



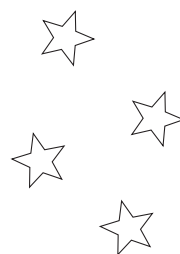
All of us have learned important lessons from our various life experiences. Finding ways to share those lessons with one another can be an effective teaching and learning innovation.

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LEARNING THROUGH SHARED HUMAN WISDOM

☆ The word “democracy” comes from two Greek words, “demos” and “kratias.” “Demos” means people and “kratias” means power. Therefore, the very essence of the word “democracy” refers to “power of people.” The reason I focus on this word and its meaning is that because my entire life, career, and way of thinking have been founded on this philosophy of putting people and their power at the center of every conversation. I started teaching at the age of 17 and I have had the honor of meeting many incredible people whose stories I have contributed to. Sometimes, they shared something that would pull me out of the trenches to soar the heights of newer experiences.

Deepak Ramola | Project FUEL



Very early on in my career, I found myself in a classroom in a city called Punjab in northern India. About 80 students were in the class. As I was going through introductions—one child after another after another—I came to a boy who had an injured eye. I turned to him and said, “Tell me about yourself.” Before he could say anything, I saw some of the students around him laughing at him. They called him names and that made him furious. His face became red and he looked ready to punch somebody. So I took him by his hand and brought him onto the stage at the





front of the class. Everybody was perplexed about what I was going to do.

I asked the boy, “Do you study like everybody else?” He said, “Yes.” I asked, “Do you come to school on your own?” He said, “Yes.” I asked, “Do you play a sport?” He said, “Yes.” I asked, “Do you like to paint?” He said, “Sometimes.” “Do you like to sing?” He said, “No. I won’t risk that.” Then I turned to the class and asked them the same set of questions: “Do you play a sport?,” “Do you study?,” etc. Everybody responded with a resounding, “Yes.” I turned back to the boy and said, “You do exactly what they do with just one eye. Who is more talented?” He looked at me perplexed for a moment, but then I saw his face light up with realization of his own potential and value.

If we can provide every single child in our education system a narrative, a positive story about themselves, that they can carry throughout their lives out into the world, we can give them the ammunition to fight the battles of perception, bias, bigotry, confusion, and self-doubt. We would give them support to draw on whenever they feel lonely, depressed, or vulnerable.

Time for a Change

Most education systems around the world today rely heavily on conventional methods of teaching. Yet the challenges and needs of contemporary life necessitate innovative ways for us to teach our children life skills. If you



saw a former teacher on the street, you likely wouldn't say something like, "Hey, that is my English teacher. He helped me get full grades in English." But you may stop to admire a teacher who taught you deeper life lessons and say, "That is the teacher who taught me how to respect everybody and the value of time and how to love myself."

To create a positive and accessible environment in which to build positive life narratives, every student must be able to see people around them as a source of inspiration and learning. Only when we identify value in those around us can we truly shape our classrooms as the world and learn beyond the textbooks.





My mother was pulled out of school when she was in grade 5 by her grandmother, who felt that education was not meant for girls. Rather than focus on that lack of opportunity, my mother always emphasized that life is our biggest classroom. To me, that meant that everyone who is living is learning something and I wanted to go find out what they were learning.

The Lessons of Life

Inspired by this philosophy, I founded Project FUEL in 2009. FUEL stands for “Forward the Understanding of Every Life Lesson.” The FUEL methodology rests on the principle of documenting life lessons emerging out of authentic personal or social experiences. This collected learning is used





to design an interactive program for training and teaching purposes, using creative arts tools, performance and interactive workshops, art-based community initiatives, and digital content. From working toward integration of Syrian refugees in Europe to painting the world's first village of life lessons, our projects encourage creative solutions and provide tools for students to learn through immersive engagement.

The main impetus of the project stems from the belief that every person has their own unique insights in life, but that human beings unfortunately do not tend to share these insights spontaneously. Working creatively with the notion of life lessons allows groups of people to share

ideas and viewpoints and build a sustainable connection. The whole movement thus exudes a great democratic outlook of inclusion, empowerment, and equity, all while encouraging students and adults to adopt a life-long perspective about learning through human encounters. A grandmother in rural Nepal can influence a data scientist in New York. A Maasai woman can teach skills of adapting and integration to survivors of human trafficking.

In 2018, in an effort to celebrate teachers and preserve individual knowledge, Project FUEL started the "Out of Syllabus" project. We trained students in 21st century skills, such as filmmaking, interviewing, data documentation, and design. The students





then went on to interview every single school staff member, and created a wisdom corridor featuring their stories for everyone to benefit from year after year. We believe it is important to reimagine role models, focusing on accessible models with whom our children spend significant time—their teachers—instead of on social media celebrities. We value teachers as walking human libraries.

