



We hope you enjoy this edition of *OLE Nepal Newsletter*, a bi-monthly email newsletter from Open Learning Exchange (OLE) Nepal. It provides current news and information about the organisation and its activities and will keep you up to date with OLE Nepal's work to provide high quality education for children in Nepal.

Mid-Year Refresher Training

In its three years of existence, OLE Nepal has pioneered the field of ICT integrated classroom teaching-learning process through the preparation of curriculum-based digital learning materials and rigorous teacher preparation programs. However, it has not been a one shot effort for OLE Nepal. Rather, the programs have gone through numerous iterations in our effort to make them more effective and applicable in the local education context. OLE Nepal has engaged all relevant stakeholders in the process through field monitoring and discussions with students, teachers, parents, trainers, curriculum experts, school supervisors, resource persons, and educators.

Preparing teachers to integrate ICT in the classroom teaching has been central to OLE Nepal's implementation of the One Laptop Per Child project. The preparation process includes eleven days of intensive training at the beginning of the school year followed by four days of mid-year refresher training. This program is designed to not just build teachers' ability to use technology to teach effectively, but also to build their confidence in this new method of teaching. A large part of the preparation is practice teaching followed by three days of in-school training where trainers and colleagues observe teachers conducting ICT integrated classes.

In the continuous bid to better equip the teachers, OLE Nepal modified the mid-year training in response to requests from teachers involved in E-Paati integrated classroom teaching. Whereas last year's mid-year refresher included three days of residential training with one day of in-school training, this year OLE Nepal decided to conduct the refresher program on-site at the schools. Train-



ers from OLE Nepal and National Center for Educational Development (NCED) believed that in-school program will enable teachers to get more individualized attention and allow trainers to address issues that are unique to each school. The program was designed for trainers to spend two days in each school, and included classroom observations, discussions on E-Paati integrated teaching and E-Paath content, technical troubleshooting, etc.

This new refresher training approach was first tried out in seven OLPC program schools in Mustang district. Two trainers from OLE Nepal, Mr. Sunil Pokharel and Mr. Tika Raj Karki, and one from the NCED, Mr. Suka Dev Sapkota, visited the schools during second half of the month of September, 2010. They were accompanied by a technical expert from OLE Nepal, Mr. Krishna Giri, who not only helped solve technical issues at these schools, but also trained selected teachers on technical troubleshooting.

As expected, the response from teachers in Mustang was overwhelmingly positive. Teachers saw this as a great opportunity to have their queries answered, while trainers appreciated the opportunity to learn about the challenges faced by teachers. Trainers sat through E-Paati integrated classes conducted by each teacher in the schools and assessed

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Open Learning Exchange Nepal
Tel: +977-1-554-4441, 552-0075
PO Box 8975, EPC 2394
Kathmandu, Nepal
info@olenepal.org

www.olenepal.org
blog.olenepal.org
www.pustakalaya.org

the teachers' progress after nearly two years of program implementation. Trainers observed that teachers were more forthcoming with their problems when they were at their own schools as opposed to being in a larger group in combined residential training.

Based on the success in Mustang, OLE Nepal plans to conduct similar refresher programs in the other five districts in November. One of the biggest advantages of this approach was that trainers got to observe each teacher using the E-Paati actively in the classroom, unlike the previous refresher trainings where only a select number of teachers conducted the classes. Since they spent two days in each school, trainers got to learn about the daily functioning of the school that otherwise was not possible in earlier model of refresher training.

OLE Global Assembly

The second annual Open Learning Exchange Global Assembly was hosted by OLE Rwanda from October 11 - 14, 2010 in the capital city Kigali. This annual event serves as a meeting point for OLE Centers and Partners from all over the globe to share ideas and practices to improve educational standards, and to discuss strategies to leverage each other's achievements towards reaching Quality Universal Basic Education (QUBE). The inaugural Assembly was hosted by OLE Nepal in Kathmandu during the first week of November 2009, and focused around Center strategies, proposal development, effective monitoring and evaluation, and use of open source content and low-cost technologies to create scalable innovations for teachers and students. This year's theme focused on uncovering what works - a major requirement for achieving QUBE. Participants of the Assembly explored and recommended ways to evaluate the effectiveness, and lack thereof, of different strategies for scaling quality

education to all children. This theme was especially important because of the failure of so many educational innovators to assess the effectiveness of their programs as well as because of the difficulty in measuring success.

