

REPT – BUILDING BLOCKS BURKINA UPDATE, JULY 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In February/March 2017, REPT received a one-time donation of about \$18,800 following the wind-down of the activities of another Canadian charitable organization working in Burkina Faso. It was agreed with that organization that REPT would use the donated funds to accelerate progress on their Building Blocks Burkina (BBB) program. REPT committed to providing a report on the activities and spending following each trip to Burkina Faso for BBB purposes until the donated funds are depleted. We are pleased to provide this first report on our most recent BBB activities.

Background

REPT's Building Blocks Burkina (BBB) Program was designed by REPT Founder Allyson Tache as an effective and relatively simple method of providing local pre-school teachers in Burkina Faso with tools (building blocks) and training (in child centered pedagogy through block play) aimed at improving the quality of pre-school education. Much was accomplished between completion of the initial BBB pilot program in 2011 and the 2016 launch of the formal BBB Training Manual, the result of an extensive collaboration between Allyson Tache and M. Etienne Gnoumou (an Inspector at the Ministry of Education) to ensure that the training provided to pre-school teachers is adapted to the pre-school context in Burkina Faso. Along the way, various representatives of the Ministry of Education in Ougadougou have been engaged and always fully supportive. Recently, the Director of Pre-school programs at MENA (Ministere de l'Education Nationale et de l'Alphabétisation) stated that the new government is committed to devoting time and money to developing a quality pre-school education program for Burkina Faso and he welcomed BBB's initiative as an important support to this restructuring of the pre-school education program.

Thanks to contribution of additional funds in early 2017, we have been able to move on to a new phase of our project - to train local educators in the BBB methodology - thus ensuring that qualified local trainers are available to conduct professional development workshops for teachers (mostly women) in the Burkinabe preschools. In February/March 2017, Allyson Tache spent two months in Burkina Faso specifically working on this aspect of the BBB program. A high level summary is provided below, details are provided as appendices to this report.

Summary of Activities:

- Collaborating with Ministry representative to organize and plan the Train the Trainer workshop including selection of participants (who would lead the future training sessions in the pre-schools).
- Arranging for the timely manufacture and delivery of 60 blocks kits (needed for the workshops and training) through 3 local carpenters and their apprentices.
- Delivering the Train the Trainer workshop to 11 selected participants over 4 days. Supervising the initial training sessions conducted by 5 newly trained Trainers in 5 different locations which involved travelling to 4 provinces.

- Additional training (delivered by Allyson) for teachers in 7 pre-schools.

Educators from 9 regions (out of 13 regions in the country) participated in the Train the Trainer workshop and qualified to become Trainers able to deliver BBB training sessions in pre-schools in future. The Educators came from the following regions: Cascades, Centre, Centre Est, Centre Nord, Centre Ouest, Plateau Central, Hauts Bassins, Sahel and Nord. See Appendix A for more details on the Train the Trainer Workshop.

Supervised delivery of training sessions for over 100 pre-school teachers, called Petites Mamans et Petits Papas (PMs & PPs), was conducted in five regions, namely: Centre (Ouagadougou); Centre Est (Tenkodogo); Centre Nord (Kaya); Hauts Bassins (Bobo-Dioulasso); Nord (Ouahigouya). See Appendix B for a detailed report on these training sessions.

Training was delivered by Allyson personally to pre-school teachers in Boucle du Mouhoun (Dedougou). At the request of (and funded by) ASMAE, Allyson also delivered training to teachers of special needs classrooms in Ouagadougou. See Appendix C for details on the additional workshops and to enjoy a couple of her personal anecdotes of some of her experiences.

Summary

During February & March 2017 about 130 Burkinabe educators (over 100 of those were women) developed new knowledge and skills that will help improve the quality of pre-school education in Burkina Faso. The groundwork is now laid for the training sessions to continue conducted by local Trainers. An unexpected and very positive development was the initiative taken by the new Trainers, all MENA employees, to form their own government recognized "Association" (for qualified trainers in child centered pedagogy and learning through play) in order to facilitate the continuation of this work in the pre-schools throughout the country. This commitment serves further to validate and normalize the BBB approach.

