



Open Learning Exchange

Introducing the Open Learning Exchange

Everyone has a right to a basic education. It is a prerequisite for the world to eliminate poverty, hunger and social injustice and to achieve a thriving and peaceful world. Yet, although it is a stated priority of virtually every nation, progress has been distressingly slow. Thus the Open Learning Exchange grows from this sober assessment: Relying on current education development models, the world cannot achieve Universal Basic Education in our lifetime. Wholly new models are essential and OLE offers a powerful one.

The Open Learning Exchange, Inc. (OLE) is a global network of local organizations in the lesser economically developed parts of the world introducing an innovative model for improving education that communities and their governments can employ to achieve Universal Basic Education (UBE) by 2015. OLE perceives that achieving this ambitious goal is now possible if the world takes advantage of four dramatic changes:

- 1) *Increasing appreciation* throughout the world that UBE is a pre-requisite for global peace and prosperity is providing strong support for innovations.
- 2) Financial *resources* are increasingly available to achieve this goal. Economically developed countries are more ready than ever invest in education throughout the world.
- 3) *Opens source copyright* provides a legal framework for authors to make their educational resources freely available thus radically reducing the cost of education.
- 4) *Information and communications technologies* are rapidly becoming inexpensive and available, even in the more remote areas of the world. This enables sharing of information, at a speed and cost unthinkable a few years ago.

OLE's strategy is making these new dynamics available to developing nations and their communities as they move quickly toward UBE by 2015.

What do we mean by Universal Basic Education? Certainly the core skills of reading and numeracy, but more than that. OLE believes that a person with a Basic Education can:

- Read local newspapers, magazines and books
- Complete job applications
- Write letters to friends and employers
- Keep simple, accurate financial records
- Engage in productive and uplifting work
- Employ healthy agricultural, nutritional and environmental practices
- Promote cooperation and manage conflict
- Create and participate in music, art and culture
- Contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of one's family, community and nation.

OLE's Strategy

OLE believes the responsibility for basic education lies first and foremost with the governments of each nation. Our overarching goal is to help governments fulfill this responsibility more effectively. However, we recognize that many governments are finding it difficult to introduce the innovations needed to achieve UBE, let alone to do so quickly. Some of these constraints are internal. Notwithstanding their stated goals, governments in general, including ministries of education, are risk adverse, and slow to change. They are also relatively isolated from innovations, including many forms of new technology emerging in the business world. OLE has experienced that governments understand the need, and usually welcome, local but independent agencies to catalyze improvements through innovations, especially for their education systems.

As independent NGO's within each country, OLE Centers test new ideas, measure their effectiveness within their country and then advocate for the unique changes that are needed for their country to achieve its educational goals. Each OLE Center has a strong national Board and is led by a full-time team of (often) young, well-educated and dynamic indigenous "social-entrepreneurs." These committed, passionate people constitute the driving force of OLE Centers. They come from the business world, government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions. Each Center closely cooperates with its government, is a catalyst, it:

- Demonstrates cost-effective learning innovations using open source educational resources and appropriate technologies;
- Measures the effectiveness of these innovations; and,
- advocates for its government to make the human and financial investments needed incorporate these innovations to achieve Universal Basic Education by 2015.

OLE is a highly effective and scalable model of multi-stakeholder cooperation. We strongly encourage each Center to employ a community-based approach involving local "sweat equity" investments within each community in order to build and strengthen the total learning environments of their children. This co-investment model is working. When local communities "own" their schools, though technically they are public schools, they tend to be stronger and more effective.

Six Innovations

The OLE model for achieving UBE by 2015 involves six tangible innovations, applied in concert with each other, creating an aligned movement that is proving to be effective.

1) A "Course Development Studio" — *a set of software tools for generating, downloading, localizing and translating open-source educational content from around the world.* Local curriculum developers use the Studio application on their computers to prepare appropriate educational courses, for use in print or online, complete with a link to an educational standard, a

suggested teacher's guide, lesson plans and ways to measure achievement. One can create easily a new language version of the Studio by simply filling in a table, in any language script, with local terms. This makes it easy for educational content to be also created in any non-national language or dialect, such as Qechua or Telegu. While the Studio has been developed for the creation of local K-12 educational content, its potential uses for other learning objectives for virtually any subject and age group are enormous. This responds to the needs of minimally trained teachers and other groups for complete packages of course materials.

