

PETER HESSE FOUNDATION VISIT REPORT 28 NOVEMBER – 5 DECEMBER 2023



Written by Fay Hendriksen

AMI Head of Outreach Fay Hendriksen visited different schools in Senegal following an invitation from Carol Guy-James Barratt. This came out of discussions around a more formal 'EsF recognition' for the training offered through the Peter Hesse Foundation (PHF). PHF has recently shifted focus to working in West Africa given the highly volatile situation in Haiti which makes it impossible for the training centre to operate and many schools have had to close unfortunately due to insecurity in the area. PHF has been working in Senegal and Cote D'Ivoire for many years as Carol lived there for a couple of years and was asked to support different schools. More recently, a school also opened in Mali as a teacher from there trained in Senegal. The purpose of the visit was to look into some of the details around how training is organised, how to give formal recognition for it and also to explore strategies to increase access to Montessori education in the region. At the same time, there is a need to look at the collaboration between AMI and PHF, which has been in existence for quite some time but there are details to be worked out about the future.

Wednesday 29 November

A visit was first made to the Senegalese American bilingual school. This school has recently transitioned into a Montessori school and Heliana, the trainer from Haiti has been working here supporting the teachers in school in the morning and in the afternoon, there are training sessions with a group of 10 student teachers. This is the second group in training, the first group were all teachers from the school whereas with the second cohort there are also some teachers from other schools. The school is in a wealthy area of the city and serves children from middle- and upper-class families. There are about 70 children between 3 and 6 years of age in the classroom, currently divided up in a 3-4 classroom and a 5-6 classroom. There are many teachers in each classroom, about 3-4. The younger children have a wide variety of materials while for the older children the focus is mostly on literacy and numeracy. One of the challenges is that quite some children only start school at 5 which makes it challenging to build up concentration. An additional challenge is that many children are labelled as special needs and according to the teachers they are disruptive and difficult to control. The children in the 3-4 classroom seem normalised and are choosing their own activity and working with concentration. Independence is sometimes limited as for example paper for the metal insets is not available to the children, they have to ask the teacher for it. They are allowed to go to the toilet independently if they wear a necklace to make sure that only one child at a time goes. There are a lot of language materials with a strong focus on reading and there seems to be little focus on oral language. Children work individually and they handle the materials with care, walk around the mats and speak with soft voices. The teachers are calm and gentle with the children and the children approach them when they need help. The environment is organised and tidy, the order of the materials is not always clear.

In the afternoon training sessions, the students sit in a circle to watch a presentation given by the trainer Heliana. She seems to be a very kind trainer and the students feel at ease around her. They listen attentively to the presentations and afterwards they discuss the aims of the materials as well as further exercises. The students make use of a handbook that was developed by Carol, which functions as a kind of album. The students also receive a number of workbooks, which are used for example for record keeping, one to develop '12 lessons', which asks the teachers to write down things such as a science experiment, a song or poem.



