. When I asked him questions, he always knew the answer. Starting second semester, he volunteered his intelligence on his own. He would raise his hand to answer my prompts and liked giving feedback to other students. I think he would make a fantastic director. He had a significant role in the final play that he chose himself and had his lines memorized weeks before the performance. Then, in a reflection paper that [his classroom teacher] gave out at the end of the year, [he] said that he had wished he had come into his own as a talented, young actor earlier in the year. THIS is what acting can do. The class gave [him] the chance to find his voice and realize his potential and importance to the rest of the class.”