The event was inaugurated by Rwanda's Minister of Education Dr. Charles Murigande while OLE International's Founder and CEO Dr. Richard Rowe welcomed all the participants. In addition to Rwandan officials, teachers, educators, and social entrepreneurs, the Assembly saw active participation from delegates from Australia, Malawi, Ghana, Uruguay, Kenya, India, USA, Mexico, and Nepal. OLE Nepal was represented by its Executive Director Mr. Rabi Karmacharya and a member of the Board of Directors, Mr. Jyoti Man Sherchan, who is also the director and principal of Malpi International School in Panauti, Kavre.

A total of six case studies were presented during the Assembly, followed by discussions on approaches taken by Centers and partners in these countries. OLE Nepal's unique

approach in implementing the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) project was specially relevant ahead of Rwanda's plan to deploy 100,000 OLPC laptops starting next year. Most participants felt the need to translate OLE Nepal's educational activities E-Paath as well as the teacher training package so that they can be used in other countries. Other case studies included India's RIVER project, Uruguay's volunteer mobilization to support OLPC, Ghana's teacher training program, and the TeacherMate project. Participants also visited two schools where the OLPC and TeacherMate projects are being piloted.



Image Caption

E-Paatis in Solukhumbu

The students of Phaplu Community School got a surprise treat this past Dasain in the form of E-Paati laptops, thanks to the joint effort of OLE Nepal, the UN World Food Program, and a local partner, Himalayan Health and Environmental Services Solukhumbu (HHESS). A total of sixty E-Paatis were distributed to students from grades 2, 3 and 4. The school also received five E-Paatis to be used by teachers. The students were handed specially designed school bags with a separate compartment to carry the laptops.

Phaplu Community School was established in 2005 by HHESS and Cunina Nepal to provide quality education to children from socially and economically marginalized communities. Located in Rokding, an hour and half walk from the Solukhumbu District center, Salleri, the school strives to educate students from Dalit and local indigenous groups on full scholarships.

Transporting the laptops to this remote mountainous region was not an easy task since there are no roads linking Phaplu to outside world, and the small local airport does not have

regular flights due to unpredictable weather conditions. Because of flight cancellations, OLE Nepal and HHESS team arrived in Phaplu three days behind schedule. Upon arrival in Phaplu, OLE Nepal's team of a trainer, a project manager and an engineer immediately got off to work setting up school infrastructure and training teachers. Meanwhile, HHESS mobilized the local community members to carry the laptops, server, charging racks, and other equipment down to the school.



Image Caption

During their stay in Phaplu, OLE Nepal's trainer Mrs. Kamana Regmi trained five teachers on how to integrate ICT in classroom teaching. Mrs. Regmi was assisted by project manager Mr. Subir Pradhanag and engineer Biplab Singh. Since the teachers had used computers

to varying degrees in the past, it did not take them long to get acquainted with the E-Paati, and the training was focused more on how to use E-Paath activities to deliver effective and enhanced learning environment for the students. The ease with which teachers use and navigate through these activities determines how well they could integrate them in their classrooms. Once they were comfortable using the activities, the training moved to cover more complex topics including preparing lesson plans to integrate ICT, conducting classes effectively while using E-Paati, better time management, instruction designs, expected challenges and their possible solutions.

OLE Nepal's team successfully set up the school network consisting of the school server and three access points in the classes, and made sure that students could access E-Pustakalaya hosted in the local school server from their E-Paatis. They also worked with a local electrician to install necessary electric circuitry to power the server, charging racks and access points. Keeping in mind that local involvement is instrumental in the success of the program, OLE Nepal's team trained a local volunteer to do basic

troubleshooting, updating E-Paatis, and maintaining the network. The teachers were also shown a video of two model E-Paati integrated classes taken at Vishwamitra Ganesh School in Lalitpur. They found this video extremely helpful in understanding the concept of ICT-integrated class.

