Learning Toolkit+ Newsletter

Spring - Summer 2020-21

Contents

Response to School Closures

ABRA @ HOME

After more than two months of no schooling for the Kenyan children, last summer, the LTK team from **Concordia University**, **Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa**, **World Vision Canada**, **World Vision Kenya** & **Wilfrid Laurier University**, embarked on an innovative pilot project in which a 20 week print-based version of **ABRACADABRA**, **ABRA @ Home** was brought into some households in remote regions of Western Kenya. What started as a pilot project, with ten eager Kirindon teachers, 50 households to visit, and over 130 students, expanded to an additional five households in Kirindon and ten teachers in a second World Vision AP, called Matete and later to teachers in Kwale and Mombasa. By the end of the project over **60 teachers** and over **500 students** were reached.

Students from Kirindon

Measures of the students' literacy levels were taken at the beginning, mid-point, and end of the 20 weeks and the results are currently being analyzed. While it is expected that there will be significant gains in their literacy achievement, observational evidence pointed to the huge success of this program as children were seen to run to their teachers upon arrival in their homes, urging the teachers to stay to continue the lesson. Parents and teachers alike were pleased their children were no longer sitting idle, but instead excited about learning and developed a love for reading.

One teacher wrote, "Day 1 is gone. Learners were happy to see teachers at their home doorstep. Due to excitement, some had rushed to shave their hair to look smart and others with books for multiple subjects ready to learn." Another teacher expressed their happiness at seeing their students, "The Matete chapter kicked off today, the kids were excited seeing their teachers at their respective homes. It was such a sweet bonding moment after a long stay at home. I should say it's a good experience that satisfies the heart for being at their service."

While this was but a drop in the bucket given the tremendous need for continued learning opportunities for these students in the remote Trans Mara region and throughout Kenya, our team was honoured to support teachers as they provided these children with a unique and enriching educational experience that will stay with them a lifetime.

Literacy Portal

Our **LTK Literacy portal** posted in response to the pandemic, has received over 200,000 visitors from 200 countries.
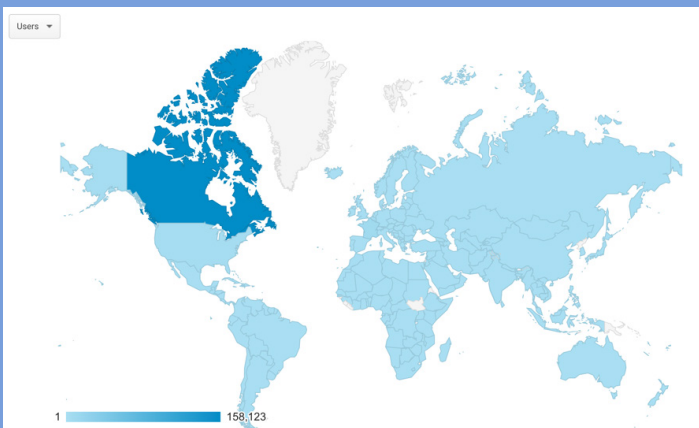
Google Analytics, July 2021

LTK+ Update

Development on the security additions and upgrades to the LTK+ suite of tools continued this past year. The team hopes to have these completed by this time next year.

Canadian Projects

ABRA HEADS TO NUNAVIK

In early 2021, multi-day English and French ABRA/READS trainings took place virtually for teachers from the **Kativik School Board**, which supports schools through Nunavik in Northern Quebec. The Literacy Portal was used to train over 20 teachers in the French session and 15 teachers in the English session. Some schools in the North have since had servers installed that will support the use of ABRA and READS this upcoming school year. A refresher training course will take place in September to support teachers as they begin to implement ABRA in their classrooms.

LITERACY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODULES

Our online literacy professional development program, called **Teaching Early Literacy with the Learning Toolkit+**, is designed to help teachers as they further develop their literacy skills, promote best practices and useful teaching strategies, and support teachers' use of the LTK+ tools in their classroom.

The latest version contains a total of ten modules: Introduction; **Getting Started with ABRACADABRA; Alphabetics (phonological and phonemic awareness, and phonics); Fluency; Comprehension; Writing; ABRA Assessment; READS; ABRA-ePEARL Connection**; and **Train the Trainer**. Following the structure set from Version 1.0, the new modules provide multimedia explanations and opportunities to reflect and apply the newfound knowledge.

With funding from the **Global Partnership for Education under the Knowledge Innovation Exchange program (GPE-KIX)**, and a partnership with **Wilfrid Laurier University**, the **Aga Khan Academies** and **World Vision Canada**, the core literacy modules were embedded within a 12 wk. online course hosted by WLU and piloted in Kenya this past year (see article on pg. 12). Feedback from the graduates helped refine the content of existing modules and influenced the design of a second iteration of the online course which is currently being offered in three conditions—face-to-face, blended and fully online. Several of the teachers from the first pilot eagerly agreed to serve as teaching assistants in the upcoming training.

