

RESULTS OF THE BUILDING BLOCKS BURKINA PROJECT SURVEY

Burkina Faso, February 2018

"What impresses me in this training is that I did not believe in it at first, but I saw the impact of the blocks on children. Whoever dared not assert him or herself, does so now without hesitation. Children take risks of any kind to achieve some things. It's absolutely wonderful!"

-Early Childhood Educator, Ouagadougou, 2018

INTRODUCTION

Building Blocks Burkina (BBB) is one of the significant projects supported by Refuge Enfants Pour Tous (REPT), a registered Canadian charity. Since 2012, BBB has been working with the Ministry of National Education and Literacy (MENA) in Burkina Faso towards the ambitious goal of improving the quality of preschool education throughout the country.

BBB's Founder, Trainer & Manager - Allyson Taché, developed the BBB training program specifically for implementation in Burkinabe preschools. Since its inception in 2012 she has personally conducted training for over 650 people working in the field of early childhood education in 24 provinces in Burkina Faso:

- 23 Directors of Early Learning and Early Childhood Education Centers (CEEP)
- 19 Bisongo Supervisors (Bisongos are local preschool institutions)
- 98 Early Childhood Educators (EJE),
- 320 Petit Mamans (PM's) and Petit Papas (PP's) - informal staff /caregivers in the Bisongos
- 190 students in training in the schools that train EJE.
- 10 Inspectors and EJEs have attended "Train the Trainer" workshops to ensure that this pedagogy will continue to be supported.

To support the program delivery over the last few years, BBB organized the production of 56,000 wooden blocks by local carpenters and provided more than 200 kits (280 blocks per kit) to 35 CEEPs and 130 Bisongos.

In order to assess the impact and effectiveness of the building blocks program, BBB conducted a survey amongst a sample of individuals who participated in the training and who use the kits in their classrooms. Below is a summary of the survey results. A methodological note is presented at the end of the document.

SURVEY RESULTS

Where possible we give percentage of respondents to a specific question, followed by one or more quotes to illustrate the respondents' experience.

Teachers perceptions on the use of the blocks:

1 - A relevant teaching tool

- 99% of participants find it useful to have blocks in their classes.
"Kids love to play with this material and they learn to count, sort, measure, recognize, and compare shapes more easily."

- 97% use blocks in pre-math activities.
"Children get better at counting and recognizing colors and shapes. "

- 89% note that children are more focused and engaged during play activities with blocks
*"This material motivates the children and helps to develop confidence".
"When we make the blocks available to the children in the play centres, they concentrate on their play and are calmer".*

2 – An activity that stimulates language

All participants reported that block-play encourages the development of language and helps shy children to express themselves.

- 99% notice that children talk to each other more.
- 97% note that children describe the colors and shapes of what they build.
"The children are talking to each other. They make short and simple sentences. They discover new words. "

3 - An activity that develops learning skills

- Over 80% of respondents felt that the use of blocks encourages the development of all the following: imagination, autonomy, perseverance, collaboration and organizational skills, as well as the ability to count, measure and compare.
"The blocks support the development of many language and math skills".

4 – A relevant resource adapted to young children's learning.

- 100% of respondents say they use blocks in free play activities, as well as language, and pre-math lessons.
"Now that we have the blocks we use them regularly".

- 96% cited the blocks as one of the three most interesting resources to stimulate children's learning.

"We use these blocks in almost all activities (free play, pre-reading, etc.)".

5 – The blocks change the day-to-day teaching experience for the teachers. We asked respondents to describe in their own words how the blocks had impacted their teaching:

[1][2]

Many of the respondents state that the blocks played a critical role in the development of their teaching practice.

"The blocks have changed the way of conducting activities especially during free play activities such as physical play, self directed manipulation and in pre-mathematical, pre-reading and sensory learning activities."

Many of the respondents also felt that the blocks have had a positive impact in their daily (professional) lives because this material reinforces their lessons and the BBB program has brought it within their reach.

