OLE Nepal Newsletter
साझा शिक्षा ई-पाटी
OLE NEPAL

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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 organization and its activities and will keep you up to date with OLE Nepal's work to provide high quality education for children in Nepal.

Year End Review

The One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) project in Nepal started in April 2008 with 135 students from grades two and six in two test schools in Lalitpur receiving *E-Paati* laptops along with 22 teachers trained on laptop integrated teaching methods. The *E-Paatis* were pre-loaded with curriculum-based interactive educational activities, *E-Paath,* which is an integral part of this novel approach. It was a humble beginning for an ambitious project that aims to transform education by improving quality and access through the integration of technology in the daily teaching-learning practice. With the long term vision to bring a systemic change, OLE Nepal went beyond simply equipping classrooms with hardware and connectivity, and set out to demonstrate an effective and scalable implementation model that put major emphasis on curriculum-based digital educational materials and teacher preparation. The partnership with the government was given high priority to ensure active participation from various institutions and agencies under the Ministry of Education. This partnership proved to be critical in building local capacity needed to expand and sustain the program in the long run.

As of today, there are over 2500 students in 27 schools spread over seven districts who are benefiting directly from the OLPC program. Although this number

may seem pale in comparison to 500,000 in Uruguay and 150,000 in Peru, Nepal's effort has drawn worldwide attention due to its unique approach to integrating laptops in daily teaching-learning process. While the large deployments in South America were the initiatives of their respective governments, the Nepali initiative was started by a small organization in partnership with the government. The movement was able to get off the ground with support from the Danish Embassy's Local Grant Authority, the UN World Food Programme, the Danish IT Society, the OLPC Foundation and few individual donors. Nepal was the first OLPC deployment where significant time and effort were put into developing educational content that matched the national curriculum and preparing teachers on delivering effective lessons in English, mathematics and Nepali subjects using digital content. By April 2011, OLE Nepal will have an entire set of learning activities for grades two to

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four in English, Nepali and mathematics, and for grades five and six in English and mathematics. These learning materials are being made freely available to everyone.

Over the past three years OLE Nepal has been changing classrooms across the nation. From the remote schools in the far western district of Dadeldhura to the overcrowded classrooms in Kapilvastu, OLE Nepal's effort is transforming the way education is being imparted to students. Evidence has shown that children are not the only beneficiaries

Wishing you all a Happy New Year 2011

from the OLE Nepal family

of the program; more than 130 teachers in the 27 schools have gained valuable knowledge and experience in conducting ICT-integrated classes using the *E-Paath* learning activities. OLE Nepal has also developed a digital library, *E-Pustakalaya*, with the support from Canada-based Nepal Library Foundation, that can be accessed on the Internet (www.pustakalaya.org) as well as locally through school servers.

Students of Gyanodaya School, Lete, Mustang using E-Paati

While students and teachers continue to enhance their learning experience through access to *E-Paath* and *E-Pustakalaya,* OLE Nepal's network team have worked relentlessly to connect the schools to the Internet. The geographical remoteness of the schools, the unforgiving terrains, and the lack of infrastructure made this task quite daunting. The team overcame many obstacles, and never hesitated to climb hills and trees, and successfully brought Internet connectivity to schools from Dadeldhura to Kapilvastu.

Although the current bandwidth will not allow all students to access the Internet simultaneously, the connection has opened many possibilities to both teachers and students while making it much easier to communicate with the schools and monitor the technical equipment remotely from OLE Nepal office.

Reflecting on the first three years, Founder and Executive Director Mr. Rabi Karmacharya, believes OLE Nepal has been successful in demonstrating that it is possible to implement ICT-integrated programs in classrooms in Nepal with a well-thought out plan executed through available resources trained in the new methodology. He adds, "Not only have we taken the first big steps towards bringing about a change in the way we think of education, but over the past three years we have developed a working and scalable model to implement the OLPC project with available resources."

