

Expanding Big Picture Schools Internationally

Prospectus

Context and Needs

Big Picture Learning is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to a fundamental redesign of schools and schooling in the United States. Big Picture designs innovative public schools, researches and replicates new designs for learning, and trains educators to serve as leaders in their schools and communities. With supportive funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Big Picture is facilitating the adaptation of the Big Picture School design in approximately sixty sites throughout the United States. Presently, there are Big Picture Schools in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, DC, and Washington.

Since 2002, we have been working with organizations in other countries that wish to create schools based on the BPL design. We currently have schools operating or in the planning stages in Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Kenya, The Netherlands, South Korea, and Tanzania.

While the number of inquiries from the international community is increasing, the workload attending to the expansion of the BPL schools network in the United States has made it difficult to respond sufficiently to these inquiries. Additionally, we know that we could be doing a much better job with organizations in those countries where we are already working. Without the appropriate online and telecommunications support, such technical assistance is labor intensive and expensive.

Current and Projected International Work

Thus far we have secured serious commitments to start up schools in several countries. In each country, we have facilitated the establishment of a non-profit organization that works with us on the political and programmatic components to set up the schools and do the initial professional development for the staff. This has occurred in Australia and the Netherlands, we are in the early stages of such work in Canada, Israel, Kenya, and Tanzania. The Dutch are organizing their own non-profit organization to do work in Belgium, France, and Germany. In November 2008, BPL leaders will be meeting in The Netherlands with the organizers to finalize these plans.

As we move forward with these individual initiatives, there is a simultaneous impetus to create an international learning community around this work so that the learning accomplished in each country can be shared and used to guide ongoing improvements in the BPL school design. Aside from seeing BP Schools as the future of how schools should fit students, this work is also seen as a social venture initiative where communities in these countries are using our practices to better the lives of students they have found difficult to educate. In Israel, for example, we are providing assistance in establishing a school in Dimona for Jews and Moslems together. In Canada and Australia our school design aligns with many of the ways of learning practiced by their indigenous populations. Our ways of practice that truly integrate relevance, relationships, and rigor to

produce high quality learning and learning environments is obvious to the people we are working with.

Goals and Objectives

We wish to develop an international community that is focused on adapting and using the BPL school design to develop schools. Additionally, we wish to help the organizations that are part of this international community to take a leadership role in advocating for alt education through policy and advocacy.

In order to accomplish these goals, we will:

1. Significantly expand and enhance the BPL website to provide a virtual space in which organizations can learn and work.
2. Conduct an international convening to jumpstart the formation of an international learning community.
3. Assist organizations in other countries to establish themselves as developers of BPL schools.
4. Develop specific initiatives that connect teachers and students internationally, including teacher and student exchanges, cross-country online projects, and joint curriculum and professional development projects.

Major Tasks and Events

Develop extensions and enhancements of the BPL website in order to support the formation of an international learning community focused on the BPL school design and on developing alternative education systems. The website will feature spaces for collaborative work, ongoing conversation, and training and support.

Design and conduct an international conference. In addition to convening representatives from those organizations already working with BPL, we will reach out to contacts we have made with organizations in other countries. This major international convening will focus on developing an understanding of the BPL school design, learning how the design is adapted in several international sites, and helping interested organizations to establish or enhance a school development management capability. We will use the conference to introduce participants to the BPL website and to the preliminary design for the online telecommunications system that will support the development of an international learning community dealing with BPL schools.

Provide training and support to the organizations that have committed to developing and supporting BPL schools. These services will include helping the organizations to establish themselves as BPL school developers, training school coaches, and assisting with the development of information and evaluation systems. We will also facilitate the development of specific initiatives that connect teachers and students internationally, including teacher and student exchanges, cross-country online projects, and joint curriculum and professional development projects. Further, we will connect our international partners to specific initiatives we are developing in the United States that may have applicability to their work.

Project Management

Elliot Washor will direct the project. He will be assisted by Jill Olson-Crowley, who will coordinate the network development, website enhancements, international conference, and I'm going training and support activities. BPL specialists will be used to provide targeted training and support services.

We anticipate that the project work will require about 24 months. We will need about six months to develop the website and appropriate support materials. We will conduct an international conference between six and nine months into the project. We will then use the rest of the grant to provide ongoing training and support, principally using the online telecommunications system and workspaces. During the last six months of the project, we will move to a fee for service system so that the international network becomes self-supporting. Additionally, we will help these organizations develop their own business plans as non-profit and for-profit social venture organizations so that they also will become self-supporting through fee for service arrangements.

Estimate of Resources Required

We estimate that this project will require about \$.625 million over 24 months. We need resources for personnel to set up the network, design and organize the international conference, conduct regular videoconferences and related communications, and develop a special section of the BPL website. We anticipate that the network will be self-supporting by the end of the grant period.