

Readsters Report: Readsters Goes International!

Readsters is working in Africa! We are excited to be working with the Global Partnership for Education as consultants to The Republic of Gambia in West Africa on their *Early Reading in National Languages* project.

Michael Hunter is the primary consultant on this project. He has traveled to The Gambia twice for the project. He also spoke about teacher training to representatives from 16 African countries at the *All Children Reading* conference in Kigali, Rwanda.

Our work in The Gambia is with a pilot program that teaches first graders to decode in the national language they speak. While English is the official language of The Gambia, there are at least 10 national languages in this small country, and many children entering school do not speak English. The *Early Reading in National Languages* project includes five of the

The Republic of Gambia is surrounded by Senegal

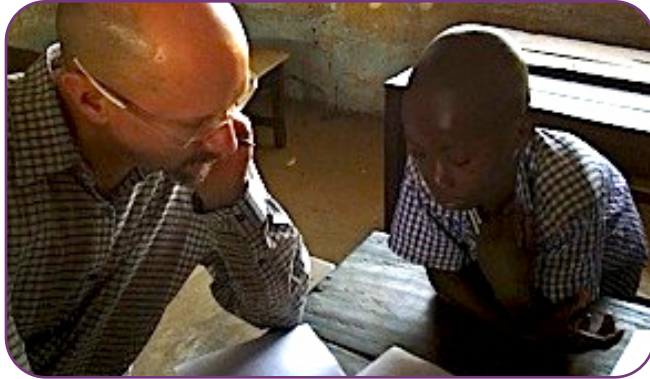
national languages and is in 125 schools (25 schools per language).



Teacher, Michael, and Student Learning Together

First Grade Students





Michael and Student

Our work on this project is similar in some ways to our work in the US: we wrote lessons that included scripted routines and participated in designing a training-of-trainers. Michael helped lead the training for 25 coaches (5 for each language). He also visited classrooms to observe the lessons being taught so we could give feedback to the coaches who work with the teachers.

The differences from our work at home are what make this project extraordinarily challenging and extraordinarily rewarding. Little print material, if any, exists in the national languages, and students arrive at school with virtually no literacy background. That means that lessons must teach **all** students everything about how print works. Resources are scarce in The Gambia, so the children have only one book that includes everything they need for their reading lessons. Essentially, they learn to read without much reading material. There are no classroom libraries or big books for read-alouds in these schools.



Coaches Learning

Another major difference is that the lessons we wrote were translated into the national languages by coaches. So when Michael observed classes, the teachers and students were speaking the national language, which he does not know!

Learning Letter Formation
with Air-Writing

While Africa is a very long plane ride away and the languages the children are learning to decode are different, the fundamentals of good reading instruction remain the same. We are pleased to be sharing what we have learned from teachers in the United States with teachers in The Gambia, and we look forward to sharing what teachers in The Gambia have taught us with teachers here at home.

