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Primary teachers learn about math skills for real-life problems

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Thirty primary school math teachers participated in a Math Camp, the first of its kind in Rwanda, to learn how to support students in developing the critical skills they need for solving real-life problems. The camp took place in Kibuye, Karongi district from April 3-5 and was hosted by the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) as part of the USAID-funded Literacy, Language, and Learning (L3) Initiative.

According to Terry Ward, VSO mathematics specialist, real-life problems require logical thinking, planning, experimentation, and evaluation, skills developed in mathematics lessons. "These maths skills help us in business, in science, in engineering, and it all starts in primary school," he said.

The Math Camp emphasized these skills and modeled how primary teachers can support children in acquiring them. Teachers learned what makes for quality lessons, from warm-up activities to assessment, as well as how to make low-to-no-cost teaching aids, such as puzzles, from local materials. At the end of the three days, each teacher committed to incorporating aspects of the training into their teaching next term. An education specialist will visit each teacher to support this new effort.

Many teachers agreed to begin lessons with a starter, a fun and fast-paced game to motivate students, review previous learning, and prepare students for the day's lesson. By doing starters, children also practice quickly doing mental calculations, which will help them in the future with more complex equations.

Additionally, teachers plan to begin using mathematical investigations, which are problem solving exercises in a real-life context. "In investigations, students should be able to explain how they figured out their answer," says Anathalie Nyirandagijimana, a REB pedagogical norms specialist. "This helps them to develop key skills such as choosing appropriate strategies, making predictions, thinking critically, and making logical arguments."

In one investigation, it is imagined that seven people meet and each person shakes hands with the others. To determine the total number of handshakes, learners must come up with a method. Using the solution, teachers can ask the learners to predict how many handshakes would be made if 20 people met, which can produce a general rule.

"Investigations will help the learners to discover the different methods to find the solution for difficult things," said Noel Murekeyezu, a P6 teacher.

Funded by USAID, the L3 Initiative is implemented by Education Development Center (EDC) in partnership with REB and with assistance from VSO, Concern Worldwide, International Education Exchange, and the Peace Corps.

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