"The mission of the International Reading Association is to promote reading by continuously advancing the quality of literacy instruction and research worldwide."

MAKING BIG DIFFERENCES: PROMOTING LITERACY IN MANY CORNERS OF THE WORLD

By Jennifer Jones, VSRA International Projects Chair

The Virginia State Reading Association (VSRA) embraces the concept of International Projects in various and meaningful ways. VSRA commits to promoting international literacy through long-term projects, short-term projects and through professional development opportunities in international settings each year.

The Ghana Project showcases VSRA’s long-term partnership with the University of Education of Winneba. Through this collaborative partnership, teachers and students in Winneba have received culturally relevant, research-based literacy workshops, as well as the building of a Teacher Resource Center, which contains books for children and resources for teachers.

Short-term international projects are also supported by VSRA. In collaboration with the Malawi Chibale Project, VSRA has provided funds for school nutrition for school children who typically receive one meal a day, and has contributed supplies and materials for a school library in a rural village school in Malawi, Africa. Conference bags from VSRA’s literacy conference are donated to professional development trainings focused on literacy in Malawi. After receiving a bag after participating in a training, one teacher stated, “I am now a rich man, for I have a bag for my books!”

Finally, VSRA supports professional development in international settings through an annual scholarship program. Through this scholarship opportunity for its membership, VSRA has supported professional development sessions in Guatemala, New Zealand, and beyond! The VSRA International Projects Chair organizes efforts and the scholarship program, and disseminates information.

A first grade teacher models another component of Best Practices, shared reading.

A team of teachers from the US visits the school in Santa Avelina every July for a week of inservice training in Best Practices in literacy instruction. Volunteers bring books in Spanish to stock the school library.
END OF AN ERA: THE ACTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES IN SCHOOLS (ATLAS) PROJECT ZAMBIA

Nestled at the confluence of the Luangwa and Zambezi Rivers, the Luangwa District in Zambia’s Lusaka Province is home to some of the most remarkable scenery and wildlife in Zambia. With a population of approximately 18,000, Luangwa district is also made up of several villages.

The ATLAS project Luangwa district started in 2011 as an extension of a pilot program begun in 2008. In Luangwa, 12 teachers from 5 schools were trained in IRA’s Diagnostic Teaching Method (DTM) under the Active Teaching and Learning Approaches in Schools program (ATLAS), funded by ChildFund New Zealand and implemented by the International Reading Association. ChildFund’s ATLAS program is designed to improve the quality of education received by students through teachers’ use of active, participatory and child-centered teaching and learning methods.

As the ATLAS project in Zambia concluded this July, IRA conducted a 2-day workshop in Luangwa and Lusaka. The Luangwa Workshop was oriented toward professional development and focused primarily on a review of the ATLAS training and a sharing of experiences by the teachers.

Dr. Janet Condy, an IRA member, IRA Global Volunteer Trainer and a professor from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town South Africa, presented on various topics including leadership and change, mentoring, community leadership and family support.

The workshop led to a discussion among teachers on the importance of their role as teacher leaders in the community and how they need to work together, with support from the ministry of education, to spread the PD knowledge gained from ATLAS to other schools in the region. IRA staff also facilitated a 1-day workshop focused on creating a local reading association within their community.

Global Operations Spotlight

In September, IRA Global Operations staff attended the Asian Literacy Conference, hosted by the Bangladesh Reading Association in Dhaka, Bangladesh. During the conference, participants had the opportunity to share about literacy issues in countries around Asia and to hear about targeted literacy projects in their own communities.

In addition, IRA celebrated International Literacy Day along with conference participants from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan, Taiwan, India and more. IRA delegates also had the special privilege of attending a high-level International Literacy Day event hosted by the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh and UNESCO.

September also marked the third year of IRA’s Global Literacy Professional Development Network (GLPDN) projects in Indonesia and Bangladesh. Representatives of both countries gathered in Dhaka along with IRA staff and funders to share about the successes of the project. With over 1,400 teachers trained and 85,000 students impacted during this project, we know that IRA and its network are helping to solve the problem of illiteracy in those communities.

Global Operations Spotlight

Another component of Best Practices – a kindergarten teacher and her students share a big book, written by local teachers in Ixil, with parents.