30 November

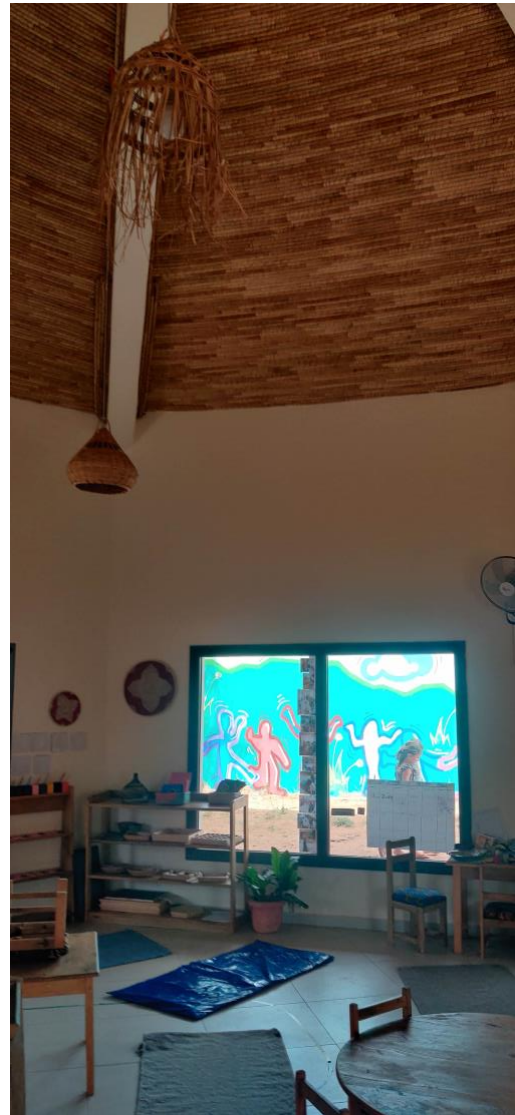
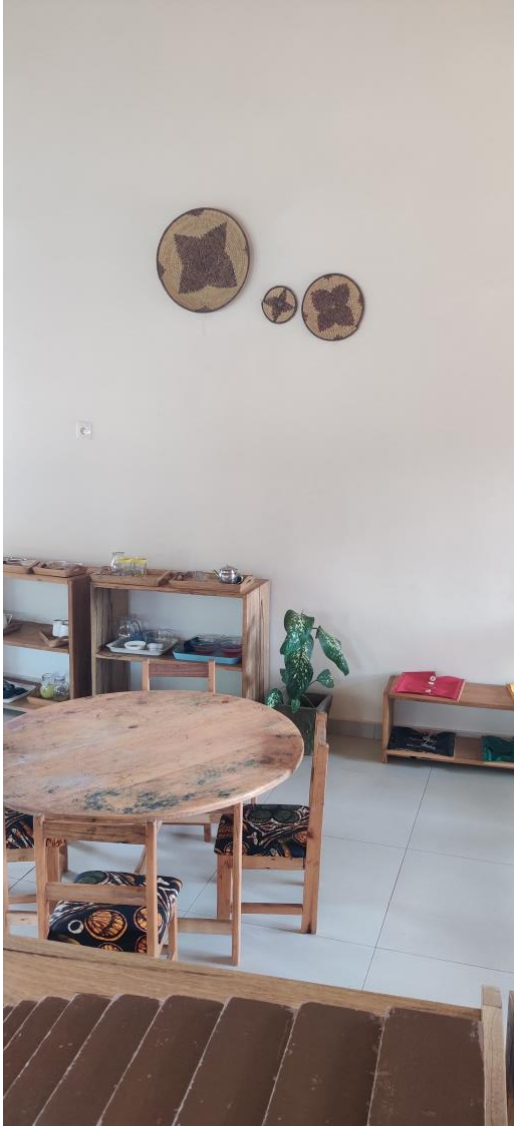
A school in Louga had requested support from the Peter Hesse Foundation and the plan was to make a visit to do an assessment of the school and then work out the way forward. Fay, Heliana, Carol and the driver of the school, Monsieur Siké, left very early as the drive was about four hours each way. The drive was beautiful once outside of the urban area with a sandy landscape marked by many baobabs. The school was in a small village and set up in a house, with two small rooms and a large corridor, a kitchen and a garden area assigned to the school. The school was supported by a French Montessori teacher who had offered some training and was planning to visit regularly to continue training for the teachers on site. The set-up of the small classroom seemed to lack order and rationale with some materials displayed whereas for example language materials were not available. The children were divided in two groups, with one group working in the Montessori classroom and the other group of children sitting doing nothing in the other bare room. It soon became apparent that the children had not been properly introduced to the materials as they were just keeping busy without any meaning to their actions. The team then sat down with the head teacher who shared that there was no daily schedule as Montessori just meant freedom, allowing the children to do whatever they wanted. She then went back inside and came back with a detailed schedule that was created for inspection purposes. She shared that she had done about three weeks of training and then some follow up sessions online. Carol invited her to send teachers to train in Dakar and the head teacher asked if that would lead to a diploma, as she was very keen on obtaining one as a form of recognition of her Montessori training. Carol and Heliana went through the checklist for school visits and the team then got back in the car for the drive to Dakar, stopping on the way to buy some fruits and locally made baskets.



1 December

The plan for the day was to visit another Montessori school whom Carol had connected with recently, Les Colibitis. After some confusion about the location and a drive that was a bit longer than expected, the team made it to Mbour, a village on the seaside. In a residential area a beautiful Montessori school was set up by a couple, Elsie Blaise from Senegal and her husband from France. They had started the school as they were looking into the best education for their children and Elsie decided to follow Montessori 3-6 training in France. Her husband followed online 6-12 training, and both read a lot and did research. They teamed up with a local architect and realized a beautiful school with little houses as classrooms, using local materials and planting many trees as well as setting up a vegetable garden. The team of teachers was mixed with some from Senegal and France and Fay was particularly excited to find a teacher from Kenya at the school, who had followed 3-6 training in Nairobi and 6-12 training in Nakuru. The 3-6 environment was orderly and complete, and the 6-12 environment was set up with a lot of attention to detail, with some 6-12 materials on offer but this was limited. The children were encouraged to explore the plants and trees around them, and they worked on different projects with the teachers. The 6-12 environment was still quite new and there were currently 11 children. The parents were very supportive of the school, which mostly seemed to cater to the children of expats. All the children enjoyed a shared lunch, and the team was sad to leave as they needed to get back to Dakar in time for the Friday prayers for monsieur Siké.





2 December

Fay and Carol met in the morning to discuss the point of EsF certification for the PHF training as well as the MoU outlining the collaboration between AMI and PHF. This document would be an interim solution to make it easier to manage the finances and reporting on both sides. It would mean that PHF would deposit an amount to AMI to be used for the expenses of the PHF activities. Carol would provide regular reports and continue to share invoices to fulfil the requirements of the auditors. For the EsF diploma, Carol suggested to look into shared standards for exams and training. Fay shared the types of training currently supported under the EsF umbrella, the National Courses offered in Kenya, and Community Rooted Education. They discussed the details around both programmes and how the work of PHF could be incorporated under the same umbrella. For the longer term, the details need to be worked out around transferring the PHF funds to AMI and what the conditions would be around that. Peter Hesse is keen to discuss this further and this is something that would likely be discussed at Board level, but it would be good to work out a proposal on what would be desirable for AMI. The rest of the weekend included sightseeing activities to the Renaissance Monument and a local market with beautiful fabrics.



