

Teachers benefitting from Literacy Boost

OLIVE UWAMARIYA - TEACHER

Literacy Boost works with parents, teachers and children to promote literacy in the classroom, in after school reading clubs and in community training sessions. Olive Uwamariya, a teacher and Consolee Mukahakuzimana the Head Teacher at the school 'Groupe Scolaire Rukizi' in Cyumba, Gicumbi district in Rwanda have benefitted from Literacy Boost teacher training sessions by Save the Children's Literacy Boost education team. Olive and Consolee tell us how they are implementing the techniques in the school and classrooms and the changes they have seen in children's literacy.

Olive (pictured below) is a Primary I (PI) teacher at Groupe Scolaire Rukizi in Cyumba, Gicumbi district. Olive has gone through Literacy Boost teacher training and she is implementing the techniques she has learned in her classroom. Below she tells us her story:

**Olive stands in front of a wall in her classroom covered in literacy materials**

“I am Olive Uwamariya, I have been a teacher for seven years. I started as P6 teacher for two years, and then I was a P4 teacher for one year. I am currently a PI teacher and have been for the last four years.”

“I have learned a lot of things through these trainings, but one that was so new and that I enjoyed most is teaching children while making them the centre of the learning process, giving them activities to do whilst they learn, and also using locally available materials, like cutting boxes, counting stones or using flowers or leaves. The whole aspect of making the children active in the classroom is amazing.”

Olive tells us about how her teaching has improved using these new techniques, and the impact it has had on children's learning:

“Every child loves it, even the weak student who does not know how to use the pen and a notebook can learn using these ways. And the one who somehow had forgotten a pen or a notebook, or whose family can't afford them, they still get the chance to learn and understand like everyone else.

One more thing that I never knew before is the way to teach the alphabet at the very beginning, not teaching them at the end of the semester or in the middle. So now we teach them in the beginning, and children can know the alphabet and that improves their literacy before they even know how to read properly.

We also learned about teaching the basic sound of a letter. For example if I am teaching the letter S, I will first teach its basic sound, then with them we will add the vowels accordingly Si Su So Sa Se. That helps the children to know the difference between the proper sound of a consonant and its various sounds when it's followed by vowels. Another thing is to have the teaching materials hang on classroom walls. I never knew that children could learn from that, but it has improved their literacy so much because even if it can be a newspaper, they will find a letter they know and read it. They can also be attracted by the images and relate them to the words on them.”

Olive tells us about some of the challenges that she used to encounter, and how the training has helped her to overcome them:

“As a teacher I used to be the main actor in the classroom, and have so little involvement with the children. But now Save the Children taught us to be more like guides and involve the children instead. Before, as a teacher I was overwhelmed. I used to do everything - read for them, explain, give them orders...but now I teach in a more playful way, and they still learn efficiently.”



Primary school students at Groupe Scolaire Rukizi during a reading lesson

Olive explains that:

“No child is left behind anymore because they don’t have the necessary materials. Now even when a child has no notebook, they still learn because they also use other materials. I will still mark them and they are able to pass and go on to the next grade.

I have been teaching PI for the last four years, but this is the first year I am seeing sharp children who are more open and can read better than all the other children in the previous years. This is because I have applied the skills I learned in the Save the Children training.”

Olive describes how her classroom used to look before she received the Save the Children training, and the difference creating print-rich wall displays has had on the children:

“Before we received Save the Children’s training, our classrooms used to be bare - just brick, and nothing more. We would prepare lessons on a daily basis, and I didn’t believe that hanging them would make any difference to the learning process. But now we have a print rich environment and even when I step out of the classroom children don’t just make noise. Instead, they get busy looking at the images and reading. Even when they come early to school, instead of only playing outside, they come in the classroom because they enjoy it.

We also never knew that a PI child could read, but since Save the Children provided books in classrooms, they actually do read them. The one who asked for it for the first time, I asked him to share the story with the class after reading the book, and he did, and many other borrowed the books afterwards.”

Finally, Olive told us her opinions on why learning to read is important for Rwandan children’s future:

“First, children will be more exposed to the open world, it will widen their horizons, because they will have access to newspapers and books and they will not be limited about what they can learn. They can also get moral lessons from the stories they read, and those lessons shape them into noble people who can fit into society. Then the major importance is that they will pass it on to the next generations, and Rwanda will become a nation of readers and writers.”

Translated from Kinyarwanda by Natasha Nishimwe

CONSOLEE MUKAHAKUZIMANA – HEAD TEACHER



Head Teacher Consolee Mukahakuzimana at Groupe Scolaire Rukizi school

Consolee (pictured above) is the Head Teacher at Groupe Scolaire Rukizi in Cyumba, Gicumbi district, where teachers like Olive are participating in Save the Children’s Literacy Boost training and implementing the techniques they learn in their classrooms. Consolee tells us about how she became a head teacher, and the changes she has witnessed in her school since Save the Children’s Literacy Boost activities began in her school in 2013.

“I am Consolee, the head teacher of Groupe Scolaire Ruziki, in Cyumba sector, Gicumbi District. I have been in the education sector for 25 years. Within those years I have been a head teacher for nine years, and a head at this school for the last two years.”

“Save the Children started training our teachers about literacy practices towards the end of last year (2013) and since then we have seen tremendous changes in the whole learning process....Collaboration between the teachers and the students (has improved) as they interact more and that has improved the quality of learning.”

“We now have speaking walls (print-rich classrooms). Our classroom walls used to be bare with nothing on the walls, but Save the Children taught us the importance of having print materials on the walls and now our classes are wonderfully colourful. The students enjoy it so much. They come to school early and spend time looking at the pictures on the walls and talking about them, many of them do not know how to read yet, but they definitely learn a lot from them.”

“The students participate in the making of those materials. Some they make in class with the teachers, others they make at home with their parents and bring them to the classroom.

We use different teaching materials now. As you have seen, students come with small stones, sticks, or wires, and the teachers have been taught ways to incorporate those into the lessons. It helps the students a lot, because they are the ones that use them in a practical way.

Another aspect that I consider the most important is the fact that students don't miss school anymore. They love school and they just don't miss class. The parents are amazed by that fact and other parents are asking to have their children join this school because other schools are still struggling with the school dropout challenge. We have already solved this problem.

Another thing that was already known but not practiced is the "group work method." After Save the Children's training, we were encouraged to implement it and we started using it. The smarter children help out the ones struggling, and together they get better results."

When asked what she thinks of promoting literacy in schools for children in early grades, Consilee tells us:

"I think this is a great idea by Save the Children, because when a child knows how to read early all other lessons get easier. They can master mathematics, history, languages and other (subjects). As a matter of fact, the PI students we have now are smarter than the ones we had in previous years. They understand their other lessons with less difficulty than before. Literacy is the basis of the other lessons, and in the classroom they have a reading corner introduced by Save the Children too. I am happy because if the students are encouraged to take time to read, they will never let go of that culture when they grow up."

Translated from Kinyarwanda by Natasha Nishimwe