To quote Allyson's words in closing:

"I am encouraged by the responses of all those I encountered. One hundred and one women teachers (PMs) developed new skills and strategies to improve the quality of the education they provide. The fact of being together with other PMs/PPs from their province allowed them to openly discuss and share their experiences. They felt validated and respected for the first time. The per diems we provide are important as many of these women have not been paid since September. I sincerely believe that the time is right for this child centered learning approach to be embraced by teachers in their classrooms, as well as government officials. It feels like the educational climate here is aligning with my vision... It has been a privilege to work with such committed educators. I am especially grateful for the time spent with the courageous women in the preschools who devote their days to nurturing and supporting young children in their development and early learning. They are the true heroes!"

APPENDIX A

Train the Trainer Workshop

Ouagadougou, February 22 – 25, 2017.

Participants: 9 men 2 women. 4 days, 11 blocks kits

Total cost: \$3,102.39

The key objective of this training session was to develop a core group of trainers in child centered pedagogy through block play. The general objective was to ensure that the training provided to pre-school teachers is adapted to the pre-school context in Burkina Faso so that children benefit from block play in their learning – in other words, to promote an evolution in methods, attitudes and behaviours towards young children, thus improving the quality of pre-school education.

The principal resource was the Training Manual in block play, written by M. Etienne Gnomou and Allyson Taché. The trainers received per diems, and REPT paid for their transportation, as well as providing one blocks kit for each trainer.

Overview of the objectives of the 4 day workshop:

- create the teaching module to be used to train pre-school teachers;
- develop classroom management strategies that would facilitate block play;
- create observation tools/grids to be used by teachers when observing children engaged in block play;
- create teaching strategies that use the blocks that are adapted to the context of pre-schools in Burkina Faso;
- recognize that blocks are adaptable so they can, and should, be used to support the existing curriculum; and
- prepare the practicum schedule for 5 trainers in their regions.

The list of participants in the Train the Trainer workshop is below. All but two are inspectors in the Ministry of Education. All but one of the participants (M. Corneille Mare) had attended at least one previous workshop delivered by Building Blocks Burkina and were among the first groups of early childhood educators to be trained in various regions in Burkina Faso from 2012 – 2016. They were selected to attend this session based on their experience, performance and the interest in child centered pedagogy that they demonstrated during the first workshops. An effort was also made to ensure that several regions of Burkina Faso would be represented.

BONKOUYOU, Boukare	IEJE	DPENA	NORD Ouahigouya
GUINKO, Issaka	EJE	DPENA	CENTRE EST Tenkodogo
BAZONGO, Taquiéba	IEJE	DRFSNF	CENTRE OUEST
REGTOUMDA, Clément	IEJE	MFSNF	PLATEAU CENTRAL Zorgo
WOBA/ZERBO, Honorine	MEJE	DPENA	HAUTS BASSINS Bobo Dioulasso
SANON, Maurice	EJE	DPENA	CASCADES Leraba
KONSIEMBO, Denise	EJE	DPENA	CENTRE NORD Kaya
TRAORE, Oumarou	IEJE	ASMAE	CENTRE Ouagadougou
BAZIE, Badéma Serge	IEJE	INFTS	CENTRE OUEST Réo
GNOUMOU, Etienne	IEJE	DPEIFG	SAHEL DORI
MARE, Kone	IEJE	MENA	CENTRE Ouagadougou

The participants were engaged and eager to work on developing strategies that will improve early childhood education. They expressed a keen interest in the material that was presented and participated enthusiastically in all the activities. There was much discussion and debate around key elements of child centered pedagogy and how the blocks can be used to support existing curriculum guidelines and bring active learning to the pre-school environment. They surprised me with the points they made that indicated they had assimilated the basics of this pedagogy and understood that steps must be taken in order to implement this pedagogy in all pre-schools in Burkina Faso (see Note below).

Their commitment is made clear by the fact that they are joining together to form their own "Association" so that they may continue this work in the pre-schools. With a recognized status as an Association they will be able to apply for funding to continue the training and to provide support of pre-school teachers.