4 December

The day started with a discussion with Masaké, the Head of School of the Senegalese American Bilingual School (SABS). Carol has been working with the school for the last few years to transform from traditional approach into a Montessori 3-6 classroom and to train the teachers from the school. PHF Trainer Heliana is employed by the school and works with the teachers in the mornings and offers training in the afternoon. Masaké recently took on the role which was previously held by her mother and expressed her interest in Montessori education for the 6-12 and 12-18 level as well. She has had some experience with Montessori as she followed a 12-18 programme offered by Great Work. Fay suggested to start with strengthening the 3-6 offering, make it possible to have the children working in a fully mixed ages classroom again and also shared a bit more about the plans to strengthen regional hubs across the African Continent to increase access. Senegal seems well positioned to support this growth with a number of authentic Montessori schools and an existing network of teachers and heads of schools committed to supporting this growth. Masaké shared that the school was currently working on their strategic plan, and she would be keen to focus on becoming a model school and training centre. Fay also shared some details around the different options for training, including the AMI Diploma. Masaké expressed her commitment to having more teachers trained, also at different age levels and that this will be built into the new strategic plan for the school.

The following suggestions are made for the model classroom:

- Bring culture and arts into the classroom, now separate activities.
- Look into merging the two groups of children.
- Offer more oral language, have one teacher speak English and one French consistently.
- Build in time for observation.

- Set up a reading corner in the classroom.
- Offer more activities with movement, walking on the line, washing hands, windows, etc.
- Ideally integrate indoor and outdoor environment.
- Cultural materials in practical life, plants in the classroom.

To have an authentic model school for teachers to visit as a source of inspiration, a number of changes are suggested, and it is uncertain whether that commitment is there. Alternatively, another school could become the model school. Les Colibris was probably closer to full implementation and more open to change, for the short-term Carol was going to suggest that the students in training and the Head of School visit Les Colibris.

Next Steps

The model for training along with the handbooks that were developed by Carol is highly commendable and has great potential for further replication. To meet the needs on the African Continent, more teacher trainers are needed, and it would be beneficial to have a shared standard along with a connected network for collaboration and sharing of best practices. The PHF training offered in Senegal shares a lot of similarities with the national certificate and diploma courses in Kenya and for that reason it is suggested to bring it under the same banner of national courses recognised by EsF. For the national courses the requirement is that the teacher trainer pursues an AMI Diploma in order to have an additional qualification and to deepen their understanding and practice. AMI would be able to identify a substitute teacher trainer if needed. The course content has been reviewed and the exam questions are set by AMI. In the case of Kenya, the colleges come together to mark exams of the other colleges and AMI awards digital certificates to those who have passed the exams.

There is great potential in the model of mobile training but one thing that is essential to that are more teacher trainers. To increase capacity in different regions in Africa, there is first of all a need for committed and well-trained teachers who can be supported to set up model schools. Those schools could become training hubs in places where there are no Montessori training centres and teachers with classroom experiences can be supported to become teacher trainers. The AMI courses in Tanzania are preparing teachers from many countries in East Africa mostly, with some teachers from West Africa as well who have enrolled for the AMI 6-12 training that will start in January 2024.

Next to training there is a strong need for support for schools. This is both coming from schools who are interested in training for their teachers or from teachers who will need a supportive leadership team to implement what they have learned during the training. Examples are the importance of mixed age classrooms or the engagement with parents who might expect to see daily homework and grades. There are opportunities here to share experiences and ideas as there are different approaches in different countries. For example, Tanzania works with a network of regional coordinators who conduct school visits and work closely together with the training colleges in the region. This also links in with the need for professional development and ideally a network for teachers to connect.

AMI will work on a mapping of the current Montessori landscape on the African Continent to identify teachers, schools, Montessori organizations and supporters. AMI will organize focus groups with representatives of a specific region to discuss opportunities and challenges as well as next steps. For the longer term, the aim is to identify regional coordinators to support the further growth of Montessori education.

Another challenge will be around languages given the wide variety of languages spoken across Africa. With time, training can be given in languages other than French and English and during the training teachers can be further supported to develop language materials in their mother tongue or other languages. Ideally this can build onto the resources available on AMI Digital as well, where classified

cards are currently available in for example Maa, a language spoken by the Samburu in Kenya. Workshops can also be organized with a focus on sourcing additional language materials.

There are many possibilities for further collaboration as the mission of the Peter Hesse Foundation and AMI are so closely aligned. The Peter Hesse Foundation has trained over 3000 teachers in the last 30 years in often challenging circumstances which is highly commendable. Articulating the relationship and collaboration between the two organizations in a Memorandum of Understanding will be a key step in strengthening processes and information sharing while exploring future opportunities.