

**World Bank case-study on our Montessoriproject in Haiti**  
(received by Email from Worldbank on 11.5.2000)

**Montessori Preschools**  
**Montessori-based Teacher Training and Preschools**  
**for Children From Poor Communities**

HAITI

<b>Contact:</b>  Ms. Carol Guy-James Barratt E-mail: cguyjames@yahoo.com c/o Peter-Hesse Foundation Mr. Peter Hesse Peter-Hesse Foundation Otto-Hahn-Str. 2 D-40699 Erkrath Germany Fax: 0211-2509-497 E-mail: p.hesse@solidarity.org	<b>Mission:</b>  <i>Give poor children a better chance to develop themselves early enough, and convince society of its feasibility through quality teacher training and the creation of community -based preschools. The training of qualified teachers translates directly into increased local capacity to provide high-quality stimulation and education to children of pre-primary school age.</i>
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**What we do**                      The Montessori Preschool Project provides high-quality, internationally recognized teacher training for individuals of all education and economic levels. Through a scholarship scheme, student teachers are required to serve in a poor community for at least three years after successful completion of a nine-month training course and two internships. Student teacher graduates are encouraged and financially supported to open Montessori preschools for children at risk if the community provides the support for the school to become sustainable latest after one year.

**Cultural context**                      Because Haiti's culture is heavily based on oral communication, teachers are accustomed to memorizing and reciting teaching material but have problems applying what they have learned in a classroom setting. To facilitate classroom application, the course was redone in Creole and the curriculum was adapted to the needs of student teachers in Haiti. More than 70% of classroom time is spent on oral explanation in the mother tongue. In addition, substantial practical work helps student teachers translate theory into practice: they must complete a supervised internship of six weeks in a Montessori preschool, they must create didactical material and learn to adapt everyday objects as teaching tools. By creating lessons, teaching materials, and visual aids, teachers in Haiti compensate for a shortage of books and materials.

**General approach / Methodology**                      Montessori education builds on a child-centered philosophy that emphasizes the individual learning path and capabilities of each child. Children can freely access different kinds of materials and are encouraged to learn at their own pace. The freedom for purposeful

activity allows children to develop not merely their intellectual faculties but their powers of deliberation, intuition, independence, and self-discipline, with the social awareness and behavior needed to get along in the world. Teachers and children are taught mutual respect and non-aggressive behavior; competition is strictly avoided.

In the Montessori teaching philosophy, didactical materials present knowledge to children in such an orderly way that their intellect classifies the information into an organized system of thought (thinking through). The process of working with the material keeps the intellect constantly exercised and results in mental expansion. The effectiveness of the material derives from its thoughtfully planned manner of presenting to the child:

- Concepts in isolation, to reduce the confusion of too many ideas at once
- Various difficulties in isolation from the easiest to the most difficult (in the case of young children, from the concrete to the abstract)
- A graduated series of self-teaching materials, suited to the various stages of natural development of the child
- Occupation, including body movement to a specific purpose (movement + mental concentration)

More than 50% of the didactical material is made locally, including most of the reading material. The teachers produce the major part of this material at the beginning of the academic year; other Montessori teaching materials are imported. A basic set costs approximately US\$1,000, and each new preschool is provided with one set. Because the Montessori teaching material benefits the child's cognitive development even if the teacher has not fully understood its didactical background, teachers who do not completely comprehend the Montessori pedagogy can become effective teachers. This is how the Montessori teaching method has trained people from poor backgrounds and with a low level of education to become nationally recognized teachers.

The children attending Montessori preschools range in age from 2 1/2 to 5 or, in exceptional cases, 6 years. The classes are not divided by age groups. This setting invites children to learn from each other and to interact across ages. Children learn to take pride in helping the weaker and smaller and enhance their social skills.

### **How is the program implemented**

Since the program's inception in 1986, 38 Montessori preschools have been established of which 36 are still operating. They now provide services for about 2,000 children from poor communities yearly. About 50% of all student teachers are scholarship students who sign a contract with the Centre Montessori d'Haiti that obliges them to teach for three years in a poor community after they complete their training. Most teachers return to their own unity to

establish a school and extend their commitment far beyond the initial three year agreement. A common structure, teaching philosophy, and similar administrative set-ups create strong linkages among all project schools across the country. Each summer break, the teachers gather for a three-week workshop to share experiences and to enrich their teaching skills.

The training course takes nine months. In addition to the final examination, graduation requires two six-week internships in an affiliated Montessori school. Three types of diploma are offered: the assistant's diploma, the national teachers diploma, and the international Montessori Directress diploma. To obtain the international diploma, students must have passed all parts (written, oral demonstration, practical) of the national examination conducted by the Centre Montessori d'Haiti and must have acquired a full understanding of the Montessori philosophy. In addition, they must pass a second examination conducted by an outside internationally recognized specialist.

83 student teachers (about 20% of all student teachers trained) have obtained the international diploma as "Montessori-Directresses/Directors," which certifies them as Montessori teachers entitled to teach and open schools in Haiti and around the world. After teaching for one year, they can also become assistant student teacher trainers in one of Haiti's Montessori Training Centers.

In addition to the original center, two training centers were recently established with financial support from the Peter-Hesse Foundation. The new centers are closely linked to the original, and all student teachers are examined and given their diploma by the Centre Montessori d'Haiti. The new centers will be refunding their start-up funds by taking on scholarship student teachers over a period of several years. During 1996-97, the Centre Montessori d'Haiti interrupted its teacher training courses to strengthen the Montessori preschool structure across Haiti and to conduct evaluations. Also in 1996, 75 Haitian Montessori teachers established the Association Montessori d'Haiti (AMOH), a professional teachers group.

