BIG Learning

A Non-Profit Dedicated To Hands-on, Real World Learning for School and Life Success

2009 Annual Report

Mission & Focus

Big Learning, Inc. was founded in 2007 to support children's school and life success through hands-on, real world learning. We focus our efforts on economically disadvantaged children and those at risk for other reasons, including English language learners and children with learning disabilities. Big Learning, Inc. is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.

During 2009 we focused on completing the work of productizing our Knowledge Builder (KB) after-school curriculum. This is critical to supporting our goal of having widespread use of KB. This work included the following:

- Revising some of the projects to reduce the number of different materials required, and to reduce the materials cost
- Finding reliable, scalable sources for all materials
- Completing the Teacher's Guides, and finding a cost-effective printing solution for the guides and the accompanying posters
- Creating student instruction diagrams that enable the students to work more independently
- Enhancing the student assessment built into KB
- Creating a scalable manufacturing system for organizing the various project materials into a ready-to-use kit that requires no teacher prep effort

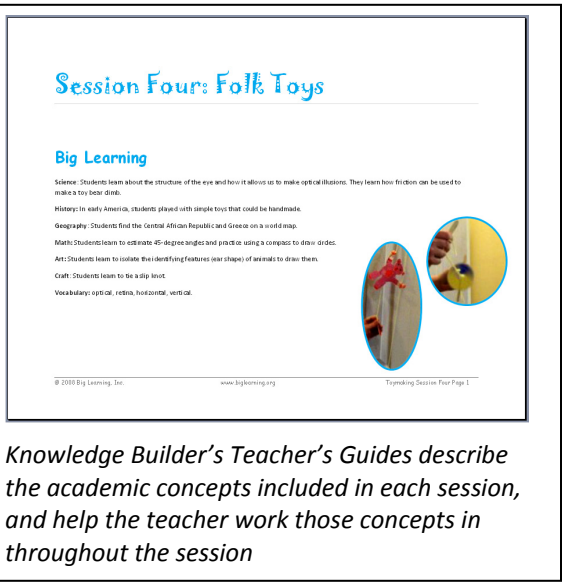
Volunteers also redesigned the Big Learning web site, making it much easier for visitors to understand what Big Learning does and why it's important. The web site had over 750,000 page views in 2009.

Program Activities

Big Learning offers programs for children, programs for families, and programs for parents. Our primary focus is on after-school programs for children. Over 1,500 people have participated in Big Learning workshops.

These programs support both school *and* life success. School success is supported by infusing each hands-on project with school-relevant background knowledge in a variety of areas, including math, literacy, science, history, and art. Academic concepts are woven throughout the projects, and our pre- and post-assessment shows large gains in understanding of these concepts by participants.

Life success is supported by designing the projects so that students gain 21st-century skills, such as persistence, communication, collaboration, and self-confidence. We find that as the sessions progress, more and more students challenge themselves to go beyond the sample project the teacher demonstrates and build something more sophisticated. This invariably leads to design and engineering problems that the students solve, either on their own, with the help of classmates, or with subtle guidance from the teacher. The gains in student self-confidence from the first session to the last session are often amazing.


Session Four: Folk Toys

Big Learning

Science: Students learn about the structure of the eye and how it allows us to make optical illusions. They learn how friction can be used to make a toy bear climb.

History: In early America, students played with simple toys that could be handmade.

Geography: Students find the Central African Republic and Greece on a world map.

Math: Students learn to estimate 45-degree angles and practice using a compass to draw circles.

Art: Students learn to isolate the identifying features (ear shape) of animals to draw them.

Craft: Students learn to tie a slip knot.

Vocabulary: optical, retina, horizontal, vertical.

 www.biglearning.org Toymaking Session Four Page 1

Knowledge Builder's Teacher's Guides describe the academic concepts included in each session, and help the teacher work those concepts in throughout the session

Success Stories

Among our many successful students are children with learning disabilities and children with limited English. Children designated gifted and talented have also found delight and challenge in our classes. Here are some of our success stories.

Limited Language Skills

"Hana" is a 2nd-grader from Japan who has been in the US a very short time. Her English is very limited,

Engineering and design challenges are built into every project, and each student's finished project is unique

and she was very reluctant to talk during the discussion period at the beginning of class. But she worked independently on each Toymaking project, and completed all of them. She frequently decorated her toy with many detailed drawings that were always along the theme of the toy. If she got stuck building the toy, the teacher would help her figure out what to try next. Her face would light up in a kind of "aha!" moment, and she would dive back into building. The teacher said, "I think I could have shut the lights off and left and she wouldn't even have noticed, she was so intently focused on finishing each project."

ADHD-type Kids

"Sarah" is a 2nd-grader whose mother spoke with us before signing her up for the class. The mother said that Sarah had a difficult time sitting still and focusing, and for that reason, hadn't enjoyed other after-school programs. Sarah walked into the first class and immediately announced that "This class is boring!," and a few minutes into the class, announced "I'm not going to build that toy." She was fairly disruptive, frequently getting up and bugging other students. About halfway through the first class, though, she got interested in the project, and announced that she was "going to help Arthur build his," which she did. The toy they built together was quite different from the model toy, but they were both proud of it and decided they would take turns taking it home each week. The same thing happened the second week: she was uninterested and disruptive at first, then got interested and worked with a classmate. The Toymaking projects really captivated her, though, and from the fourth class session on, she participated in the discussion period, and worked diligently on each project.

