

# Piloting Let's Breathe! and Learning to BREATHE: Evaluating the use and desirability of a trauma-sensitive, self-regulation mindfulness program for students at Flying Kites Academy in rural Kenya

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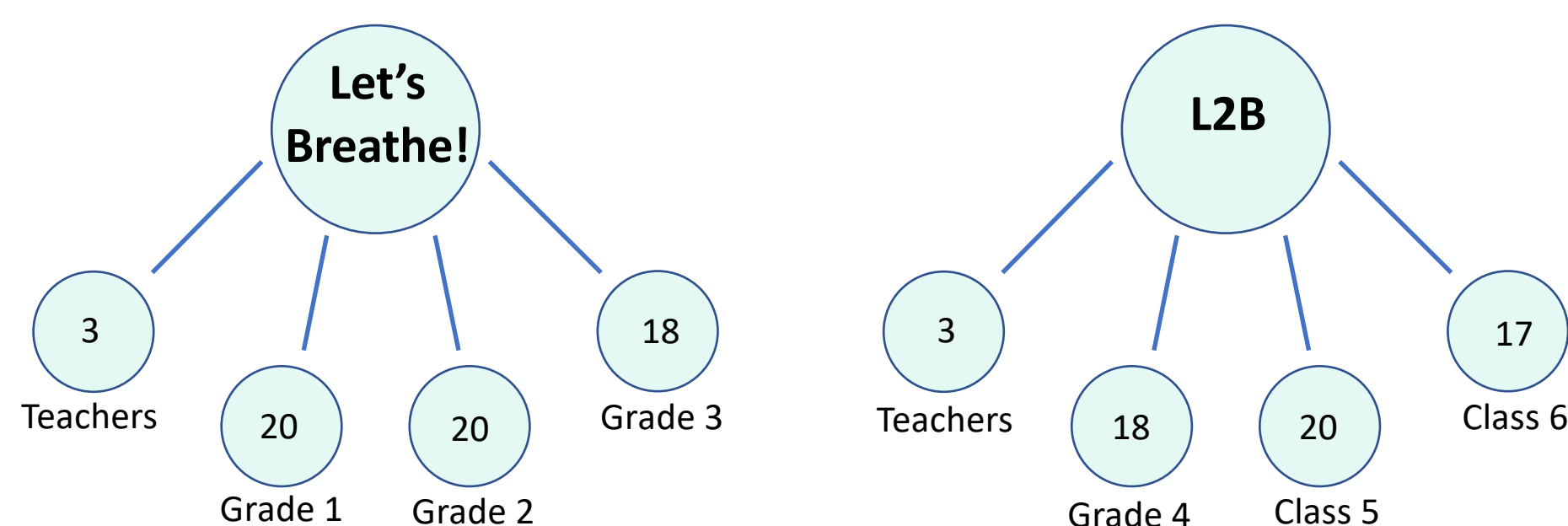
## Background Information

- Flying Kites Academy (FKA):** school based in rural Njabini, Kenya providing the most vulnerable students, who regularly experience poverty and trauma, with a primary education
- Growing up in disadvantaged communities → higher exposure to stress and trauma → negatively impacts all other areas of life such as emotional regulation and executive functioning → struggle to handle emotions, sensation, stress and daily routines<sup>7, 8, 10</sup>
- Trauma-informed care:** a strengths-based approach rooted in the understanding and impact of trauma on physical, psychological and emotional health; programming should have specific skills to increase protective factors and positive experiences for students<sup>6, 10</sup>
- Self-regulation:** controlling emotions and actions within context of environment and goals<sup>5</sup>
- Mindfulness:** self-regulation practice of being aware of present-moment experience[s] without trying to push [them] away or over-engage<sup>3</sup>
  - Mindfulness has potential to improve students' cognitive performance, resilience to stress, and overall school performance<sup>2</sup>
  - More positive experiences during the non-academic parts of their days, more feelings of connectedness → increase in classroom engagement and academic performance<sup>1</sup>

