

# ABRACADABRA matters

## ABRACADABRA Pan-Canadian study possible for 2007

A letter of intent to the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network for a pan-Canadian study of ABRACADABRA (ABRA) was the only one accepted for full proposal submission.

The acceptance and award of this grant would mean the scaling up of the ABRA studies to date and partnering with 6 sites across Canada to investigate the effectiveness of this tool with a larger and more diverse sample.

This two year study would involve a multi-disciplinary team of researchers including: Noëlla Piquette Tomei from University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Mary Ann Evans from the University of Guelph.

Eileen Wood from the University of Waterloo, Lesly Wade-Woolley from Queens University in Kingston, Ontario and Linda Siegel from University of British Columbia.

The team will partner with schools in their respective locations and work with teachers to use ABRA as a whole class instructional tool as part of the Language Arts Curriculum. The integration of ABRA in this way will be trialed in January of 2007, on a smaller scale in Montreal.

## Conferences & Kudos

A Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network grant was awarded to Dr. Robert Savage, CSLP theme leader for a look at ABRACADABRA integration into the whole class environment in Quebec.

ABRACADABRA was presented at the international e-Learning Symposium in Melbourne, Australia December 3-5 2006, by Dr. Robert Savage and colleagues Erin Comaskey (CSLP Literacy Projects Coordinator) and Louise Deault (McGill Ph.D. candidate)

## ABRACADABRA extreme make-over: ABRA gets a whole new look

At the end of the 2005-2006 school year, new characters for ABRACADABRA (ABRA) were tested with school age children. The choices included a spunky little girl with her cat and a softer panda bear and friends. The decision wasn't easy as children seemed to be split down the middle in regards to which characters they preferred.

The result is a whole new look to ABRA with a combination of friendly, yet edgy interfaces that provides users with an exciting new world to learn in.

Designers Sébastien Rainville and Benoît Danis, under the direction of Creative Director Catherine LeBel, have worked hard at bringing ABRA together as a more cohesive package. "We want ABRA to have the same learning content as it has always had, but with a more playful feel."

The redesigned version of ABRA will be launched in September 2008. In the meantime, it will be piloted in smaller studies in the Montreal area in September 2007.

To find out more about the content additions of the new version of ABRACADABRA, please see pg. 3.



Sébastien Rainville, Catherine LeBel and Benoît Danis surrounding the new stars of ABRACADABRA

Check us out at:

<http://grover.concordia.ca/ABRA/abra2007alpha/>

## Coordinator's Corner

ABRACADABRA (ABRA) isn't the only thing that has changed over the summer. There have been some changes to the faces of the people working on ABRA at the CSLP.

Geoffrey Hipps, former literacy coordinator, is now the English Language Arts Consultant for the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board. He has left behind a legacy of excellence and passion for this project and he is missed. However, as the ELA he is able to continue championing ABRA with SWLSB teachers in their classrooms.

In his place is Erin Comaskey, M.A. from McGill University. Erin was an elementary school teacher in New Jersey, USA for four years before moving to Montreal in 2003. She worked with ABRA during its pilot study and following that, used ABRA as the basis for her Masters thesis.

Since joining the team in August, Erin has also been involved in training professionals for the ePEARL research project and assisting in grant applications and coordination.

Ane Jorgensen, former instructional designer, is currently working for the Educational Technology Department at Marionopolis College. In

her place, we welcome Gia Delevaux, Ph.D. candidate from McGill, who has hit the ground running developing the Teacher Module material.

Denise Silverstone, former research coordinator, has returned to Toronto making way for Vanitha Pillay, MEd from McGill University. She is coordinating both the ABRA and ePEARL research projects.

We welcome all the new team members and look forward to a very productive year!



Vanitha Pillay, Erin Comaskey and Gia Delevaux

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## Coming Soon

We are sponsoring ABRACADABRA's first **Story Contest**. We are currently accepting entries of stories of all genres from students across Quebec. We are looking for stories written by students geared for a first grade audience. The selected stories will be turned into viewable stories, complete with illustrations on the ABRACADABRA website.



# Grants and Project Development

Following the acceptance of our proposals to both the **Ministère de l'Éducation, du loisir et du Sport du Québec** and **CTREQ**, we are focusing our development efforts not just on the visual redesign of ABRACADABRA (ABRA), but also on developing the other modules that have been planned to complete the software.

The first additional module that will be complete is the *Professional Development* or *Teacher* module. This area will include more detailed information about integrating ABRA into the Language Arts Curriculum, as well as videos that will allow teachers to access support on demand for informational or instructional purposes. Lesson plans, extension activities and printable resources will also be found in this area.

Aside from practical and pedagogical resources, we will be providing teachers with access to research and other valuable information that contributes to best teaching practices in Language Arts.

Other modules that will be under development over the next year are the *Assessment* and *Communication* modules. These modules will be available to help teachers evaluate the progress of their students both in and out of the ABRA software, and help to build a community of practices by providing them with the means to dialogue with other educational professionals.

Other proposals to **CLLRnet** and **LEARN-Quebec** will help us to expand these professional development materials and help to extend our vision of the *Assessment* and *Communication* modules. It is also our goal to build a *Parent* area that will contain specific information for *at-home* practice and instruction.