"The use of blocks has allowed a great improvement in the professional practice of every day because I no longer have to worry about the adaptation of materials for my lessons."

All the participants remark that the blocks make it easier for the children to meet their specific learning goals.

"The blocks can be used in many different ways and for different purposes thereby allowing the children to learn different concepts much more effectively."

Many of the respondents who provided personal feedback also appreciate that blocks allow them to better supervise children and that learning is fast and well understood.

"The blocks have increased the variety of effective classroom materials, made the exercises easy, and helped to stimulate the children in the play centres. It is a material that is easy for children to handle and is safe for them."

6 – Additional comments from respondents further reflect on the many educational benefits the blocks have brought to the children in their classrooms. Some examples are:

"Easier understanding and retention of mathematical concepts, colors and shapes while playing with and handling the blocks".

"The blocks provide an improvement in learning. The children understand quickly, they count, and differentiate shapes and colors."

"Children become more motivated, attentive, autonomous, sociable. They express themselves well, count easily."

"Children are more and more creative and communicate together and collaborate together."

Many survey respondents note that children are better able to understand and retain mathematical concepts, and the names of colors and shapes while playing with and handling the blocks.

"There is an improvement in learning. They understand quickly, they count, and differentiate shapes and colors."

Many observe that children are more motivated and demonstrate autonomy in their learning.

"Children become more motivated, attentive, autonomous, sociable. They express themselves well, count easily."

Many note that children develop their creativity when playing with the blocks and that children are comfortable and communicate more easily.

"Children are more and more creative and communicate together and collaborate together."

Overall Satisfaction:

The overall positive experience in the training and its subsequent use in the classroom is further reinforced by the fact that 99% would recommend the BBB program to a friend or colleague.

"The blocks help the instructors in their work. They can entrust an activity with the blocks to one group of children and work quietly with others."^[3]

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the survey show that the BBB program has made preschool environments more responsive to children's needs and has fostered their physical, social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic development. According to respondents, the children enjoyed using the blocks and their play with the blocks significantly increased their learning in the five areas of development identified above.

Our survey demonstrates that the BBB Project, with its focus on teacher capacity building and the use of quality teaching materials, has improved the quality of preschool institutions; the teaching and practice of the teachers; and has contributed to the development of their students.

The ongoing need for this work is very well captured in the words of one teacher who participated in the survey:

"Increasing the number of blocks kits, more training for teachers, and if possible that all the little children have access to blocks because they stimulate learning a lot."

APPENDIX A: SURVEY METHODOLOGY

A sample of 109 people participated in the survey. This represents 17% of the 650 educators and other staff who have been trained in the use of blocks in the classroom and who had received the building blocks. The survey was conducted in 5 provinces. Respondents traveled to each of the provincial capitals to complete the survey.

All participants had attended at least one training session in how to use the blocks and have worked with blocks for a year or more (up to 5 years) in their classrooms.

Of the 109 respondents, 84 (77%) were female and 25 (23%) were male. This female to male ratio appears to accurately reflect the gender of educators who have been trained. Age ranged from 18-66, with an average age of 37.5 years.

Professional profile of respondents:

Two categories of staff have been trained in the BBB project:

- Bisongo staff (less educated): Petit Mamans (PMs), and Petit Papas (PPs), most of whom have 6 years of schooling. Some have 9 years of schooling and some have not had any formal schooling. They attend a three-week course organized by the MENA, to train them in their role as supervisors and educators of small children.
- CEEP staff (more educated): EJE and MEJE, 12 years of schooling plus a two-year Teacher training program in Early Childhood Education.

All respondents completed the paper questionnaire individually. The questionnaire was adapted according to the gap between the educational levels of the targeted respondents. This is why two versions of the questionnaire were created and used:

A. Version A: for PMs and PPs (76 people)

B. Version B: for EYES (33 people). This questionnaire is similar to the first but also includes 2 additional questions (Open / Narrative).

Respondents who had a lower level of education were assisted by resource staff, hired to assist with this data collection.