The 11 trainers gained the expertise and experience necessary to act as advocates for developing child centered pedagogy in the pre-schools and to provide training for preschool teachers in how to use blocks in the classroom. The key objective was attained.

Note: It is my experience that there has been a huge gap between Ministry curriculum guidelines and the Ministry's Teacher training curriculum, and the reality of what is happening in the classrooms. Overcrowded classrooms and lack of teaching material has meant that much of what is proposed by government and taught in Teacher Training Programs remains theoretical, i.e., impossible to put into action in the schools as they exist today. I believe that BBB is closing this gap by providing concrete teaching material for the classrooms along with professional development training, both elements that are deemed essential for quality pre-school education.

APPENDIX B

Practicums: Supervised Teacher-Trainer Sessions in 5 regions.

Locations

Centre **Ouagadougou**

Centre Est **Tenkodogo**

Centre Nord **Kaya**

Hauts Bassins **Bobo-Dioulasso**

Nord **Ouahigouya**

The Teacher-Trainer Sessions were conducted by 5 of the recently approved Trainers (from the list in Appendix A) and supervised by Allyson Tache.

Participants: 100 pre-school teachers (called PM/PPs) - 85 women, 15 men
40 pre-schools (called Bisongo's)

Total Cost Teacher Training: 6,085.39

We selected 5 regions and 7-8 pre-schools per province for this phase. Five trainers (3 men & 2 women) led two day workshops with the PM/PPs in their region. The five trainers and all the participants received per diems for the two days of training. I was able to observe and assess the trainers for both days of their practicum in two locations, Kaya and Bobo-Dioulasso, but due to time constraints, only for one day of the practicum in the other three locations. A couple of observations:

- Trainers often began speaking in the local dialect while explaining various concepts, strategies and attitudes. This had a very positive impact. Teachers were more apt to participate in discussions and share information.
- Most of the pre-school teachers attending the workshop had attended the introductory workshops and were familiar with the blocks. I recognized many familiar faces.

Kaya March 3-4, 2017

Trainer: Madame Denise Konseimbo, Directrice du CEEP

Participants: 16 women, 5 men 8 Bisongos

Denise is an advocate of block play and I have worked with her on several occasions. After participating in the first round of workshops in 2014, she was so convinced of the necessity for blocks in her school that she went out and found a carpenter to make blocks for her school.

One of the participants in this session was a Peace Corps Volunteer volunteering in one of the Bisongos. He had attended a week long training session to prepare for this two year commitment. He explained at the end of our session that, because the workshop was interactive and provided the material to actually experience play based learning, these two days had provided him with a clearer understanding of this pedagogy.

Tenkodogo March 10 – 11, 2017

Trainer: Monsieur Issaka Guinko. EJE.

Participants: 21 women 8 Bisongos.

In 2011, M. Guinko was selected by JICA (Japanese International Cooperation Agency), to go to Japan to study their early childhood education system for three weeks. As a result he has an excellent understanding of child-centered pedagogy. In the first round of workshops, in 2014, he taught one of the sections of the teacher training sessions.

Bobo Dioulasso March 17 - 18, 2-017

Trainer: Madame Honorinne Woba/Zerbo. MEJE.

Participants: 18 women, 3 men 8 Bisongos.

Honorine is a dedicated and highly motivated pre-school teacher who is becoming a spokesperson for block play in Bobo Dioulasso.

Ouagadougou March 21 – 22, 2017

Trainer: Monsieur Taquiba Bazongo, IEJE.

Participants: 15 women, 2 men. 9 Bisongos.

During the Train the Trainer workshops, M. Bazongo was instrumental in bridging the gap between the reality of pre-schools in Burkina Faso and child centered approach of children learning through block play. He provided concrete examples of how blocks can be used in every learning situation of a pre-school environment.

Ouahigouya March 22 - 23, 2017

Trainer: Monsieur Boucaré Bonkougou, IEJE.

