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# The Current Education System in Senegal: A Closer Look at the Advantages and Disadvantages of Attending a Private Catholic Institution in Dakar

Erin Clasby  
*SIT Study Abroad*

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**The Current Education System in Senegal: A Closer Look at the Advantages and Disadvantages of Attending a Private Catholic Institution in Dakar**

Clasby, Erin

Academic Director: Diallo, Souleye

Advisor: Cryer, Stephanie

Boston College

Senegal, Dakar

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SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2013

“Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life” The Purpose Of Education by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1947.

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## **I. Abstract**

For my independent study project I examined the possible reasons for the current state of the education system in Senegal. Focusing on the primary school level, I explored what factors contribute to the low levels of achievement currently in the schools of Dakar. To help me do this, I observed and participated in the everyday lives of children at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette, a local private Catholic school. I studied socioeconomic status, student to teacher ratio, curriculum, the importance placed on education in the culture and communities I stayed in, and how these factors affect the quality of education children are receiving. I also focused on the possible benefits of attending a private Catholic school and what the teachers, administrators, parents, and students at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette are doing to counteract the difficulties they face in primary education each day. Through my research, I found teacher quality, reliability, and discipline to be the main factors leading families to enroll their children in a private Catholic education.

## II. Introduction

### Overview of Primary School Education in Senegal

Since Senegal declared its independence in 1960, the country has continued to employ the French model of education. Its programs and structures make it "an apprentice of the French school" (Rideout and Bagayoko 1994). Despite recent reform efforts to create a more uniquely Senegalese curriculum<sup>1</sup>, the language of instruction remains predominately French. Complying with the French model, primary school in Senegal consists of five stages (See Table 1). Children begin attending primary school between the ages of six and seven at the Cours préparatoire level (CP/11ème). This is followed in consecutive order by Cours élémentaire première année (CE1/10ème), Cours élémentaire deuxième année (CE2/9ème), Cours moyen première année (CM1/8ème), Cours moyen deuxième année (CM2/7ème). The school year is divided into three terms, starting in October and ending in June. An average week consists of approximately thirty hours of classes (Gomis 2012).

During the early years of primary school, a large percentage of the time is devoted to teaching children French, which will be the main language of instruction for most of their education. At this stage students also begin instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. In later years children are ideally introduced to history, geography, natural science, music, art, and physical education. Class size averages seventy students per class in urban schools and forty-eight per class in rural areas. Although the gap between male and female enrollment has narrowed since Senegal's independence, with the number of

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<sup>1</sup> Some significant elements of reform called for by the *Etats Généraux* include the transformation of textbooks to being based upon Senegalese rather than French experience, published in Senegal, and distributed free of charge to students. They also include instruction in the maternal languages during the early years of primary education and religious education in the public schools.

male and female students in urban areas nearly the same, there continues to be a significant gap in rural areas (Michel 1988).

Also modeling the French school system, after five years in primary school, students may take the *certificat des études primaires élémentaires* (CEPE), a state administered standardized test that evaluates student's knowledge in writing, reading, math, history, geography, and applied sciences. Students who pass this test can then take the *examen d'entrée en sixième*, a highly competitive screening examination. However, not everyone who passes both examinations attends secondary schools, possibly a result of family poverty and/or lack of space in the schools.

While some children might not have access to formal education, all children in Senegal begin learning the customs and traditions of their society from an early age. By the age of five or six many children have family responsibilities, and at a young age begin to receive formal occupational training. Most Senegalese ethnic groups have a formal system of apprenticeship through which knowledge, skills, and expectations are passed along from mothers to daughters and from fathers to sons (Michel 1988).

### **Current Issues in Senegal's Education System**

During my time here, I have learned that Senegal places a large emphasis on the importance of education. Despite this emphasis and recent interest in improving the education system in Senegal, the system continues to fail. While research has found that Senegal has made progress in increasing access to education over the last eight years, it has also been determined that quality of education has deteriorated. Results from the 2006 Program on the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) show that in Senegal,

scores in math and French have declined from 1996 to 2006 for both second and fifth grades (DeStefano, Lynd, and Thornton 2009)<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, attendance rates in Senegalese schools vary widely from as much as ninety-three percent of school-age children in urban areas to as low as ten percent in some rural areas (Cain and Schuman 1994). Drop out remains high in primary school, with only about fifty percent of students who start out in first grade making it through to the end of the cycle (Case, Paxson, and Ableidinger 2004). A recent report from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) regional office in Dakar showed that Senegal is near the bottom of countries in Africa in terms of the percentage of students who enroll in primary school compared to those who complete the cycle. With a gross enrollment rate of ninety percent, but an achievement rate of only around fifty percent, Senegal fares considerably worse than neighboring countries, such as Guinea, Mali, Benin, Ghana, and Gambia (DeStefano, Lynd, and Thornton 2009) (See Table 2).

