Overview

School doesn’t have to be all work and no play. In fact, primary school teachers in the Mara Region of Tanzania are learning how to better engage students with lessons that encourage more creativity, collaboration and communication. Instead of only using traditional lecture methods, where students write down notes in exercise books and learn through repetition and memorization, some Grade 1 and 2 literacy teachers are integrating the Play-Based Learning (PBL) methodology. In 2017, with support from the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, PCI/Tanzania introduced this teaching approach to 231 schools in Butiama, Bunda and Musoma districts.

According to a baseline survey conducted by PCI/Tanzania which was distributed to 600 students in July 2017, only 16.2% of Grade 1 and 2 students were reading at grade level. To address this challenge and complement traditional teaching methods, PCI/Tanzania trained 486 Grade 1 and 2 literacy teachers on the child centered PBL methodology. The objective of the training was to equip teachers with new and quality teaching techniques that incorporate guided play into the learning process. As a key partner, the government of Tanzania endorsed the PBL methodology as a teaching approach to be used in primary schools.

“The PBL training for our teachers added more value to classroom teaching,” said Lucy Nyanda, Chief School Quality Assurer for Musoma district. “I would suggest all districts to adopt this method, not only to teach literacy.
competencies from Grades 1 and 2 but also from Grades 3 to 7."

According to “Learning through Play” in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, “Children learn well when they are mentally and physically active. Engaging in play stimulates the young mind to be receptive in the learning process” (Smith PK, Pellegrini A. June 2013). Play-based learning is a necessary component of brain development and ensures active participation of every child in the learning process.

“Students like and enjoy the lessons, because play and games activities motivate and stimulate them to learn" Mwinyi said. “The methodology has also made teaching easier. Students are divided into small groups, guided in reading storybooks and supported to interact with learning resources.”

In December 2018, just one year after the PBL methodology was introduced to schools, PCI/Tanzania conducted a post-assessment using an Early Grade Reading Assessment tool. Out of 1,021 Grade 2 students, 316 (31%) were able to read with comprehension and scored greater than 80%, which is a national benchmark as compared to the baseline recorded of 16.2%. The post-assessment findings also show how classroom management by literacy teachers has improved. At the baseline, 6% of students were off task at the start and middle of a teaching session. According to the post-assessment, that average is now 3.9% (4.6% boys; 3.1% girls).

Following the initial PBL training, PCI/Tanzania consistently monitored and supported teachers with implementing the methodology and in addressing any challenges. Now, quarterly monitoring reports from school quality assurers continue to show a positive trend in teachers using PBL techniques in the classroom.

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