Participants: 15 women, 5 men. 7 Bisongos

M. Bonkougou is dedicated to improving the quality of pre-school education and he has a clear understanding of child-centered pedagogy. He continues to deepen his understanding of how children learn and to provide quality training for pre-school teachers.

More than half the participants had attended previous workshops, and are familiar with the blocks and the associated concepts. They welcomed the opportunity to further explore block play and gain a deeper understanding of how to use the blocks in the classroom and they were happy to receive new blocks kits for their classrooms. Many had some blocks left in their classrooms from the first workshop and they are using them regularly. These sessions served to re-enforce and support the teachers (many of whom have not yet received remuneration for their work since last October). Sadly, things move so slowly that often schools don't even receive the required materials till half way through the year.

APPENDIX C

Additional Workshops (& personal anecdotes)

March 13 – 14, 2017

Boucle du Mouhoun **Dedougou**

Two other training sessions in Dedougou: for additional reading see Appendix B.

Aside from working with MENA I was invited to deliver a workshop to a private pre-school in Dedougou . Two pre-school teachers were trained in how to use the blocks in the classroom and two kits were provided for the school.

While in Dedougou I made an impromptu visit to a public pre-school where I had delivered a workshop in 2014. The director of the school welcomed me, and I took the opportunity to demonstrate how to use the blocks in the classroom to the three new teachers of the preschool. Two kits were provided to the school.

Participants: 5 women pre-school teachers 2 pre-schools

March 25, 2017

ASMAE **Ougadougou**

I was invited to deliver a one day workshop organized by ASMAE to provide professional development to 10 of their special needs teachers. The workshop took place in their Ouagadougou Office, and ASMAE covered all costs, including the purchase of 5 blocks kits for the respective schools.

Participants: 9 women, 1 man 5 pre-schools

A few anecdotes:

Benoit and I drive out of town, 6-7 km to a “Centre de....de la paroisse...” Expansive concession main hall, church, conference rooms, AC is optional, sleeping rooms – a kind of retreat centre cum conference centre– in a softly forested area – very flat and dry. The buildings made of local brick – red earth and stone – are spread out over several acres along with a banana plantation, mango orchards, a marvelous vegetable garden (ripe eggplant falling off their stocks, rows of garlic, onions, dill, zucchini, cabbage) cattle, pigs (this is a catholic enclave), chickens – they make their own cheese, which (I just realized) I forgot to take with me this morning – two tommes (!)

Worked with Madame, a friendly, mature woman who is doing her best to look after a group of 55 children, ages 2 to 5. A few 5 year olds arrived with their younger siblings hanging from their backs in the usual baby carrying pang– amazing to see a child of 5 (perhaps 15 kilos), with their younger sibling (perhaps 9 kilos) walking with ease in spite of the added weight – two heads, almost identical, bobbing along a mere meter above the dusty ground.

Here the children play a lot –

Benoit thought about having me come here, in part because he thought the women were being lax in their work. My observation is that this is one of the first pre-schools where the children have very little structure and have access to an eclectic assortment of toys that the children play with freely. We kept 8 children in the class while the rest went outside to play on the equipment and with the toys. Children at the table played for 15-20 minutes and showed a keen interest in playing with the blocks. We changed the group a few times and with the last group I led an activity with the children. Together we sorted the blocks by colour and put each pile of blocks in a separate corner of the room. We then asked the children to go to “rouge” then “bleu” etc. Then we sent 2 children to each collection of blocks and added the planchettes so they could build again with just two colours. This proved to be a very effective and easy activity. The teachers were enthusiastic and I left secure in the knowledge that they were able to see how the blocks could make their days with the children more productive and less stressful and how the children’s pre-school experience and education are enriched through independent block play.

Tuesday I went to visit the CEEP where I had run workshops in 2015 with Ibrahim, the Supervisor of the Bisongos. The Director of the CEEP, Mauricia Sanon, welcomed us and we had a pretty animated discussion around the state of affairs in the Bisongos. At one point I realized that the time would be most productive if I went to get the extra blocks kit and came back to do a quick demonstration of how to use the blocks in the classroom. In fact this was very productive and I left the kit with the Director. I invited her to join the workshop that I would be delivering in Ouaga on the 24th and promised I would give her two more kits for her school if she came.