"This course was an eye opener to me [...] I have always had challenges with learners who cannot read fluently or comprehend the text. The resources that were available (e.g. reading materials, videos, activities) were spot on. The resources will serve as a reference whenever the need arises in future." – Teacher who received our TPD training in 2020

Two additional TPD modules are being developed: Cooperative Learning, and a Quiz module. They are expected to launch by the early Fall 2021.
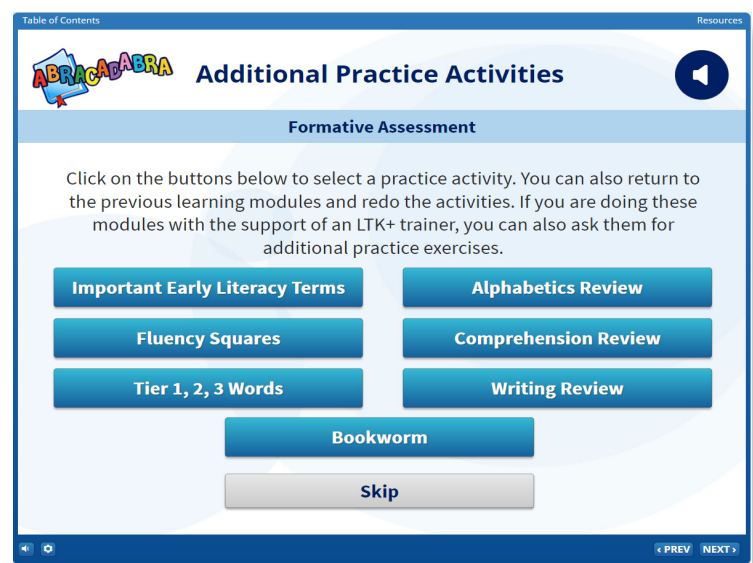
EPEARL 4.0

For the last couple of years with funding from the **Entente Canada-Québec relative à l'enseignement dans la langue de la minorité et à l'enseignement des langues secondes (ECQ**), we have been working on the design and development of **ePEARL 4.0**, an electronic portfolio to improve teaching and learning at the post-secondary level. The philosophy behind **ePEARL 4.0** is a learner-center approach, which stimulates active, reflective learning and encourages students to take on greater responsibility for their learning. In the winter session of 2021, we ran a small-scale pilot of tool's beta-version.

During this test, a handful of undergraduate education students used ePEARL 4.0 to complete their teaching portfolio course assignment. Students' self-reports show that they frequently used such features as goal-setting and reflection, and were able to link to professional competencies, and easily demonstrate their competency growth. The students also reported these features were helpful for their learning and, expressed a willingness to use **ePEARL 4.0** for future coursework. Partners on this project include the **Centre for Teaching and Learning** (Concordia), McGill's **Teaching and Learning Services** and Dawson College's **Office of Academic Development.**
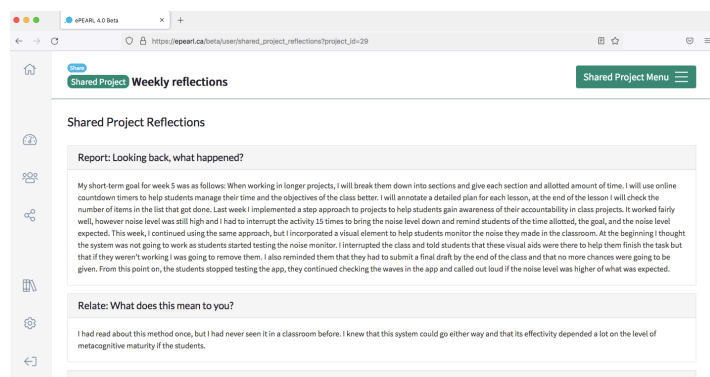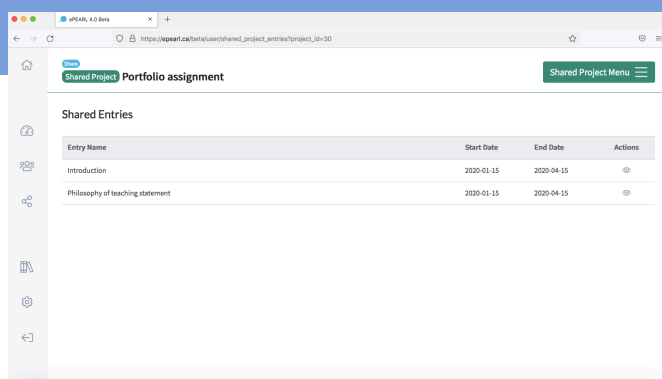
INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

Thanks to the **International Development Research Centre** (IDRC) for producing a wonderful **series of five videos** that showcase elements of our Kenyan project.

ROSIE AND OUR SCALABILITY SURVEY

Our **GPE -KIX** project entitled **Using Technology to Improve Literacy in Global South** has been selected to participate in an umbrella project known as the Research on Scalability in Education (ROSIE). This research is led by the **Centre for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings Institution** who in 2016 published their Millions Learning report on scalable educational interventions in developing countries.