### **Evolution of the program**

The notion of sustainability and Haitian capacity guides the Montessori Preschool Project. When the project started, its one center trained 20 teachers during one nine-month course, and one 25-child preschool class was attached to the center. Both were directed by expatriates. This capacity grew to an annual average of 40 students, mostly women, who were trained under the supervision of Ms. Carol Guy-James Barratt, a London-trained Montessori specialist from Trinidad. Currently, Haitian graduates of the Montessori program conduct all teacher training in three centers with the capacity to train 60 teachers each academic year. 55 preschool classes, also run by Haitians, benefit 1,980 children from poor communities yearly.

Haiti now has 36 functioning preschools, including 1 for children who are HIV-positive, 1 for deaf children, and 2 that are attached to an orphanage. Since the program began, an average of three new

preschools have opened yearly. Only one preschool has ceased operation, and one has resorted to the traditional system of rote learning. Classes have remained "small" with 30 children per class, compared with 60 children in the traditional Haitian classroom. To date, 450 teachers have been trained of which 297 have received national teacher diplomas and 83 have received international teaching diplomas.

The increase in local capacity to train qualified teachers translates directly into increased capacity to provide high-quality stimulation and education to preschool children. The children remain in the program an average of two to three years. Of the 1,980 children enrolled each year, only some 10% drop out. About 660 children graduate from the program yearly, of whom about 620 continue on to primary school. At the preschool level parents do not seem to favor the enrollment of boys over girls. This helps more girls move into primary school.

**Support  
structure /  
Financial  
background**

The Montessori Preschool Project was created and is supported by the Peter-Hesse Foundation SOLIDARITY IN PARTNERSHIP for ONE World, a nonprofit welfare organization registered in Germany and in Haiti. Peter Hesse started his work in 1981 and formalized it in 1983 to sustain small self-help-projects for poor people in Haiti. Initially, the work concentrated on two-day seminars on project management for self-help groups and on the opening of small financial bottlenecks, mostly for rural initiatives. In 1984 the emphasis switched to early childhood care and development, which led to the creation of the Centre Montessori d'Haiti in 1986.

The project aims to influence the public and private Haitian education sector by demonstrating that high-quality early childhood education is possible—even with relatively limited resources—if the quality and length (one academic year) of teacher training are adequate. The average yearly financial support has never exceeded US\$100,000; far less often was available, but it was sufficient to support the program. Financing is privately secured by the founder and about 50 individual donors per year. The German government occasionally assists with small grants to cover exceptional needs. The United Nations Development Programme and now the German development service (ded) financed a U.N. volunteer during some past years.

The foundation's funding covers project coordination and supervision; supports scholarship students who will later teach in a community school for deprived and disadvantaged children; and supports new preschools with a start-up fund of US\$3,000-\$4,000 per school. This fund is used to purchase a basic set of Montessori teaching material, help with school construction and administrative set-up, and procure technical advice.

Other financial resources which are limited, but sufficient to sustain the preschools, are secured through small school fees and community contributions (e.g. providing a building). The training centers can raise financial contributions as student teachers who are not on scholarship pay regular fees. The two new training

centers payback start-up funds by providing scholarships for a certain number of student teachers each year.

### **Basic principles leading to Success**

#### The Montessori Preschool Project:

- Is demand driven: Starting small, it has expanded in a sustainable manner.
- Is community based: Schools are opened only by community request and when the community involvement proves to be reliable.
- Is based on the ownership principle: Teachers own the schools and are accountable for financing, student performance, and school reputation.
- Financially sustainable: Schools and training centers become financially independent latest after one year.
- Builds on indigenous cultural patterns: The teaching methods are adapted to the local language (Creole) and the oral culture.
- Operates with clearly defined selection criteria for student teachers: Scholarship students are carefully screened to guarantee their future commitment to rural communities.
- Provides employment opportunities for low-income individuals: Poor students with little or no education can become qualified teachers.
- Is inclusive: The program brings together teachers and children from different economic backgrounds. The combination of poor and rich students helps the schools to become financially sustainable and to achieve a good reputation.
- Incorporates a successful teaching method: It builds self-esteem, confidence, problem-solving skills, and a positive life attitude.

### **Outlook**

#### 1. Going to Scale

A great unsatisfied demand for high-quality preschools in Haiti remains. With the two new centers, training capacity has increased from 20 to 60 teachers per academic year. This increase is expected to have great spill-over effects as new teachers open new schools in poor communities.

To improve the educational standard, better training is necessary at all school levels. The foundation proposes to establish a resource center that would provide continuing education and professional development for teachers of preschool and primary-level students. Teachers using the center would be able to participate in continuing education and special topics seminars with professional education experts to improve their teaching and curriculum

development skills. They would have professional assistance to access print and electronic media materials, do research, and review didactical materials taking according to their specific classroom need. To reach working teachers, the center would be available to any teacher from the public or private sector and would remain open during off-work times: Saturdays and vacation periods.

## 2. Program Evaluation

In addition to its own 1996/97 evaluation, the Centre Montessori d'Haiti is pursuing an independent external evaluation of the program's impact on poor children and the development of proficient preschool teachers.

## 3. Advocacy and Visibility

An important part of the foundation's work is to promote high-quality early childhood development and education as a priority in development politics, in Germany and internationally. For broader visibility, the foundation registered as a non-governmental organization, which is represented at several childcare networks and at international early child development and U.N. conferences. "Three Suggestions for One World Development" became an NGO-input to the U.N. World Summit for Social Development in March 1995, and the project was selected to be presented at EXPO 2000 in Hannover, Germany.

On May 4., 2000, the Peter Hesse Foundation was granted SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS with ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.