The success of this model is apparent in the fact that various OLPC implementers from around the globe have turned to Nepal for ideas and suggestions to ensure success of their own programs. Last June, a representative from the African Innovation Foundation visited Nepal to see how the project was being implemented here so that they could develop strategies for their own implementation in Angola. Furthermore, we have been assisting the OLPC project in Rwanda with our content and technical support, and have been in discussions with implementers in states of Uttar Pradesh and Manipur in neighboring India on how Nepal's experience can be leveraged to facilitate their programs.

Looking forward, OLE Nepal's short term goal is to saturate grades two to six in the existing schools by 2011, and to work with the government to develop a scaling plan for ICT-integrated classes. OLE Nepal has also been assisting the Ministry of Education on developing an ICT in Edcuation Master Plan, while continuing to refine and strengthen the OLPC model.

## Literature for Young Adults: Content Creation Project

OLE Nepal has started an ambitious project to create content relevant to young adult in Nepali literature. Over the span of two years we spent collecting and archiving works of Nepali literature, we realized that there was a real dearth of literary materials for young adults between the ages of eleven and eighteen. After a number of discussions on this topic, *E-Pustakalaya's* Advisory Panel met on November 30, 2010 at OLE

Ganesh Ghimire of OLE Nepal demonstrating the E-Pustakalaya

Nepal office to plan the content creation process to meet the literary needs of teenagers in Nepal. Currently, books for young adults are like a drop in the ocean. This section of Nepali literature has long been neglected by authors as

it is considered to be unprofitable. We need books that answer questions that young people do not get to ask parents or other adults.
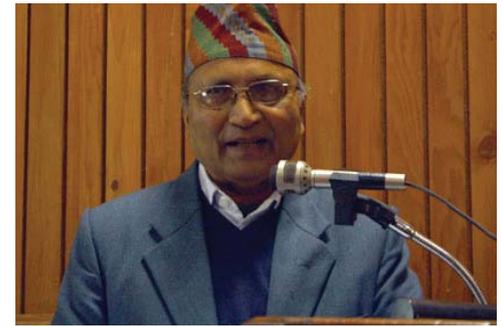
Dr.Churamani Bandhu presenting his paper at the seminar

The panel decided that we needed to better understand the social and psychological issues relevant to Nepali youth before starting the content creation process. Hence, a seminar was organized on the December 22, 2010 in Kathmandu to discuss the various issues, problems, and challenges faced by young adults in everyday life. The seminar was attended by eminent authors, artists, teachers, students, social workers, parents and others related to the literary field.

The program began with OLE Nepal's Founder and Executive Director Mr. Rabi Karmacharya welcoming the guests and giving a brief introduction on OLE Nepal's pioneering activities in ICT-integrated education. This was followed by a short demonstration of the digital library, *E-Pustakalaya*. Then Prof. Churamani Bandhu, a prominent writer and a member of OLE Nepal's digital library advisory panel, presented a paper on the state of young-adult literature in Nepal. This was followed by another panel member and prolific author, Mr. Vinaya Kasajoo, shedding light on the importance of young-adult literature, as well as on various issues such as youth psychology, emotional state, and socio-psycho-economic factors affecting the youth of today. Then the floor was opened to all participators to share their thoughts on what the writers should address in this new genre of literature.

Participants raised various issues that literary works for young adults should address. On the social front, speakers drew attention the the fact that problems related to young adults are not uniform across regions and socio-economic strata, and that those from urban and middle class families face different sets

of problems from those in rural areas and from poor communities.

Many participants felt that literary work should provide guidance to young adults who are going through a phase filled with confusion related to hormonal and physical changes, sexual curiosities, education, career, freedom, responsibilities, relationships, etc. These confusion and

Mr. Vinaya Kasajoo presenting his paper at the seminar

changes could lead to many behavioral problems amongst young adults when they do not know where to turn for answers. Literary work should provide information that young adults need in making right choies and decisions.

Adolescence is the time when friends start becoming closer than family members. Hence, peer pressure is a major issue at this time in life, and many young people end up picking bad habits such as smoking, drinking, and using drugs as a result of their desire to fit in with others. Furthermore, many teenagers feel that they are grown up and mature and can make their own decisions, but adults continue to treat them as children. The generation gap between the youth and adults also cause a lot of misunderstanding between them and become a cause for tension and rebellious behaviors.

