✗ laptop.org   http://laptop.org/en/vision/essays/35-tablet.shtml

one laptop per child

This open letter to India was written in response to a proposal by India's HRD Minister Kapil Sibal to make a $35 tablet available to all Indian students. A version was published in the Times of India. It is also available in Spanish, French, and German.

One Laptop per Child applauds Minister Kapil Sibal for promoting a $35 tablet. Education is the primary solution to eliminating poverty, saving the environment and creating world peace. Access to a connected laptop or tablet is the fastest way to enable universal learning. We agree with you completely.

Please consider this open letter OLPC's pledge to provide India with free and open access to all of our technology, and our experience with 2 million laptops, in over 40 countries, in over 25 languages. As a humanitarian and charitable organization, we do not compete. We collaborate, and invite you to do so, too.

In the meantime, let me offer the following six suggestions:

1. Focus on children 6 to 12 years old. They are your nation's most precious natural resource. For primary school children, the tablet is not about computing or school, it is about hope. It makes passion the primary tool for learning.

2. Your tablet should be the death of rote learning, not the tool of it. A creative society is built not on memorizing facts, but by learning learning itself. Drill and practice is a mechanism of the industrial age, when repetition and uniformity were systemic. The digital age is one of personalization, collaboration and appropriation. OLPC's approach to learning is called constructionism. We hope you adopt it too.

3. Tablets are indeed the future. OLPC announced its own eight months ago. However, caution is needed with regard to one aspect of tablets: learning is not media consumption. It is about making things. The iPad is a consumptive tool by design. OLPC urges that you not make this mistake.

4. Hardware is simple. Less obvious is ruggedness, sunlight readability and low power. We use solar power because our laptop is by far the lowest power laptop on the planet. But do not overlook human power – hand cranking and other things that kids can do at night or when it rains. Just solar would be a mistake. Rugged means water resistant and droppable from 10 feet onto a stone floor.

5. Software is harder. Linux is obvious, but whatever you do, do not make it a special purpose device with only a handful of functions. It must be a general purpose computer upon which the whole world can build software, invent applications and do programming. We know that when children program they come the closest to thinking about thinking. When they debug, they are learning about learning. This is key.

6. More than anything, of all the unsolicited advice I have to offer, the most important and most likely to be overlooked is good industrial design. Make an inexpensive tablet, not a cheap one. Make it desirable, lovable and fun to own. Take a page from Apple on this, maybe from OLPC too. Throw the best design teams in India behind it.

India is so big that you risk being satisfied with your internal market. Don't. The world needs your device and leadership. Your tablet is not an "answer" or "competitor" to OLPC's XO laptop. It is a member of a family dedicated to creating peace and prosperity through the transformation of education. In closing, I

repeat my offer: full access to all of our technology, cost free. I urge you to send a team to MIT and OLPC at your earliest convenience so we can share our results with you.

Nicholas Negroponte
Founder and Chairman
One Laptop per Child Foundation
Cambridge, Massachusetts
USA