In those two days of informal training 8 pre-school teachers were trained in a way that will hopefully allow them to easily adopt this activity of free play with blocks for their classrooms. A good start.

APPENDIX D

Cost Breakdown – Workshop & Supervised Practicums

1. Train the Trainer Workshop

Ougadougou, February 22-25, 2017

2 women, 9 men, 11 blocks kits

	# of days	Per Diem: 27,000/day	Transport
BONKOUGOU, Boukare	4 days	108,000	5000
GUINKO, Issaka	4 days	108,000	9000
BAZONGO, Taquiéba	4 days	108,000	
REGTOUMDA, Clément	4 days	108,000	4000
WOBA/ZERBO, Honorine	3 days	81,000	14,000
SANON, Maurice	4 days	108,000	19,000
KONSIEMBO/SAWADOGO, Denise	4 days	108,000	4000
TRAORE, Oumarou	4 days	108,000	
BAZIE, Badéma Serge	4 days	108,000	
GNOUMOU, Etienne	1 day	27,000	19,000
Mare Corneille	3 days	81,000	
Totals (FCFA)		1,053,000	74,000

TRAIN THE TRAINER	FCFA	\$CDN
11 Inspectors/EJE per diems	1,053,000	
Transportation	74,000	
Blocks kits 11	297,000	
TOTAL	1,424,000	\$3,102.39

Total cost: Train The Trainer \$3,102.39

2. Practicums: Teacher-Trainer Sessions

Note: Per diems for Ministry employees (Inspectors, Directors) are set at 27,000 FCFA.

Local pre-school teachers attending the training received a daily per diem of 10,000 FCFA

Location - KAYA

March 03 & 04, 2017

16 women, 5 men, 8 blocks kits

21 PM/PP, EJE per diems	210,000	
lunch for all – 2 days	35,000	
transportation	20,000	
Trainer 2X27,000	54,000	
Blocks 8 kits	215,000	
TOTAL	535,000	\$1,155.00

Location - TENGODOGO

March 10 - 11, 2017

21 women, 0 men, 8 blocks kits

21 PM/PP per diems	210,000	
lunch for all – 2 days	24,000	
transportation	42,000	
notebooks etc	20,000	
Trainer 2X27,000	54,000	
Blocks 8 kits	215,000	
TOTAL	566,000	\$1,210.00

Location – BOBO DIOULASSO

March 17 – 18, 2017

18 women, 3 men, 8 blocks kits

21 PM/PP per diems	210,000	
1 director per diem	27,000	
lunch for all – 2 days	25,000	
transportation	42,000	
notebooks etc	5,000	
Trainer 2X27,000	54,000	
Blocks 8 Kits	215,000	
	579,000	\$1,261.58

Location – OUAGADOUGOU**March 21 – 22, 2017****15 women, 2 men, 9 blocks kits**

17 PM/PP per diems	170,000	
lunch for all – 2 days	25,000	
transportation	34,000	
photocopies/phone	5,000	
Trainer 2X27,000	54,000	
Blocks 9 Kits	243,000	
	532,000	\$1,159.13

Location – OUAHIGOUYA**March 22 - 23, 2017****15 women, 5 men, 7 blocks kits**

20 EJE PM/PP per diems	200,000	
lunch for all – 2 days	22,000	
transportation	23,000	
photocopies	2,100	
Trainer 2X27,000	54,000	
Blocks 7 kits	189,000	
	490,100	\$1,067.68

ASMAE Ouagadougou

no cost

10 educators – 9 women, 1 man

Blocks – 5 kits

This training of special needs teachers, conducted by Allyson Tache, was requested and paid for by ASMAE

Location – DEDOUGOU. “Unscheduled” training conducted by Allyson Tache

5 Educators – all women

no cost

Blocks 4 kits

108,000

\$232.00

Total Cost: Practicum and (Supervised) Teacher Training \$6,085.39**Number of Pre-School Teachers Trained = 100****Number of Pre-Schools Impacted = 40**