Participants also emphasized the need to give special attention to issues faced by girls during adolescence. In addition to being discriminated against at home in favor of their male siblings, they become more conscious of their bodies as they grow up, and with the lack of information or adults to talk to, they often become introverted and detached from others.

Technology has become an integral part of life amongst young adults, especially in urban areas. In many cases, the addiction with technology has seriously curbed social interaction between young adults and other family members. While social networking sites allow them to stay in touch with friends, they also provide them with a place to express their feelings without being judged by adults.

Other topics that were discussed included cultural sensitivity, civic responsibilities, trend to go abroad for education and work, etc. The information and suggestions collected at the seminar will be used in a series of writing workshops that OLE Nepal is planning to organize in the near future.
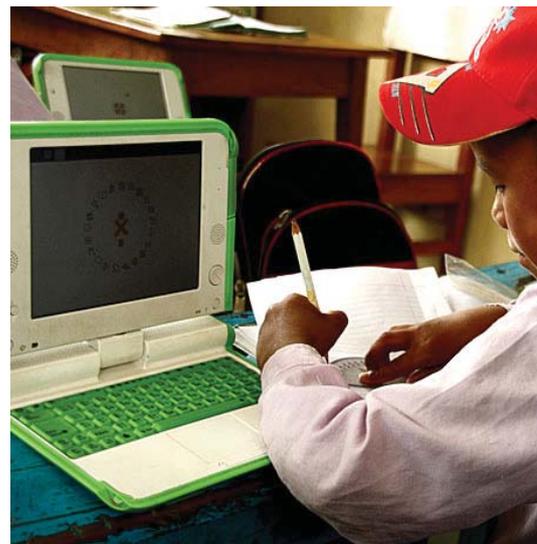
Asia Society's Asia 21 Young Leaders Summit

Rabi Karmacharya, Executive Director of OLE Nepal, was chosen among more than 200 emerging leaders from some 30 countries and economies in the Asia-Pacific region to participate in the Asia Society's fifth annual Asia 21 Young Leaders Summit, held in Jakarta from December 3-5, 2010.

Mr. Karmacharya joined other young leaders, all under age 40, in discussions about "Unity in Diversity: Responsible Leadership in the Asia-Pacific." The diversity of representation – from business, government, academia, to media, civil society, and the arts – brought a wide range of perspectives to the discussions and explored issues such as the recent natural crises in Asia, ways to foster more equitable growth across the region, and lessons in leadership from history's greatest leaders.

The Asia Society's Asia 21 Young Leaders Summit is part of a larger initiative designed to help emerging leaders from across the region to develop common approaches to meet its shared challenges. "The Asia 21 Summit brings together the region's most impressive

young leaders to develop relationships, trust, and mutual understanding that can drive collaborative approaches for addressing the region's greatest challenges," said Asia Society Executive Vice President Jamie Metzl.

The Asia 21 Summit is the pre-eminent gathering of Asia's most dynamic young leaders from the Asia-Pacific region, from every sector including business, government, media, culture and civil society. To date, the network counts more than 600 of the most accomplished young leaders in the Asia-Pacific among its members, including businessmen, documentary filmmakers, environmental activists, human rights advocates, members of parliament, military personnel, performance artists, and social entrepreneurs.

The Asia 21 Young Leaders Summit creates an active network for emerging leaders to build relationships and engage in interdisciplinary dialogue and cultural exchange, and seeks to develop cooperative responses for addressing shared challenges. Apart from being the major connecting portal for our young leaders, the Summit serves to promote greater public visibility for the contributions of younger leaders of diverse backgrounds and as the feeder for the Asia 21 Fellows Class.

