



# How to Change the World in 10 Easy Steps

ERIC GLUSTROM AND BORIS BULAYEV, *Class of 2007*

*The founders of Educate!, a social program for children in Uganda, change the game by focusing on local empowerment*

by Araba Taylor '13

He is from Boulder, Colorado. He played sports in high school and wanted to come to Amherst because of the “campus and sense of community that [he] felt existed between the students, faculty, and staff.” He explored several possible career choices while attending the school, including medicine, which “only lasted for a month or so.” He majored in biochemistry and claims to have memories of a “nice little place on the back of Mead Art Center.” Seems like a typical Amherst experience. But Eric Glustrom '07 was not the typical student.

## Entrepreneurship in Uganda

In the summer of '02, following his junior year in high school, Glustrom traveled to Kyangwali refugee camp in Uganda to film a documentary in order to increase awareness about the tragic state of these camps. Unexpectedly, the actual documentary ended up showcasing the life of Benson Oliver, a 14 year old who had lost his entire family to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Before leaving the country, Glustrom asked what he could do to help, to which Benson responded with a wish to attend school so that he could then help his own community. Eric discovered the \$75 cost per semester at a Ugandan school and helped Benson enroll prior to leaving Uganda.

Eric founded Educate! a year later, with Benson's story at the root of the program. He continued to work with it throughout his time at Amherst and leads it as executive director today. Educate! is a two-year program for high-school students based out of Uganda that currently employs 11 people. As executive director, Glustrom works to “set the overall, long-term direction of the organization. In Uganda this translates into working with our country director and program director to implement and refine the model. In the U.S., I do a lot of work with individual supporters and foundations to raise the support needed to implement the model of education we provide.” In a country where half the population is under the age of 18, Educate! scholars and mentors address the issue of “the current rote-memorization based education system [that] stifles creativity and passion such that youth graduate and can recite the regions of Germany, but are little better prepared to tackle the serious challenges facing their communities than when they began.” The program introduces a non-traditional “social-change curriculum” that enables students to “start sustainable initiatives in their communities” while fostering confidence in a supportive setting.

## Rapid Success

Since its founding in 2002, Educate! scholars have gone on to build an orphanage, send 60 other students to school, provide mosquito nets, create a theater group for AIDS education and an anti-violence group for women. They have generated an estimated \$34,700 in wealth for their community. The program has grown so much that now in 2009 it coordinates with 415 high school students at 24 different partner schools.

All this success, however, could not have been achieved alone. Glustrom credits a large amount of the development and implementation of Educate! to fellow Amherst alum Boris Bulayev '07. “One day he walked into my room in Crossett and asked to get more involved.” That curious student turned out to play a large role in keeping the program afloat in the midst of Glustrom's hectic senior year, during which he had to write a thesis. Bulayev was an asset

to the growth of Educate! as a whole. Glustrom remarks “I don't know if Educate! would have survived. Boris not only took on many of my responsibilities with Educate!, but he also helped the organization to take many important steps which have led to where we are today. Boris deserves an incredible amount of respect and credit for his work to make sure Educate! not only survived but also grew and developed throughout college.”

Bulayev will work full-time with the program in the next few weeks. His first experience with Educate! was interning during his sophomore year. Subsequent summer experiences helped him realize his interest in the entrepreneurial aspects of building an organization rather than in simply dealing with one section. His decision to fully devote his time to Educate! centers on his feeling that “we have a really big and unique opportunity to create an organization that creates significant impact in the developing world and comes up with a new model of empowering local people to address their own problems, rather than depending on external organizations.” The affects of Educate! are clearly tangible, and Bulayev liked how “we could count how many students we were impacting.” Bulayev commented, “if I won the lottery, this is what I would do, and I figured, why wait?”

## A Worthy Partner in Business

Glustrom and Bulayev seem to complement one another perfectly. Both acknowledge that Bulayev is the more “business minded”, “pragmatic” one while Glustrom is “idealistic” and “positive minded.” The two admit that their conflicting personalities result in clashes and end in compromise. Glustrom describes, “another challenge [as] building consensus within the organization such that everyone not only agrees, but also believes in the overall direction or any changes that the organization is going to make. Especially in the early stages, there are so many different directions that the organization can take. Boris is very business minded and I am more idealistic, which often puts us on opposite sides of the decisions we need to make. Coming to the middle ground is a productive, but sometimes rocky process. As we work more together we have learned to make that process as smooth as possible.” Despite the occasional issue, the contrasting personalities, not just between Boris and Eric but between all the members of the Educate! team, help the program as much as they challenge it. According to Boris one of the most rewarding experiences of the organization is, “knowing that we have done all this together and stuck it through after five years and countless disagreements.”

And this strenuous process has indeed worked. Since its founding, Educate! has earned National and Global recognition for the work the group has been doing in Uganda, including a VH1 Do Something Award and the Echoing Green fellowship, and has been featured by Entrepreneur Magazine as “one of the most brilliant companies of 2009.” Concerning the Echoing Green fellowship, Bulayev commented that the award “was a huge sign of support and approval ... It was really a very proud moment for me at least because it showed that we were doing something right. I think before, we knew we had a huge opportunity to do something big, but we were the only ones who truly thought that. Now with Echoing Green there are people who have tons of experience watching social change ventures grow who think we have a huge opportunity.”