2) A "National Teachers' Library" — *a nation-based, on-line resource for teachers of free, ready-to-use, country-appropriate k-12 content*. The materials include rating scales and comment sections enabling teachers to share their assessments. We approach technology realistically, presuming that for some time most underserved students will not have Internet connectivity in their schools and will not even have electricity. Therefore, much of the content in each of the country-based National Teachers' Libraries is being prepared in a format that can be printed on paper and distributed to schools through existing delivery systems, using programs, such as the UN World Food Program. The Libraries will also contain interactive content, designed for teachers and students who at some point may have access to computers and the Internet.

3) Evidence-based Practice -- *empirical evidence of what works and what doesn't in each country*. It is not sufficient to simply "believe" a given approach will be effective. There must be evidence to support or reject each innovation. The Centers' research and evaluation programs are used to direct practical improvements in the effectiveness of educational innovations and to provide the evidence needed for any broad acceptance of such innovations.

4) Public awareness and advocacy -- *urging governments to make the human and financial investments required to achieve Universal Basic Education by 2015*. This is critical aspect of OLE's work requires major investments by each nation, sometimes in collaboration with donor countries. OLE Centers cooperate closely with ministries of education but remain independent organizations, able to move quickly, test and then advocate for effective innovations that are often difficult for governments to undertake with their current structures and incentive systems.

5) Coordination with other initiatives – *working with the other prerequisites for UBE by 2015*. Effective teachers and quality content cannot by themselves achieve UBE by 2015. Students need a nutritious diet, health care, a secure living environment and a community that supports learning for their girls as well as their boys. Basic education of young girls has a huge positive impact upon the quality of life in communities and thus this is a major objective for all OLE Centers.

6) Global Networking of Educational Innovations – *sharing ideas and practices that are effective in the developing world with other nations*. Through the OLE global network, the innovative solutions of one nation are shared openly and freely with other nations, building a body of evidence about ways that enable a country to achieve UBE as well as ways that are less effective.

OLE International

OLE International is helping to create a global learning-and-action community of those dedicated to achieving UBE by 2015 throughout the world. It serves as initial sponsor and ongoing supporter of a rapidly increasing number of nation-based OLE Centers around the world. It helps Centers become established by providing administrative and technical advice and limited initial seed money. As OLE develops, OLE International will serve as “secretariat” of the emerging global OLE Network. At that point it will be supported mostly by OLE Centers’ membership fees and fees for such services as:

- Advice on creation of their National Course Development Studios and Libraries
- Provision of a free online Billion Kids Library that includes:
 - All of the free and open educational content developed by each OLE Center
 - Open source software for educational purposes
 - A catalog of ICT hardware that can be used in developing countries
 - Examples of effective testing and assessment tools for schools
 - Teacher and Leadership training materials
 - An Organizational Development Toolkit to help Centers become sustainable
 - A database of people ready to volunteer their services to Centers
- Regular dissemination of innovations and experimentation in education including lessons from the national OLE Centers
- Technical support on cost-effective evaluation and measurement techniques for educational innovations in low income countries
- Links with innovators designing new technology products, with the possibility of influencing the next round of educational technology development based on lessons learned from national OLE Centers
- A back-up Central repository of teachers’ library resources, and technical advice on virtual library management
- A forum for discussion of advocacy techniques and experiences with integrating innovations into large government ministries
- A link to central funding agencies, like the World Bank, to inform them of the promising educational innovations being undertaken by OLE Centers that may scale up
- Contributions to the deepening debate on the inclusion of meaningful social and cultural outcomes as part of the each country’s educational standards
- Channeled and/or brokered financial support from donors

OLE's Progress

Launched in 2007, OLE has made strikingly rapid progress. Observing how quickly OLE Centers have become established — with extraordinarily strong and influential boards and highly effective (often, but not always) young, social entrepreneurs — has helped convince us of the power of the OLE model. OLE leaders throughout the Network are giving up more lucrative employment to volunteer, or near volunteer, as committed leaders of this mission to ensure basic education to all children.