School Tool for Student and Classroom Management

The challenge of integrating technology in schools in remote locations across the country has led OLE Nepal's team to explore various possibilities in the field of ICT-based education. In our effort to make full utilization of tools and technologies to facilitate teachers and school administrators, OLE Nepal felt the need to develop a software to help teachers manage students and classrooms. While laptops along with educational resources such as *E-Paath* and *E-Pustakalaya* have made significant impact on pedagogical side, the equipment available there could also be utilized for other purposes such as keeping student records and managing classes. After almost two years of experience, we found that most teachers were comfortable using the *E-Paati* laptops for teaching purposes as well as for personal use such as typing documents, reading books, etc. Hence, it seemed the next logical step was to provide them with a new tool to help manage their classrooms using technology. After evaluating few available tools, we found SchoolTool to match most of our requirements for a management software. It is a web-based software that allows different user levels such as admins, teachers and students. It also contains a student information system and is capable of holding calendar information and daily attendance. In addition the software can be localized and most importantly it is an Open Source software.

Even though SchoolTool met most of our requirements, there were a number of changes that had to be made before it would be ready for our schools. For starters, we needed to integrate the tool in school server platform which is based on Fedora Linux. Then the terms had to be translated to Nepali and contextualized to our schools. Overall, it turned out to be a time-consuming exercise and many tests had to be performed until we arrived at a stable stage.

The localized SchoolTool is now ready to be piloted in select OLPC program schools. OLE Nepal is in the process of preparing a user manual and a training program to prepare teachers to use the tool. SchoolTool offers yet another dimension in the use of technology to facilitate teachers by making it easier to keep track of student attendance, grades and performance, while organizing their classes through the use of calendar, journal and report generations.

For more in-depth technical information about SchoolTool, please visit our blog at blog.olenepal.org. SchoolTool is a suite of free administrative software for schools (http://schooltool.org/)

Observations from Schools

Following on the success of monitoring and in-school refresher trainings in Mustang last October, OLE Nepal's staff and trainers spent the month of November conducting similar monitoring and training sessions in program schools in the other five districts with the help of trainers from the National Center for Educational Development (NCED). As reported in the last newsletter, this new approach to mid-year teacher training were designed to allow trainers to spend two days at each school observing ICT-integrated classes conducted by all relevant teachers and providing valuable feedback. The trainers also led discussions on how to improve ICT-integrated teaching through better practices and collaboration amongst teachers. The method also enabled teachers to get more individual attention than in previous training sessions, while allowing trainers to address problems that were unique to each school.

This new approach has benefited not just the schools, but our own trainers and staff have come back with insightful experiences that have enhanced our understanding of the impact that this project has had in schools in remote areas. Mr. Sunil Pokharel, OLE Nepal's curriculum expert and trainer was convinced that keeping children happy in the classrooms is critical to effective and an in-depth learning experience, and based on the recent school visits, he has no doubt that the E-Paatis have helped create that enjoyable classroom atmosphere. He found that children in all the schools are more eager to learn using the E-Paatis than they were with just their textbooks.

Teachers in E-Pustakalaya orientation at Janabal School in Marpha,Mustang

Mr. Pokharel fondly described an incident from Shree Devi School in Makwanpur, where he came across few grade three students making a case at the principal's office to be allowed to take their E-Paatis home that day. When asked why they were so insistent on taking the E-Paatis home, one of the children answered, "to read a story that I have downloaded from the E-Pustakalaya." The popularity of the E-Pustakalaya amongst students is not limited to just this school; teachers in many schools have been very surprised at the rate at which the children are downloading and reading books from this digital library. E-Pustakalaya has undoubtedly make a big difference in enhancing pupil's reading habits at the schools

Summing up his observations from visits to program schools in Dadeldhura, Mr. Madhav Prasad Joshi, School Supervisor from the District Education Office, opined "Had it not been for the OLPC program, most of these children would have had to wait another 10 or 15 years just to touch a computer. It is almost unbelievable to see these children not just using computers, but using them to read and learn with joy."

Tek Bahadur Dhami, a parent from Jana Joyti School in Dadeldhura said, "Initially I thought that my son was wasting time reading something trivial for too long on the computer. When he began reading me the stories and rewriting the stories that he read, I realized that he was not wasting his time."