## ABRACADABRA



Electronic Portfolio Encouraging  
Active Reflective Learning

The link between our two literacy applications, ABRACADABRA (ABRA) and ePEARL, our electronic portfolio for Self-Regulated Learning, is quickly turning into a reality.

The link will involve using ePEARL to help track literacy development in ABRA in both oral reading and writing skill development. Anne Wade, ePEARL project coordinator states, "We are very excited about the linkage of ABRACADABRA and ePEARL given the natural fit between the development of early literacy skills and portfolios. ePEARL enables young students to: track their reading development by recording directly into their portfolio, issue a reading response, reflect on their reading ability, learn rudimentary keyboarding and word processing commands, and use multimedia to express their learning. We believe this will provide an enhanced learning environment for students that will compliment the basic literacy skills developed within ABRA. Students will even be able to archive the accomplishments they are most proud of and carry this forward into future years!"

From a technical perspective, this will mean a merging of what has been until now, two separate databases. This will allow us to provide schools with a suite of tools that they can use in conjunction with one another. Schools will be able to import student data to help set up student and teacher accounts, as well as track student use and development.



# Research Report

Research remains the foundation of development for all of our applications. Since 2005 ABRACADABRA (ABRA) has been studied in Quebec in several different capacities. A follow up study to collect longitudinal data from those first grade students who participated in the ABRA intervention last year was carried out in November. The analysis has begun to take place and we are excited about the potential results.

An investigation into ABRA's effectiveness with first grade students who exhibit some attention problems by Ph.D. candidate Louise Deault, yielded extremely positive results. A full report on this study is currently under review and we hope to be reporting the details of this study in the near future.

In addition, two separate studies on the use of ABRA with kindergarten students were also carried out in 2006. Karine Tremblay M.A. used ABRA and SMARTboards with her students as a whole class instructional tool at Selwyn house. Erin Comaskey and Stacy Altman worked with ABRA as a learning center with an at-risk population. The latter study's preliminary results showed significant effects for those students who used ABRA over the control group in several key literacy areas including: letter sound knowledge, sight word and non-word reading and other phonemic awareness tasks like blending and unit articulation. The writing of this paper is in progress.



## Upcoming Events and Conferences

### Conferences

For the 2007-2008 year there are several important events that the CSLP will be taking part in.

#### APRIL:

AERA Conference  
QAIS Conference

*Presenters*

Anne Wade  
Erin Comaskey

#### JUNE:

CLLRnet Conference  
Presentation of ABRA

### Agenda Item!

#### **MAY Steering Committee Meeting**

Tentative date scheduled for ABRACADABRA steering committee meeting.

#### **Meet and Greet Dinner**

Wednesday May 23rd

#### **Meeting at Concordia**

Thursday May 24th

We hope you will be able to join us to help plan the ABRACADABRA activities for next year and beyond.

## Steering Committee Members

Name	Position/Organization
Phil Abrami	<i>CSLP Director, Professor, Concordia University</i>
Janet Cameron	<i>Board Member, Canadian Association of Principals; Prince Edward Island Association of School Administrators</i>
Michael Canuel	<i>CEO, Leading English Education And Resource Networks (LEARN)</i>
Bette Chambers	<i>Director, Early Learning, Success for All Foundation</i>
Anastasia Cheetham	<i>Project Technical Lead, The Inclusive Learning Exchange (TILE) project Design Team Member, Web-4-All project</i>
Erin Comaskey	<i>Literacy Projects Coordinator, CSLP, Concordia University</i>
John Cyr	<i>Member, Association of Directors-General of the English School Boards of Quebec Retired Director General, Central Quebec School Board</i>
Mary Ann Evans	<i>Professor, University of Guelph Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network</i>
Diane Fyfe	<i>Canadian Association for School Administrators Retired Director General, Western Quebec School Board</i>
Val Johnston	<i>ICT Officer and Web Coordinator, e-Learning Ontario</i>
Heather Halman	<i>Director Educational Services, Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board</i>
Geoffrey Hippi	<i>English Language Arts Consultant, Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board</i>
Catherine LeBel	<i>Director, Design and Development, CSLP, Concordia University</i>
Anne Lemay	<i>Language Arts Consultant, Central Quebec School Board</i>
Mary-Jo MacRae	<i>E-Learning Programs and Services, New Brunswick Depart. of Education</i>
Helen Raham	<i>Research Director, Society for Advancement of Excellence in Education (SAEE)</i>
Don Reid	<i>Deputy Director General, English Montreal School Board</i>
Gerald Robillard	<i>Assistant Director of Educational Services, Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board</i>
Rob Savage	<i>Educational and Counselling Psychology Faculty of Education, McGill University, CSLP</i>
Norm Segalowitz	<i>Associate Director, CSLP and Professor, Concordia University</i>
Linda Siegel	<i>Professor, University of British Columbia, Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network</i>
Ron St. Louis	<i>Education Officer, e-Learning Ontario</i>
Jutta Treviranus	<i>Director, Adaptive Technology Resource Centre, University of Toronto</i>
Anne Wade	<i>Manager and Information Specialist, CSLP, Concordia University</i>
Bev White	<i>Director, LEARNing Communities</i>
Teena Willoughby	<i>Professor, Brock University; Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network</i>
Eileen Wood	<i>Professor, Sir Wilfrid Laurier University; Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network</i>