ROSIE's main objectives are to support the scaling efforts and to enhance the quality and results of the KIX projects and to generate new evidence about scaling the impact of education innovations in the context of the GPE member-countries. As a ROSIE's project partner, our team benefits from participating in ROSIE's action research in a couple of ways. Together with other KIX Global projects we collectively reflect on the scaling process and insights emerging from the projects. We also enjoy the opportunities for peer learning and capacity strengthening that CUE hosts on a regular basis for ROSIE partners. Research on the sustainability and scaling of ABRA-READS implementation in Kenya,

Bangladesh and Rwanda is the focus of own KIX Global project. While this was delayed due to the pandemic, we have been catching up on our activities in all three countries and have planned an online survey that will be administered to Kenya ABRA teachers in September and some of their peers in Rwanda and Bangladesh later in the year. This survey is based on the 2018 interviews (see **2019 LTK newsletter**) and we're interested in learning whether the initial results will be replicated.

Substantively, we hope that the survey data will contribute to our increased understanding of the scalability and sustainability of an educational innovation such as ABRA-READS. Not only does this include confirming the dimensions of scalability and sustainability of ABRA-READS and exploring the barriers and facilitators of their sustained implementation, but also understanding how regional and national contexts affect our tools' scalability and sustainability. The results of this survey study will be available next spring.

OUR GPE-KIX HUBS

While our expansion efforts into Rwanda and Bangladesh were hampered by pandemic school closures, the LTK+ team was busy this past year, planning and implementing a teacher professional development program within the Kenya **Global Hub** (see below) and setting up the new hubs in Rwanda and Bangladesh.

AGA KHAN ACADEMY (DHAKA) HUB:

At our Bangladesh hub, hosted by Aga Khan Academy in Dhaka, Musle (Babu) Bhuiya, the Director of TPD Outreach worked closely with the LTK+ team to align the Bangladesh textbook with the skills taught by ABRA. This teacher's guide and other support materials such as flashcards, worksheets, and lesson plans will be ready for teachers once the schools re-open.

WORLD VISION KENYA AND WORLD VISION RWANDA HUBS:

This past year we welcomed two new LTK+ staff members - **Emmanuel Korir**, who is serving as the ABRA/READS Coordinator for World Vision Kenya hub. Initially Emmanuel will be supporting teachers in the Kirindon and Matete regions and later expanding into other WV Area Programs. A second ABRA/READS coordinator was hired for the **World Vision Rwanda** hub, **Jean-Baptiste Maniraguha**. Jean-Baptiste will be supporting teachers in WV's Area Program, Burunga and is currently planning for the project launch and pilot once Rwanda re-opens. We welcome both individuals to our KIX team.

KENYA TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PILOT

During the final months of 2020 when Kenyan schools were still closed, a 12-week course on early literacy instruction was designed and facilitated by members of the KIX LTK+ team. The fully online asynchronous course was offered through MyLearning Space, a Learning Management System hosted by **Wilfrid Laurier University**.

Working from home, participating teachers accessed four of the core TPD Modules, the ABRA software and the Teacher Resources literacy site. Teacher engagement included reflection with their peers on the discussion board, regular communication with their instructor, and submissions of assignments and lesson plans that incorporate ABRA. A virtual celebration ceremony was held in December 2020 for the 15 teachers who successfully completed the course. Even seasoned ABRA teachers were pleased with what they had learned about effective literacy instruction.

Key findings from the pilot such as the need for Teacher Assistants and more opportunities to engage with peers and the software were taken into consideration as another iteration of the course was designed for spring 2021. Currently unfolding, this iteration is comparing fully online with blended and face-to-face formats.

SSHRC PARTNERSHIP: SOMESHA DIGITAL, ABRA AND INCLUSION

Alongside the **Aga Khan Academy Mombasa**, the CSLP-LTK+ team began collaborating with **The Action Foundation** (TAF) and began plans for **Somesha Digital**—a pilot project that will explore the use of **ABRA** in inclusive classrooms within Kibera, a severely disadvantaged area in the center of Nairobi. TAF is an organization that aims to end exclusion for children with disabilities in marginalized areas by providing health and well-being resources as well as inclusive education resources.

TAF staff were trained in early 2021 on our TPD modules, as well as on ABRA and READS. A project launch on May 6 introduced the project to community leaders and the participating schools. The teams have since organized a training program for teachers in the Kibera region. As research on how to accommodate inclusion in the classroom is underway, the LTK+ team is also creating support materials to help teachers. This project is funded under a **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership grant**, with contributions from TAF.

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

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Guo, X., Cheung, A., Abrami, P.C., & Wade, A. (2020). Teachers' perceived challenges of using technology to teach through the lens of activity theory: Lessons from rural China. [Manuscript under review]. Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology

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Wood, E., Gottardo, A., Uribe-Banda, C., Vica, C., Kiforo, E. & Iminza, R. (2020). Supporting teacher integration of early literacy technology: Voices of teachers and teacher-mentors. [Manuscript under review]. Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology.

Concordia