The team also assisted the teachers in ensuring that students got well acquainted with their E-Paatis. As was the case everywhere else, students were very quick to learn their new educational tool. Within the first week of getting the E-Paati, they were comfortable with navigating through various E-Paath activities as well as

other educational applications that were available. Once both the teachers and the students were acquainted with their E-Paatis, the teachers conducted their first ever real ICT-integrated classes in the presence of the OLE Nepal trainer. Although a little nervous in their first attempts, the teachers soon demonstrated their potential to successfully conduct classes using E-Paatis.

Overall, the first ever deployment in Solukhumbu was quite successful, and a follow up visit is planned within the next couple months to ensure that the school and teachers are able to run the program successfully. It was especially

rewarding for the team to be able to bring E-Paatis and this innovative learning opportunity to students in this remote and backward region of the country.



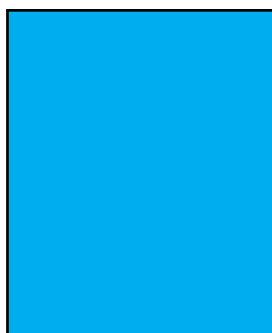
Image Caption

New Board of Directors

During the third Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the organization that was held on October 6, 2010, Dr. Prativa Pandey stepped down as the Chair of the Board of Directors (BoD) of OLE Nepal. She has been succeeded by Mr. Mohan Das Manandhar, the immediate past Vice Chair. OLE Nepal owes much of its success to the able leadership of Dr. Pandey and the full support of the BoD during the three years since the inception of the organization. Although the past BoD became official only when the organization was registered on September 17, 2007, all the members have played instrumental roles in forming the organization as well as setting the vision and strategies.

Owing to their increased professional commitments, Mr. Siddhant Raj Pandey and Mr. Satish Krishna Kharel informed the Chair that they will no longer be able to continue serving on the BoD of OLE Nepal. As the Treasurer of the organization, Mr. Pandey helped prepare the financial plans and procedures for the organization with emphasis on transparency and financial accountability. Although Mr. Kharel served as the Secretary, he was also the main advisor on legal matters. He helped prepare all the organization documents such as registration and policy papers. Both Mr. Pandey and Mr. Kharel will continue as general members of the organization.

During the AGM, two new additions were also made to the BoD: Dr. Bidya Nath Koirala, a familiar and well-respected name in education, and Mr. Prithvi Bahadur Pande, a renowned and eminent banker.

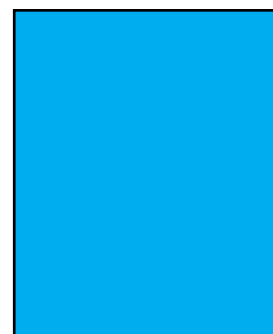


Dr. Bidya Nath Koirala is a professor at Tribhuvan University's Department of Education. He is also coordinator of the M.Phil in Education program

offered by the department. Dr. Koirala has participated in various projects such as the preparation of three-year plan of the National Planning Commission (2010), development of curriculum to ensure women's rights in Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan through The Asia Foundation Nepal (2009), and preparation of strategic plan for Equal Access Nepal (2009). Amongst Dr. Koirala's numerous awards are the Education Award (1993), Mahendra Vidya Bhusan (1998), Honor of Senior Educator (2008), and Peace and Progress Lifetime Award (2008).

Mr. Prithvi Bahadur Pande is the Chairman and Chief Executive Director

of Nepal Investment Bank Ltd. As one of the leading banks in the country, NIBL provides various retail and corporate banking products and services in Nepal. Ever since leading a consortium of investors to buy Credit Agricole shares in Nepal Indosuez Bank, and renaming it the Nepal Investment Bank in 2002,



Mr. Pande has successfully led NIBL in delivering world class service through the combination of latest technology and visionary management.