## Programs & Participants

- Let's Breathe!:** lays foundation for Learning to BREATHE; teaches to identify emotions and ways to manage/cope with challenging feelings<sup>9</sup>
- Learning to BREATHE (L2B):** evidence-based mindfulness curriculum for adolescents to foster emotion regulation, attention, and performance<sup>3, 4</sup>
  - Workbook for grades 4-8 to broaden learning
- Programs adapted and created, respectively, to reflect Kenyan culture
- Both include 6 lessons intended to be taught over 6-week period

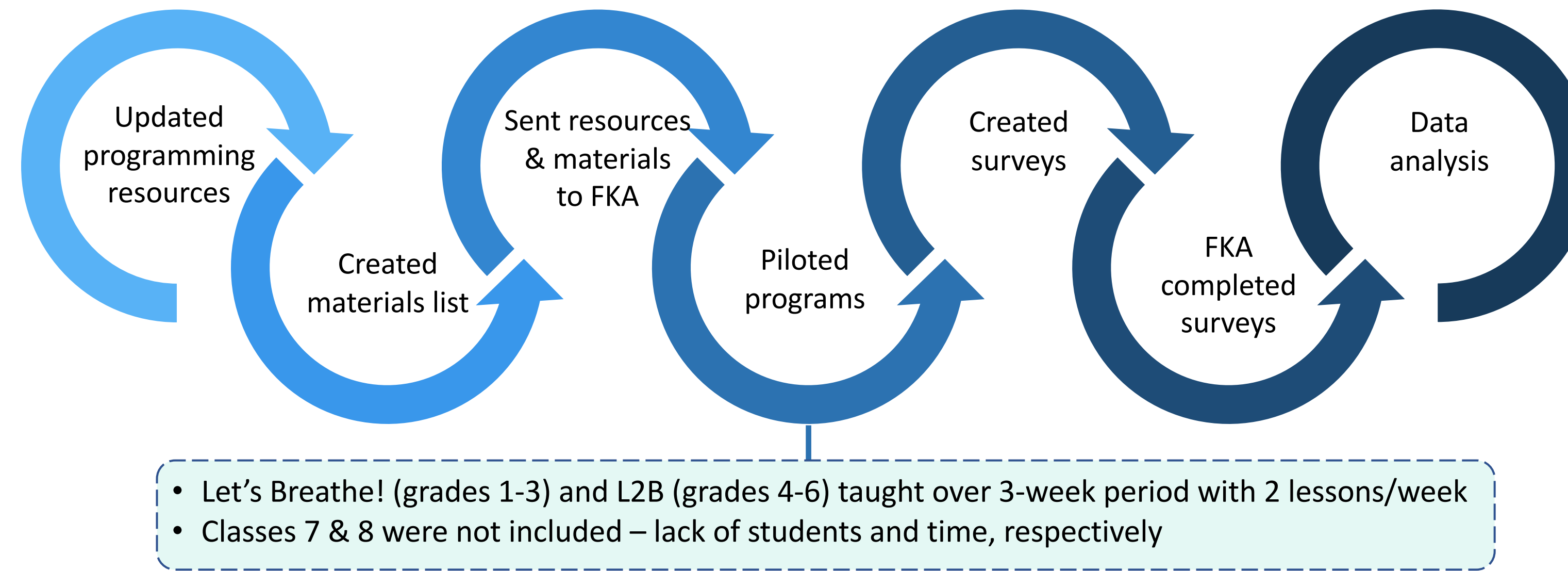
### Participants:



## Project Aims

- Pilot *Let's Breathe!* and *L2B* curriculums to students at FKA
- Determine effectiveness of programs for students & teachers
- Evaluate teacher & student perceptions to identify which areas students benefited from the most
- Identify which areas need adjustment