For children who do stay in school, research has also found that teacher quality in Senegal is inadequate (Michaelowa 2001). Teachers may be hired quickly as volunteers for a short-term position to fill a gap in the faculty, and end up with a permanent position without any training in classroom management and instruction. Teacher development and teaching seminars are also rare due to funding, and are not structured enough to impact teaching practice when they do occur.

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<sup>2</sup> The PASEC panel in Senegal started in 1995 with a representative panel of students at the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. These students were followed until the year 2000 where those who did not repeat any class completed their primary education. At the end of each academic year, the students were tested in math and French to obtain information about their progress over time.

One of the largest problems contributing to the failing education system in Senegal today is disruption to the school year, which has a major impact on the amount of available time for teaching and learning. Teachers' unions continue to place pressure on the education system as they seek compensation for unpaid insurance, negotiate for pay increases, and confront the ministry over the issue of volunteer and contractual teachers (DeStefano, Lynd, and Thornton 2009). The continuous disagreements between the government and the unions result in strikes that disrupt the school year. Students attending a private school would automatically appear to have an advantage over the public school population in this area.

### **Private Schools in Senegal**

Private schools represent an important part of the education sector in Senegal. The current public education is unable to guarantee access to school (no schools available in the neighborhood or overcrowded classes), or good quality of instruction (untrained teachers, lack of textbooks, etc.), leaving private schools to fill the space. At the middle and secondary level, private institutions, largely Catholic, enroll about twenty-eight percent of the students (Cain and Schuman 1994).

Private schools provide education not only for the children from high-income families. Middle class and working class families make enormous sacrifices to pay for their children to attend a private school. Most private schools are religious institutions, however they are still required to follow the government-approved curriculum, use government recommended textbooks, and employ licensed teaching staff. Some even receive government subsidies to meet operating expenses (Kitaev 1999).

## **Purpose and Objectives**

The overarching objective of my research was to explore the reasons for the failing education system in Dakar, and to identify strategies to counteract these failings.

Due to time limitations I gathered information from the general population at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette and compared it to past and present studies being conducted on education in Senegal. I studied the curriculum and structure of the classrooms, student teacher ratio, student teacher relationships, as well as programs and projects that are being employed by École Primaire Sainte Bernadette to make sure their students are succeeding.

I also focused on the benefits of attending a private Catholic school. By attending École Primaire Sainte Bernadette, students may be given an advantage over students attending public school. My research looks at why parents choose to send their children to private Catholic school. I observed what activities and support is provided for the children within the private Catholic school setting surrounding their education, such as afterschool programs, all school activities, and the overall emphasis placed on education within the community of École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. My time spent at Sainte Bernadette provided me with greater insight into the benefits of attending a private school, and possible solutions and improvements that could be made to counteract the problems the youth of Dakar are facing with the Senegalese education system today.

### III. Methodology

#### École Primaire Sainte Bernadette

École Sainte Bernadette is located in Sicap Baobabs, Dakar. Father Baudut originally founded the institution as a primary school in 1960 with the help of evangelist missionaries, in hopes of providing an education to all the children in the area. In the beginning, the school had only two classrooms. Today, the school is comprised of both a primary and secondary school, with twenty-four classrooms in the primary school, and twelve classrooms in the secondary school. Walking into the front gates, you are immediately overwhelmed by the amount of children that come to play and learn inside Sainte Bernadette's walls. This year, in the primary school alone, there are 1,347 students (515 girls, 832 boys) (Gomis 2012). These students are divided between five grades, all grades made up of four classrooms. This means that each classroom may hold between fifty to sixty students at a time. There is only one teacher to a classroom, and they are responsible for teaching all of the curriculum's subjects.

The student body varies widely. While most students are Senegalese, there are also other nationalities (mainly African) present in the school. Sainte Bernadette prides itself on being a welcoming and diverse community. Attending a private school also requires the students and their families to pay tuition. Students in all grades pay a minimum of 17,000 CFA a month to cover their general education. This money helps employ the teachers, cooks, custodians, and bus drivers at the school. However, students who wish to take extra classes, participate in extra curricular activities, ride the bus to school, and eat lunch at the canteen may pay up to 40,000 CFA a month. Within the school, there are students with families that are able to pay that amount, and there are

students with families that cannot. Sainte Bernadette understands that many families may struggle to make enough money to keep their children in school, and offers tuition reductions and scholarships. Many scholarships are given to orphans who may not be able to generate that amount of money on their own.