In only one year the OLE Network has generated four active OLE Centers: Nepal, Ghana, Rwanda and Dominican Republic; and we are in the process of helping launch OLE Centers in China, Haiti and Bolivia, among others. Although the initial material cost of establishing a center is small, the human and financial demand for start-up assistance in establishing Centers far exceeds OLE International's current ability to respond.

Some highlights so far include:

- **OLE Nepal**, in less than one year, is now financially self-supporting. Its 20 staff members are developing curriculum and managing a yearlong pilot program involving a detailed assessment of the effectiveness of student-owned laptops in two rural schools in Nepal.
- **OLE Ghana** is about to launch a major program of "Innovative Learning Teaming" that will assist the some 25,000 untrained teachers in Ghana's rural areas. It will provide teachers with in-village, in-service training.
- **OLE Rwanda** is currently working with the Ministry of Education, using the Course Development Studio to create free and open locally adapted courseware for schools throughout the country.
- **OLE Dominican Republic** is developing a strong Board that has explicit support from the government to demonstrate innovative ways to achieve UBE by 2015.

Even though the responsibility for developing, localizing and translating materials rests with each Center and their in-country partners, OLE Inc. is successfully obtaining educational materials from a number of publishers. For example, MIT's OpenCourseWare program, which includes online resources from roughly 80 percent of MIT's courses, has made its entire database available to OLE International for inclusion in its Billion Kids Library. In addition, Educators for Social Responsibility, an international organization widely respected for its k-12 courseware on conflict resolution, has offered OLE their materials to make them free and open throughout the world through our Billion Kids Library. Several other publishers, including Primary Source and the National Geographic Society, have made similar commitments.

Several U.S. public school systems have also entered into agreements with OLE International to participate in courseware development and develop leadership and teacher exchange programs in cooperation with OLE Center programs throughout the world.

Organization

The Open Learning Exchange, Inc. is a tax-exempt, non-profit Social Benefit Organization incorporated in 2007 and registered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA under section 501(c)3 of the U.S. tax code. Funds to support OLE have been received from foundations, corporations and individuals. OLE's first Annual Report can be accessed from the company's website (www.ole.org).

The Board of Directors comprises:

John Cook, Retired Chair and CEO, PRG-Schultz International, Inc.

Astrid Dufborg, former Executive Director, Global e-Schools & Communities Initiative (GeSCI)

William Foote, President and Founder, Root Capital, Inc.

Anne Margulies, Chief Information Officer, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Kitt Sawitsky, Co-Managing Partner, Goulston & Storrs

Paul Smyke, Senior Advisor to the Chairman, World Economic Forum

Richard Rowe, Ph.D., Chair and CEO, OLE International

Additional team members of the OLE International leadership team include:

James Krzywicki, Chief Operating Officer

Charles Kohl, Chief Technology Officer

Joseph Rappa, EdD, Chief Education Officer and Regional Coordinator, The Americas

Thomas Oates, Chief Development Officer

Robyn Gordon, Regional Coordinator, Sub-Saharan Africa

Andrew Wetmore, User Experience Director

Paul Cezanne, Lead Software Engineer

OLE's founder, Dr. Richard Rowe, was Director of the Test Development and Research Office of the West African Examinations Council, is a former Associate Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and former member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education. He currently serves as a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Technology and Education and, at the request of the Clinton Global Initiative, has submitted a proposal related to the CGI's special initiative for education in Haiti.

OLE's expenses for its first six months were \$276,000. More than half of these funds have been invested in technology development. During this period OLE received funds from Foundations: \$100,00; Corporations: \$39,000; and Individuals: \$170,000

OLE's Proposed Budget for 2009 is \$2,700,000. \$2,000,000 is for OLE International, which includes an Educational Advisory Group, the Technology Team, four Regional Coordinators and management. An additional \$700,000 is for Supplemental Startup Grants to emerging Centers.

For more information visit our website (www.ole.org) or send an email to info@ole.org