## Methods & Piloting



### Let's Breathe!

<b>Teachers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3/3 reported helpful to students</li> <li>3/3 reported students enjoyed</li> <li>3/3 reported lessons age and learning-level appropriate</li> </ul>	<b>Students*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>98% (57/58) liked the program</li> <li>98% (57/58) would do it again</li> <li>100% (58/58) felt calmer after lessons</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback &amp; Suggestions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoyed teaching</li> <li>Reported students enjoyed breathing</li> <li>Lesson 4 had too many activities</li> <li>Some wording was too challenging for students</li> <li>Want lessons more on paying attention</li> </ul>	<b>Feedback &amp; Suggestions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All classes enjoyed breathing activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Animal breathing &amp; 5-finger breathing</li> </ul> </li> <li>Didn't enjoy mindful movements or roleplaying unpleasant emotions</li> <li>More on how to manage unpleasant emotions</li> <li>Would like more breathing exercises</li> </ul>

*"I believe that the learners have acquired new skills in dealing with daily challenges and especially concerning unpleasant emotions. The pupils are now able to respond positively to these challenges and are able to cope with negative energy surrounding them," FKA Teacher.*

*"I broke a cup and my mom punished me. I got sad, went to my bedroom and practiced butterfly breathing. I felt more calm," Student, Grade 3.*

\* Per FKA ask, teachers tallied and recorded information on surveys for grades 1-3

### Learning To BREATHE

<b>Teachers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3/3 reported helpful to students</li> <li>3/3 reported students enjoyed</li> <li>2/3 reported lessons/workbooks age appropriate</li> <li>2/3 liked scripts</li> <li>2/3 suggested needed additional work</li> </ul>	<b>Students</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100% (55/55) liked the program</li> <li>87% (48/55) would do it again</li> <li>93% (51/55) felt calmer after lessons</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback &amp; Suggestions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would have liked additional time for lessons</li> <li>Simpler language would be better for workbooks</li> </ul>	<b>Feedback &amp; Suggestions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Least favorite parts included drawing workbook activities and emotions</li> <li>Would like to do more body scans and movement</li> </ul>

*"...these learners experience or witness a lot of challenges in their homes and community at large, the program will be of great help to them. Some of them have already started applying this knowledge in their day to day life," Teacher, Class 6.*

*"More time should be given to undertake the program just like the other learning areas in an academic year," Teacher, Class 6.*

*"When I was angry with my grandmother I took a deep breath[e] and it help[ed] me," Student, Class 6.*

*"I was stressed and took a deep breathe," Student, Class 5.*

*"When I was sad I used mindfulness and got happy," Student, Class 5.*

### Let's Breathe! Lessons<sup>9</sup>

- 1) Introduction to Mindfulness & Breathing
- 2) Paying Attention
- 3) Emotions 1 – What Are Feelings?
- 4) Emotions 2 – Unpleasant Emotions
- 5) Emotions 3 – Pleasant Emotions
- 6) Review & Closing

### L2B Lessons<sup>3</sup>

- 1) Body
- 2) Reflections
- 3) Emotions
- 4) Attention
- 5) Tenderness
- 6) Habits
- 7) Empower



## Discussion

- Overall, students enjoyed programming and reported the activities helped them to feel calmer
- FKA was seeking way to fill time in schedule – eager to try *Let's Breathe!* & *L2B*
- Strengths:**
  - Helped students better understand their emotions
  - Provided students with multiple ways to manage emotions
  - Learned the power of breathing
  - Teachers liked teaching it and thought could be helpful to students
- Limitations:**
  - Not generalizable to other sites or participants
  - English is not first language; some activities and survey questions misunderstood
    - Encouraged by FKA to use as few yes/no questions as possible
  - FKA schedule required programming to be 2x a week
  - Not all materials were acquired by FKA prior to pilot
- Future programming considerations:**
  - Coordinate with FKA to find time for 6 weeks of programming & material acquisition
  - Edit lessons/activities to include even simpler language and/or fewer activities

## Conclusion

- Understanding and managing emotions showed to help with stress and can potentially improve occupational performance of students
- Next Steps:**
  - Integrate *Let's Breathe!* and *L2B* into FKA curriculum
  - Additional teacher training on trauma and unpleasant emotions, more mindfulness activities for classrooms
  - Potential interest in mindfulness program for teachers
  - Movement-based programming for younger students

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### References



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