Mr. Tika Raj Karki from OLE Nepal observed that teachers and students alike have been making extensive use of the E-Pustakalaya to expand their knowledge. Teachers in many schools have appreciated the abundant resources that have been made available to them through E-Pustakalaya and E-Paath. These materials along with the training have assisted them in delivering effective lessons in their classrooms.

OLPC Review Meeting

A review of the OLPC program was organized in Kathmandu on December 17, 2010 jointly by the Department of Education (DoE) and OLE Nepal. The main objectives of the review session were to update the stakeholders about the progress of the project, and to hold discussions on how the DoE and OLE Nepal could work together to strengthen and expand the project.

The program was chaired by Mr. Khagaraj Baral, Director of the DoE, and was attended by eight officials from the monitoring, program, and other departments of the DoE. The National Center for Educational Development (NCED) was represented by its Executive Director, Mr. Vishnu Prasad Thaiba and Technical Officer and OLPC Trainer Mr. Ram Chandra Poudel, while Deputy Director Mr. Adanda Poudel was present from the Curriculum Development Center (CDC). The program started with a comprehensive presen-

OLPC Review meeting in session

tation on the background and status of the program by Mr. Rabi Karmacharya from OLE Nepal. The presentation also addressed the various technical, administrative and logistical challenges faced by the program over the past three years. Mr. Karmacharya underscored the need to develop strong and dynamic leadership at the schools and in maximizing community participation for successful implementation of the program. School principals with good leadership skills are needed to keep teachers motivated and to make maximum use of the available resources at the schools. They are also instru-

mental in ensuring regular interactions amongst teachers from same schools as well as those from nearby OLPC program schools to share experiences and to help find solutions to common problems and issues.

Mr. Karmacharya also shared various other lessons learned over the past two and a half years of program implementation and support. In addition to training the teachers, it was equally important to keep teachers motivated. Regular monitoring from the district officials can go a long way to ensuring proper and full use of the laptops in the classrooms. As expected, community participation was key in the safeguarding and proper use of the laptops and other equipment. As for students, there were evidence across all program schools that students were not only quick to pick up the new learning tools, but that they were making maximum use by sharing them with family members.

During the interaction program, other challenges discussed included the need to prepare local resources for technical support and maintenance, turnover and/or transfer of trained teacher, mid-year admission and dropout of students whose parents are migrant workers.

A discussion on the future of OLPC in Nepal emphasized the need revise the Concept Paper prepared by DoE, and develop a scalable plan for integrating ICT in school education. There was also an agreement that future plan should define a long term vision and should be aligned with the ICT in Education Master Plan that the Ministry of Education (MoE) is in the process of developing. There were suggestions that other models of ICT interventions also need to be tried and implemented in schools in parallel to the current OLPC approach.

Most participants expressed the need to publicize the E-Paath activities and make them easily accessible to more schools across the country. There was also a general agreement that grade

five should be added to the program at the beginning of the next academic year, hence saturating grades two to six in all program schools.

OLE Nepal emphasized the need for MoE and DoE to take more ownership of the program, and offered to start transferring knowledge and technical resources gathered over the past three years to relevant line agencies under the MoE.

Content review

With the target to add grade five to the OLPC program when the next academic year begins in April 2011, OLE Nepal's content development team have started preparing *E-Paath* activities in English, mathematics and science subjects for that grade. The curriculum team have been meeting regularly with subject experts from the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) to conceptualize new activities.

The team members and experts have expressed satisfaction with the progress and quality of content being developed. The experts have verified that all the activities under development are aligned with the national curriculum, and meet the difficulty level appropriate for students in that grade. The experts also pointed out that the conceptualized activities in both English and mathematics will make it easier for students to better understand the concepts and get ample opportunities to do exercises to reinforce their understanding of the concepts. sonnel, performance artists, and social entrepreneurs.

E-Paath is a set of curriculum-based interactive digital learning materials developed by OLE Nepal

E-Pustakalaya is OLE Nepal's education-centered digital library consisting of books, reference materials, school wikipedia, etc.

E-Paati is the Nepali name for the XO laptops used in OLPC program schools