

# Investing in Engaged Reading

Rwandan Children's Book Initiative  
(RCBI)

Save the Children

# What is engaged reading?

- Engaged reading moves away from the mechanics of reading and rather looks at **the art of reading**. Engaged readers not only are able to decode and comprehend texts, but they value reading, believe they are good readers, and choose to read.
- Engaged readers are **intrinsically motivated**. They read for the sake of reading, not for a grade or for other external incentives.
- They derive genuine **pleasure** from the experience of reading.
- Engaged reading is a state of total absorption in a text.

# The Research

- Increasingly, new research across countries is showing that the best predictor of future education achievement & life success is reading ability – or, more significantly, being an *engaged* reader.
- In one study, a national sample of students at three ages (9, 13, and 17 years) revealed that **the more highly engaged readers showed higher academic achievement** than the less engaged readers. Surprisingly, engaged readers from low income/education families achieved at a higher level than less engaged readers from high income/education backgrounds.
- **This finding suggests that engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education, and income.**

# The Fiction Factor

- Neuroscience is proving the impact of reading fiction.  
*Functional magnetic resonance* imaging (fMRI) studies indicate that the same regions of the brain that are activated during a real event are activated while reading about it in a story. Reading a story produces a vivid replica of reality.

# In the Early Years

- One study with preschool-aged children showed the more stories they had read to them, the keener their capacity was to empathize with others, particularly with marginalized groups. For example, 5 year-olds exposed to gender-positive material showed more egalitarian responses on tests of stereotypes for women's occupations.
- Reading fiction both psychologically and practically, immensely beneficial for children and adults alike.

# Research Summary

- The act of reading, particularly engaged reading, is a powerful predictor of life success by *any* measure.

It is the best predictor of:

- ✓ university attendance, regardless of socio-economic background and parental education.
  - ✓ life income
  - ✓ career options
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- Neuroscience is proving that reading fiction is one of the most powerful means of developing sympathetic individuals, with better social skills and higher levels of self esteem, resulting in increasing self improvement and pro-social behavior.

# How can education interventions engineer learning environments that promote **both the will and skill to engage in reading?**

- Promote recreational reading, not only as a means of acquiring knowledge, but also for the simple pleasure of it
- Encourage the reading of non-textbook reading material, especially storybooks for young children
- Ensure that children have access to a *variety* of reading materials that are relevant, age-appropriate and in an understandable language

# Where do we find these kinds of books?

## Introducing the RCBI project

- Rwandan Children's Book Initiative (RCBI) is a Save the Children project designed to address the shortage of quality Kinyarwanda books for young children.
- By building the capacity of local book sector actors, a host of new children's books have been developed.
- With the objective of developing the Rwandan book industry, all of the books are owned and distributed by the local publishers.
- Over the last 18 months, the 7 publishers we work with have developed more than 50 books for children aged 0-9.



# The RCBI Approach in Schools

- Part of the support to the publishers included a guarantee to purchase the high-quality books developed.
- These books were put into class book collections in P1-P3 classrooms in Burera district.
- Teachers were trained on book use and management.
- Parents were coached on encouraging reading at home.
- Book festivals & fairs sensitized communities on the value of recreational reading.

Thank you!