A Future of Discovery and Connection

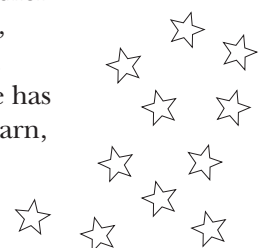
Imagine the seven billion people on Earth today. How many of those seven billion stories do we know? Each pattern derived from studying the data set of life lessons we have documented over the years show that we need to be able to teach our children how to hold space for each other. It should not be just about getting better scores and being great employees, but also about being great human beings. With that emphasis, no matter what career someone goes into, they can have authentic human connections.

Our students have to become our collaborators in the education system, not just mere beneficiaries. They can no longer be considered empty vessels to be filled with information. I think that will help us craft meaningful communities full of discoveries and not differences. Teaching students to learn from others helps them acknowledge that everyone in the world brings a certain amount of unique experience and value with himself or herself. By learning via life lessons, one becomes open to learning what we might



not otherwise learn by ourselves in our own situations. If you listen closely, you will hear stories that become life lessons. Your life lessons. What you deciphered, interpreted, and pulled out from living the life you live. The event that changed you, in small ways and big. A lesson you never forget. A lesson that has a story behind how you learned it. A lesson that runs deep in you. A lesson you pass on carefully, gently, willingly—as others have done for you.

Project FUEL is a living promise to build a tomorrow where the goal of education is not to turn our students into stars but rather honor them as constellations—of stories, lessons, folk tales, failures, victories, and, most importantly, the faith that everyone has something to teach if we are willing to learn, always and in all ways.



Project FUEL Approach

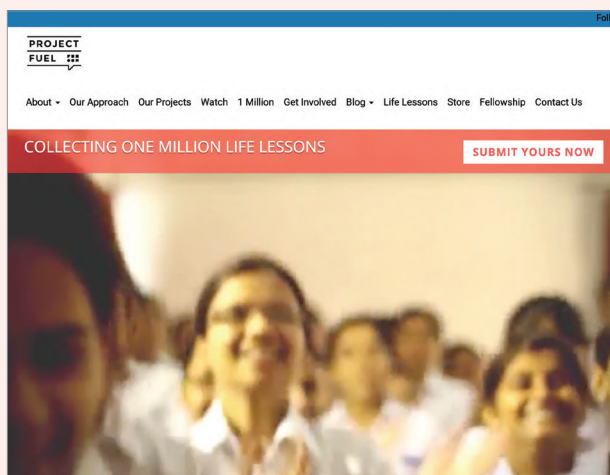
Project FUEL focuses on sharing life stories through an eclectic mix of performance and interactive mediums like theater, storytelling, creative writing, and spoken word poetry. Learning is passed along through workshops, blogs, short films, community events, and conferences. Their mission is to make each life count and to touch as many lives as possible through varied approaches. Their work contributes to enhanced emotional quotient, communication skills, and self-awareness.

Education

Project FUEL designs educational modules and programs for teaching and training purposes. Using the award-winning FUEL methodology, they create curriculums that employ creative tools like poetry, arts, theatre, creative writing, filmmaking, and performance arts. The core idea behind the methodology is to teach people to learn from others. FUEL's methodology has been recognized as one of the world's top 100 innovations in education by Finland-based organization HundrED and adopted by the City Education Board of Antwerp, Belgium, and organizations in Pittsburgh, U.S.A. This has encouraged adaptive and positive behavior in people to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, including areas like mental health and personal growth.

Art

Project FUEL collaborates with artists from all around the world to create artistic interpretations of life stories and wisdom on different mediums. Be it as a part of creating an open-air gallery in an abandoned village, or running a digital art campaign on pressing social issues, art provides different perspectives and interpretations of human wisdom. The medium helps in presenting an opportunity for open dialogue, heartfelt interaction, exchange of ideas, mutual learning, and shared wisdom between people from all walks of life. A creative interpretation showcases how one story opens the doors for art to express it.



Media

The stories of people with rich and diverse backgrounds have inspired a series of digital short films, documentaries, and episodic series. Each of the films tells stories of an individual or a community, often in their own voice, and also acts as a cultural and wisdom preservation tool. The films present diverse perspectives, experiences, and stories of overcoming different challenges that life throws one's way, in an effort to help share solutions and inspire people around the world.

Digital Humanities

Using digital tools, we study, interpret, and present the wisdom and stories of people collected through research. This medium helps Project FUEL combine visual and wisdom anthropology that exists in the world and further sparks awareness about the diversity of lifestyles, as well as the coping mechanisms that people employ to create a meaningful life. Using the tool of technology, it is easier to connect and exchange information to ignite hope and global participation in an unbiased and creative way. This collection and exhibition of human wisdom invites people to engage, contribute, and learn in an artistic and interactive way.