Everyone's Smart in Big Learning

"Tommy" is a 4th-grade boy in the Toymaking class who took the Building Big and Small class a year earlier. He doesn't like to sit still, and he also doesn't like to be told what to do or how to do it. These traits can make it a challenge to have him in class. He's pretty clever at figuring out how to put things together, though, so he quickly got very interested in the projects in both classes. In one of the later Building classes, Tommy figured out a clever way to make his structure stronger, and as a result, it was much sturdier than most of his classmates' structures. He's very proud of that, and talked about it during the first Toymaking session, more than a year later.

While making a bobble head, students make bendable joints, and get hands-on experience with the concepts of ratio and proportion

Board of Directors and Management

Management

Dr. Karen Cole is Big Learning's Executive Director. She founded Big Learning, directs our organization, and develops our curriculum, workshop materials, and web site.

Dr. Cole is an award-winning educational psychologist and author. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Stanford University in 1995. Prior to founding Big Learning, Dr. Cole worked for over twenty years in educational research and development, specializing in real-world learning, math education, and educational technology. She is co-author of the book, "Increasing Student Learning through Multimedia Projects," published in 2002 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). She has written for a variety of publications for educators and presented at national education conferences.

Board of Directors

Jennifer Knudsen is a senior mathematics educator at the Center for Technology and Learning at SRI, International, an active volunteer at her daughter's elementary school, and, of course, a parent.

At SRI, Knudsen designs programs and materials for students and teachers, helping a broad range of students learn high-level mathematics even at the middle-school level. She directs a research project funded by the National Science Foundation, developing and testing new professional development techniques for teachers. Previously, at the Institute for Research on Learning, she designed innovative, technology-rich programs for students, parents and teachers, which were one source of inspiration for the Big Learning framework.

Knudsen was a high school mathematics teacher in New York City public schools and, as a volunteer, developed an artist-in-residence program bringing weekly art experiences to the youngest children at her daughters' elementary school. Her education includes a BA from the Evergreen State College and graduate studies at Stanford University and Columbia Teachers' College.

Karin Green Karin Green is an attorney, legal writer, and parent. Karin is the Assistant Editor of Gilson on Trademarks, a ten-volume legal treatise. She also litigated for a large national law firm, clerked for a federal judge, worked on Capitol Hill, and helped manage a national educational and political non-profit. Karin is the mother of two eager, hands-on learners and has volunteered in their classrooms and PTAs. Karin earned her B.A. from Macalester College and her J.D. from Harvard Law School, where she was the Supreme Court Editor of the Harvard Law Review.

Children across the entire socio-economic spectrum are challenged and engaged in Big Learning classes

Jim Cole serves as President of the Board of Directors. He also serves as Treasurer; in that role he oversees our budgeting and accounting. He has over 20 years of experience in leading-edge software development for companies including Adobe and Intuit. He also served as CFO of a startup technology company. As founder of the Covero Consulting Group, a successful computer consulting firm, Cole brings substantial business management expertise as well as technological savvy to the Big Learning organization. He holds an M.A. degree in Economics from San Jose State University, and a B.S. in computer science, *Phi Beta Kappa*, from Indiana University. He has seven U.S. patents for computer design.

Financial Data

Big Learning's primary revenue sources in 2009 were program service fees, curriculum sales, and web site revenue. For the year, Big Learning had a deficit of $2,428.

Summary financial data for 2009 is shown in the tables below.

Big Learning, Inc. Financial Summary, 2009	
Revenue	
Program service	$4,758
Web site	$1,049
Curriculum sales	$2,970
Volunteer effort	$72,775
Other	$120
Total revenue	$81,672
Expenses	
Payroll	$3,452
Workshop development & materials	$521
Knowledge Builder cost of goods sold	$2,778
Insurance	$1,885
Internet/Web	$275
Printing & copying	$508
Volunteer effort	$72,775
Conferences, meetings	$828
Other	$1,078
Total expenses	$84,100
Surplus	($2,428)

Contact Information

Big Learning's web site is www.biglearning.org. We can be contacted by email at info@biglearning.org. Our mailing address is:

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P.O. Box 27
Garrett Park, MD 20896

Big Learning, Inc. Statement of Cash Flows, 2009	
Operating Activities	
Net income	($2,428)
Adjustments to reconcile Net income to net cash provided by operations	
Accounts receivable	($11)
Credit card	$491
Payroll liabilities	$34
Net cash provided by Operating Activities	($1,914)
Investing Activities	
Accumulated depreciation	($457)
Furniture and equipment	($457)
Net cash provided by Investing Activities	0
Net Cash	
Net cash increase for the period	($1,914)
Cash at beginning of period	$6,067
Cash at end of period	$4,153

Big Learning, Inc. Balance Sheet, 12/31/2009	
Assets	
Current Assets	
Checking Account	$4,023
PayPal	$131
Accounts Receivable	$648
Total Current Assets	$4,802
Fixed Assets	
Accumulated depreciation	$467
Furniture and equipment	$1,289
Total Fixed Assets	$1,756
Total Assets	$6,558
Liabilities and Equity	
Current Liabilities	
Credit card	$811
Loans from related parties	$1,000
Total Current Liabilities	$1,845
Total Liabilities	$1,845
Equity	
Unrestricted Net Assets	$7,141
Net Income	($2,428)
Total Equity	$4,713
Total Liabilities and Equity	$6,558