Mr. Pande has over 25 years of experience in the banking sector.

The new Board of Directors of OLE Nepal is as follows:

- Mr. Mohan Das Manandhar: Chair
- Dr. Sudhindra Sharma: Vice Chair
- Mr. Anil Chitrakar: General Secretary
- Mr. Prithvi Bahadur Pande: Treasurer
- Mr. Jyoti Man Sherchan: Secretary
- Dr. Prativa Pande: Member
- Dr. Bidya Nath Koirala: Member

Agriculture, Food & Nutrition Content development

OLE Nepal in partnership with the UN World Food Program has embarked on a project to develop interactive digital content to promote agriculture, food and nutrition amongst school children. These activities will be modeled after the E-Paath modules that OLE Nepal has been developing in English, Nepali and mathematics over the past two years. OLE Nepal's curriculum expert and software programmers will be assisted by three agriculture, food and nutrition experts to ensure that relevant issues in these topics are adequately addressed. These activities will be in Nepali language, and will be correlated with the grade 5 'Science, Health and Physical Education' subject prescribed by the National Curriculum.

This project's main goal is to address the issue of food insecurity – availability, accessibility and utilisation – by developing interactive digital learning activities and implementing them in daily classroom teaching practice. The learning activities coupled with clear instructions and training to teachers on hands-on agricultural and environmental practices will not only

enhance students' appreciation of the role of proper agricultural procedures in increasing productivity, but also the importance of diversified food types to meet the nutritional needs. We envision that including an agriculture component will help forge a more harmonious relationship between the children and their environment. In addition, these activities will also teach students areas such as the important role of hygienic preparation and handling of food in minimizing malnutrition, as well as the various nutrients contained in different food types and their importance in our bodies.

Students will be encouraged to transfer the knowledge gained through these activities to parents and community members. It is hoped that they will apply their agricultural and nutritional knowledge and skills learned at school on their own farms and homes. The content will provide agricultural knowledge and skills, and make the teaching of science and environmental education more relevant and effective. It will benefit children as the future food producers, and nurture a better respect for land and agriculture, and make them more aware of nutritional values.

The new E-Paath activities, like all our other activities, will be accompanied by a teachers note detailing how to integrate the lessons and exercises package as well as suggested practical hands-on activities children should do outside the classroom, into the classroom to promote exciting but effective teaching practices. These suggested hands-on activities could include planting and nurturing a tree, germinating a seed.

Collaboration with Wildlife Conservation Nepal

Wildlife Conservation Nepal (WCN) and OLE Nepal have started discussions on developing digital content to educate school children about various aspects of wildlife and conservation. WCN has been working with local communities, civil societies, scientific communities and conservationists in areas such as environment protection, natural resource management, promotion of sustainable use of natural resources. Amongst its various initiatives, WCN implements innovative programs in schools and communities, and disseminates information on wildlife and conservation to society at large. The organization develops awareness on conservation issues through trainings, seminars and workshops. With WCN's rich experience in running nature conservation activities amongst school children and OLE Nepal's

expertise in developing fun and exciting digital learning activities, the partnership will help create interesting activities that will raise awareness about the importance of various conservation issues. By utilizing digital features such as audio, animation, and text, these activities will engage school children in finding solutions to global and local environmental problems and encourage them to be more active in conserving nature in their surrounding areas.

OLE Nepal has also been appointed to the Project Steering Committee of Nepal Prakriti Pathshala (NPP), a joint initiative of WCN and Danish Forestry Extension. The objectives of NPP are to run mobile environmental outreach program and to develop practical and action oriented approach to environmental education.

Latest Developments

Network update

OLE Nepal's team of network engineers have been working relentlessly to improve and stabilize the Internet connections in the OLPC program schools in Kapilvastu and Makwanpur. In the previous issues of this newsletter, we had reported that the team had successfully connected the schools in Kapilvastu to the Internet - the first schools in the district to have Internet access. The schools in Makwanpur have been enjoying Internet access for over a year, thanks to the partnership with Nepali Wireless Project. However, maintaining a stable network in these harsh and unforgiving terrain is proving equally challenging as setting up the network in the first place.