## Bumps in the Road

Things don't always run smoothly, though. As in any organization, a lot of stresses and complications exist. “I think communication is difficult in any organization,” comments Glustrom. “It is probably even more difficult in a startup organization, and probably the most difficult in a startup working between continents (especially when one continent has poor email and phone access, and inconsistent power). So communication has been one big challenge. Maintaining strong communication so that everyone in the organization can understand the lessons we are learning, and therefore make informed decisions is key. It of course doesn't help that there is a nine hour time difference between the U.S. and Uganda.” However, rather than succumbing to the annoyance and disappointment that African phone lines often induce, the Educate! team is resourceful.

“There have been many long, late-night Skype calls that may get interrupted by a power outage in Uganda at two a.m.,” Glustrom continues. “Recently, I was in New York City and needed to talk with Emily and Angelica (Educate!'s country director and program director). I found a café with wireless, but didn't want to disturb people, so I asked for a “back-room” where I could make the call. After a misunderstanding, I was led to the bathroom, where I spent the next several hours with my computer set up on the baby changing station in a heated Skype debate with Emily and Angelica about the changes we are thinking of making next year. As technology gets better, communication will of course only get easier, but I don't think anything can replace the quality of in person time together as a team. In February, Boris, Emily, Angelica, and I will all be in Uganda together and I'm very much looking forward to that time!”

## Marx Gets Involved

Even Amherst president, Anthony Marx is involved with the program, as a member of the U.S. Advisory Board. This work is similar to Marx's work in the past, when he helped create the Khanya College, which was designed to help black students in apartheid South Africa transition from K-12 schools to prominent universities.

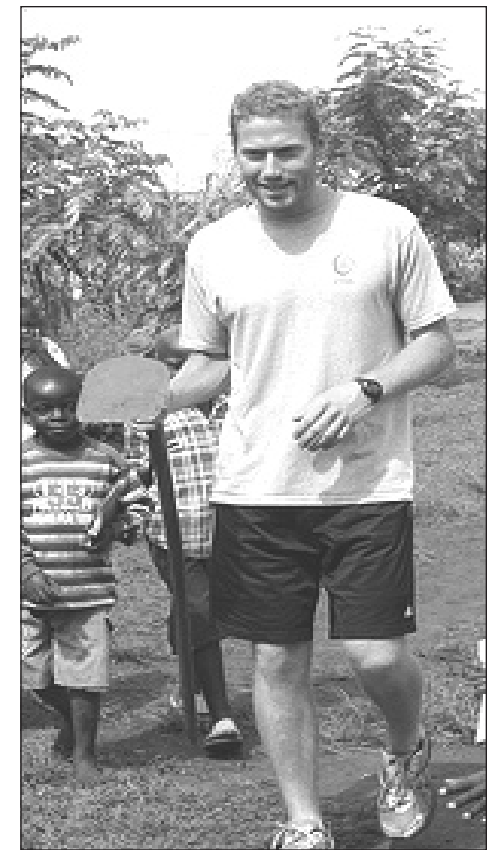
“I am proud of Eric, Boris, so many other students, and Amherst's role in Educate! and am proud to support it,” Marx remarks. “They are the model of the tradition of social entrepreneurs coming out of Amherst, building an organization that engages students across the country, partnering and building educational opportunities and effectiveness in Africa. [Glustrom] is a leader creating other leaders.”

Educate! is very much a continuation of

what Glustrom and Bulayev have learned at the College. Glustrom explains, “I see what Educate! is doing as taking the wonderful model that Amherst has developed and bringing it to some of the poorest of the poor and in doing so, creating a new model of education in the developing world that is not just for a select few, but rather, accessible to people of diverse socio-economic, religious and tribal backgrounds.” These talented Amherst alumni found a need, took what they knew, kept their minds open to learning and made a current that has produced a wave of change.

So if you have ever contemplated changing the world but don't know where to start, there are actually no 10 easy steps. However, there is one that counts the most. “Just start!” Glustrom encourages. “Don't be afraid if you don't know how or if something doesn't seem like a perfect fit with your passion. Just jump in! What we learn along the way will give us the experience we need and help us to understand where our passion is. But if we never start, then we might continue to wander always searching for the ideal without ever taking the first steps towards it.”

It's probably best to acknowledge that no step will be easy, and no formulaic recipe exists for successful philanthropy. However, like Eric Glustrom and Boris Bulayev, its best to be open to adaptation and in the end, you just might create something great.



Courtesy of Boris Bulayev



Courtesy of Boris Bulayev

In Uganda, Glustrom engages in some hard labor and entertains kids involved in Educate! (top). At the VH1 Do Something Awards, Glustrom (middle) and Bulayev (far right) pose with Corbin Bleu, star of Disney Channel Movie “High School Musical.” (bottom)