

THE GRANDMOTHER PROJECT

Bulletin

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Teaching cultural values in schools strengthens school-community ties

Most Senegalese families value formal schooling for their children. But many parents say that "what is taught in schools is from another culture". Communities often express regrets that school programs do not include discussion of local cultural values and traditions.

The Grandmother Project (GMP) works with communities to promote positive cultural values and traditions that contribute to the growth and development of children and families.

When GMP began work in the Velingara area of Senegal in 2006, many parents and grandparents said: "We send our children to school but schools don't teach them about our culture." Since 2006 GMP has been working with the school district to help include in school programs positive local cultural values and traditions, and also the grandmothers and grandfathers, i.e. the *guardians of culture*.

In 2007, GMP produced a book, "The role of grandmothers in African societies". For the first time, Senegalese primary schools had a text to read about the important role of grandmothers (GM) in families. The booklet increased teachers' interest in discussing the importance of GMs and of elders, in general, in the classroom. It also increased respect for elders by children and strengthened relationships between teachers and community elders.

In late 2011, GMP produced a second text, "African Values for Today's Children". Thru discussion with communities 12 key traditional values were identified including: respect for elders; solidarity; generosity; humility; honesty; hard work; modesty; patience. Information was collected from elders on each of these values. Drawings by children and by a local artist show how children can apply each value in everyday life. The book also includes proverbs related to many of the 12 values.

The core value is respect for elders. Grandfather, Tamsir Ballo, from Kandia village insists, "Children must respect the elders in order to benefit from their knowledge."

In early 2012 GMP produced a third book containing 15 traditional stories. Each story conveys a moral regarding the attitudes and behaviors that children should adopt as they grow up. The stories were collected from elders in the local language, Pular, and translated into French, for use in schools. One of the district education officers said, "The traditional values discussed in this booklet will help prepare children to live in harmony with our society."

Workshops were held with all primary school teachers in early 2012 to present the new books on *African values*. In each of the 32 communities a ceremony was organized to present the new books to the schools. Participants included community elders, grandmothers, parents, reli-

gious leaders, students and teachers. and on *traditional stories*. At the end of the workshops teachers were anxious to use the materials to increase children's knowledge of their cultural heritage and values. Many teachers now plan to invite grandmothers into the classroom and to take students into the community to discuss traditional values with *cultural experts*, i.e. the elders.

"The values in these booklets are essential for children today. Teachers and elders must come together to figure out the best strategy for transmitting them to children.

Mr. Sagna, Teacher, Dialékégné

gious leaders, students and teachers.

Comments from participants reflect their satisfaction with the culturally-grounded materials and the plans for their use in schools to help children to rediscover their cultural roots.



Ceremony to strengthen community-school synergy for cultural education of children

"Schools should not only teach reading and writing. Our society has lost its way. These activities in schools will help us to rediscover what belongs to us, to resuscitate our traditions that are essential to our lives."

Diawo, President of Parent-Teacher Association

"We are happy that our school will have these books so that we can learn our cultural traditions and values. I think the elders will be happy to help the teachers teach us about our traditional values at school."

Abdoulaye Baldé, young boy, Darou

"We are deeply touched by the fact that grandmothers' ideas appear in both of these books. We are going to do everything possible to support the teachers so that children understand the content of these books. »

Kankouyel, grandmother, Kael Besel

Conclusions: The materials and activities developed by GMP with the District Education Office are much appreciated by children, parents, grandparents and teachers alike. Communities have more confidence in schools when school programs include the things they value, i.e. cultural values, traditions and experts (i.e. grandmothers & grandfathers). When communities have more confidence in schools, they are more likely to enroll their children, to keep them in school and to become involved in school programs. Closer ties between communities and schools are advantageous to children, families and teachers.

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