Being able to attend École Sainte Bernadette is very competitive. During an interview with Pierre Gomis, one of the schools' Directors of Education, he explained that a large number of parents apply to send their children to Sainte Bernadette each year, but because each class can only hold up to sixty students, the majority of families are turned away. Students are chosen on a first come- first serve basis, and once all the spots are filled, families are turned away.

While Sainte Bernadette is a private Catholic school, religion also varies among the student population. Around seventy percent of the students in the school are Muslim, however, all teachers working in the primary school are Catholic. Teachers are hired based on their ability to teach, intelligence, moral sense, and being Catholic (Diouf, M. 2012). While it is required for teachers to be Catholic, religion does not play a factor in the application process for students hoping to attend Sainte Bernadette.

### **Reasons for Choosing Site**

I originally chose to conduct my research at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette because of its close relationship with SOS Village d'Enfants, and my strong interest in the education of orphans in Dakar. However, after weeks of waiting and miscommunication, I decided to change my focus to investigate the education system in Senegal and the advantages and disadvantages of a private Catholic education in Dakar.

This being said, École Primaire Sainte Bernadette is a well-reputed school, and offers valuable insight into how private Catholic institutions are run. Attending a primary school allowed me to draw connections between the secondary research I have collected and the education the children are receiving at school. I chose to complete my international pre-practicum at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette so that I would be working with, and observing children that receive a private Catholic education. This helped me to immerse myself into a Senegalese school and gain better access to the information, interview students, teachers, parents, and observe the customs and cultures.

Because of its large size and diverse student population, I felt I would have access to all different types of students and teachers. Its reputation also led me to believe that the school may have found a way to cope and combat the current state of the education system in Dakar.

## **Methodologies**

With the help of Boston College I was able to set up an international pre-practicum at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette, which allowed me to shadow a cooperating teacher (CT) for three full weeks. I began my research by conducting an unstructured interview with my CT, Louise Diouf, a fifth grade teacher at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. This first method was used to gather general background information about the current state of the education system in Dakar, that later helped me formulate questions and create a basis to conduct further interviews about my topic. I then conducted a formal interview with Mr. Gomis, one of three Directors of Education at

École Primaire Sainte Bernadette, to gain a better understanding of how the school is set up, as well as gather basic statistics about the school population.

I used the information gathered in my first two interviews, along with information I had collected from secondary resources to create interview questions for teachers, administrators, and parents. Over the last few weeks, I interviewed available teachers and parents to determine their views of the current education system, and identify strategies that Sainte Bernadette was using to counteract them. If time allowed, the interviews were formal, however many ended up being informal group interviews due to the busy lives and schedules of teachers and parents. Most participants were supportive of my research and offered interesting perspectives on my subject. I was also able to conduct a formal interview with Sister Mary Madeline, the directress of École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. This interview was helpful in gathering information about the overall mission of the school, as well as the values that the school was founded on.

Throughout my whole time at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette I was also gathering information through participant observation. I arrived at school every morning and followed my CT and her students through their day. I was able to observe how the classroom was set up, classroom management, the curriculum and instruction, as well as interact with the students. I ate lunch with the teachers, and over time both students and teachers accepted my presence in the school.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages**

Being able to complete participant observation at Sainte Bernadette acted as an advantage for my research. During my time at the school I was able to observe customs

and routines that may not have been obvious through interviews alone. I was able to observe hands on, how the school functions from day to day. Furthermore, being able to interview teachers and parents who had a strong affiliation with a private Catholic institution allowed me to collect powerful data surrounding my topic.

However, my presence at the school may have also been a disadvantage. When a stranger is introduced, there is an automatic shift in behavior, and it is hard to tell what is normal and what is not. In the beginning, students in my classroom were shy and reserved, but as the weeks past, both teachers and students became more comfortable with me being at the school. I was given some authority over the students, and stood in for my teacher while she engaged with other teachers or left the classroom.

I understand that the information obtained from École Primaire Saint Bernadette might not be representative of the entire population of students attending private Catholic schools. If time allowed, I would have liked to gather more general information for my research question by visiting other schools around Senegal and comparing them to my research completed at École Primaire Saint Bernadette.

#### **IV. Findings**

##### **Interview with Louise Diouf:**

Louise is a CM1 teacher at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. She chose to work at a private Catholic school because it is where “she feels she could teach her best”. She also added that she chose to come to Sainte Bernadette because they had a position open at the time and she needed a job. Her older sister also went to Sainte Bernadette when she was younger, and they both grew up around the corner so she knew about the school

before she applied to work there. When asked what she believed to be the biggest problems in primary school education today, she identified teachers' strikes as the largest obstacle at the moment, because children are missing days of school. Along with strikes, there is a lack of materials and space for both teachers and students to do what they need to do. Louise explained that children need to move around and interact to learn, and the way that the classrooms are set up now, over crowded, they cannot. She also feels that the curriculum is not effective, and that this results in teachers having limited time to teach essential information.