During the process, the network team has gathered invaluable insights that have helped them to strengthen and stabilize the network connections so that students and teachers can continue to enjoy access to the wide array of resources available on the Internet.

To stabilize the network connection in Kapilvastu, the team erected a 40 foot triangular tower at the Tikkari relay point on a hilltop in the nearby Argakhanchi district. Previously, the team had installed the antenna on a treetop, but after the wind and weather constantly altered the antenna direction, the team decided to erect the tower with the help of Mr. Mahabir Pun, the de facto wireless guru. While Mr. Pun arranged for the tower to be built and transported to the location, OLE Nepal's team worked with the local school communities to procure and haul construction materials such as cement, gravel and sand up to the top of the hill. After the tower was erected, the team installed 3 Mikrotik radios with 30 Dbi external antenna on the tower to ensure robust connection to the three program schools in Kapilvastu. With the antenna towering over the surrounding trees and other obstructions, there is now an unhindered and clear line of sight to all the schools. Although the construction of the tower was not in the original plan, it will become valuable in future when we expand the network access to not just schools in Kapilvastu, but also in Argakhanchi. OLE Nepal is also seek-

ing to provide the local school in Tikkari with few computers so that the local students can also reap the benefits of the tower near their school. This will also ensure protection of the tower and equipment against theft and damage.

During the process of supporting the network in Makwanpur, the team discovered the importance of protecting the radios against lightening strikes. Since the network equipment are installed at a level higher than the surrounding trees and landmarks, they are relatively more prone to lightning strikes that can sometimes damage the equipment beyond repair. Keeping this in mind, the team researched various earthing options before they implemented a multi-level earthing system in the two relay points in Makwanpur. The earthing connection ensures that exposed conductive surfaces are at the same electrical potential as the surface of the earth. Additionally, all schools and relay points have also been equipped with surge protecting circuitry to protect the devices against frequent voltage fluctuations.

Currently, the Internet connection in all five program schools in Makwanpur are up and running. OLE Nepal has also installed VoIP (Voice over Internet protocol) phones at the schools. These phones that use the network connection enable schools to have free and direct communication link to OLE Nepal and other program schools. This convenient mode of communication has greatly improved OLE Nepal's interactions with the schools.



Image Caption

E-Pustakalaya

In its continued effort to make reading materials freely available to all, OLE Nepal has broadened E-Pustakalaya's Nepali literature section by adding books from the comedy genre. Shisnu Pani Nepal, Nepal's first publishing house solely dedicated to comedy, has agreed to provide OLE Nepal will all their published works to be made available to readers through E-Pustakalaya. The materials have enabled OLE Nepal to introduce famous authors such as R.C. Rijal, Laxman Gamnage, Bishnu Prabhath and many others to E-Pustakalaya readers. Humorous works have proved to be extremely popular amongst E-Pustakalaya faithfuls, and emails have been coming in regularly requesting more uploads of similar titles.

In an effort to improve our art section in E-Pustakalaya, OLE Nepal has also compiled several coloring books. Children will now be able to print out the pages and color in the images. All instructions are available in both English and Nepali.

OLE Nepal has also installed the E-Pustakalaya at the Kathmandu Valley Public Library in partnership with the Nepal Library Foundation (NLF). The public library established in 2003 now serves almost 200 people on a daily basis, and boasts over 600 registered members. OLE Nepal added a server pre-installed with E-Pustakalaya and connected it to the four existing machines through a local network. This resulted in a total of five computers available for users to access E-Pustakalaya without having to connect to the Internet.

OLE Nepal is currently working to classify titles based on grades six through ten, and have been making a concentrated effort to upload materials suitable for these grades. We hope that such a measure will help students and teachers to make E-Pustakalaya a bigger part of their classroom teaching-learning process.

* Schools and organizations interested in setting up E-Pustakalaya and E-Paath through local school network should contact OLE Nepal at info@olenepal.org.