When asked about the advantages of attending a private Catholic school she explained that students who are able to attend get security, seriousness, and a good education. Students are not affected by the strikes like at other public schools. They are taught morals, not just general academics, but knowledge that will help them in the world. She feels that children who attend Sainte Bernadette in particular benefit from programs like Cultural Week, which acts as a festival for the students to present and learn about different cultures represented in their school. The money raised from the event is used to renovate the school or buy new materials. Students are also able to learn about the environment hands on, by helping cultivate and maintain the school garden.

In Louise's eyes, one of the most important things that her school is doing to overcome the current problems in primary school education is encouraging collaboration among teachers, and teacher development. Educators from Sainte Bernadette and surrounding public and private schools meet once a month to share ideas and offer each other suggestions. Teachers at Sainte Bernadette also meet with a supervisor, who is able to evaluate and provide suggestions for improvement in the classrooms. Louise feels the

hardest part about being a teacher is that all the pressure is placed on her. When something goes wrong, everyone blames the teacher. However, she feels that the individual students, their parents, the teacher, and their environment all affect how well the student learns.

### **Interview with Pierre Gomis**

Pierre Gomis is one of the three Directors of Education at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. He has been working at the school for over four years. He is in charge of managing and approving the entire curriculum in the primary school. Teachers in each grade are responsible for designing their grade's lesson plans, which are then brought to Gomis, who is responsible for making sure that the lessons align with the standards of the National Education Ministry. Gomis feels that the care of the children is the largest problem in primary school education today. He explained that there are schools in which you can immediately tell students are not being cared for. In these schools, the teachers do not care and do the minimum they can to get paid. Gomis added that the State also causes problems when jobs are given to "a friend of a friend" to earn extra money. He believes these people do not care about teaching or have any experience. At Sainte Bernadette, Gomis says they make sure the teachers have the love for teaching and for children.

When asked what he thought were the advantages of attending a private Catholic school, Gomis stated that the assurance that students will have class, rigorous material, and socialization. He pointed out that while the students may have different religions, they all have learned to work together and accept each other. The only disadvantage to

attending a private Catholic school would be that for certain parents, the admission that Catholic religious expression could be positive for their child's values and morals, as well as acceptance and solidarity. He explained that there should be a tolerance between both Catholics and Muslims, and that it is important to be exposed to different ways of doing things.

At École Primaire Sainte Bernadette, Gomis believes the school has created a family. If you attend this school, you become a member of the family, within a larger family. He explained that Sainte Bernadette has a program in which students raise school materials and money to support a low-income school in Casamance. This is to teach students that there are not just rich people who can help the poor, but poor can help the poor as well. Gomis believes this teaches the students solidarity and unity, which is a trait they might not learn at a different school. Gomis also stated that the most influential ways that École Primaire Sainte Bernadette is working to counteract the current issues in the Senegalese education system is through employing qualified teachers, and having teacher development once a month.

#### **Interview with Sister Marie Madeleine Diouf:**

Sister Marie Madeleine Diouf is the Directress at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. She has worked at the school since 2005, and as part of her job, holds all moral, administrative, and financial authority. When asked what the biggest problem in primary school education is today, she answered that the education children are receiving in school does not match up with what they are learning from the media. She said that they come to school and are taught morals and values, and they turn on the TV or use

their phones, and see a completely different image. She believes that this can have a strong impact on the students.

Sister Diouf believes there are many advantages to attending a private Catholic school in Senegal. The biggest advantages she sees are strong discipline, moral guidance, seriousness, security, and teachers that do not go on strike. Sister Diouf explained that other schools have strikes, but at Sainte Bernadette, teachers are always available. If a teacher is absent, Sainte Bernadette has substitutes that can take their place. Sister Diouf also pointed out that when students from her school take the CEPE, they have more children who pass than other public and private schools in the area. She explained that this might be because other institutions have missed days of school, or the students did not have enough support.

When asked what Sainte Bernadette is doing to counteract the current problems in primary education, Sister Diouf answered “promoting peace”. She believes it is important to instill the notion of peace in the minds of the students. She explained that her school works very hard to promote peace and non- violence. The school has created a hymn that speaks against violence. They also have a school slogan, “non à la violence”, that is painted around the school, as well as posters asking for peace to further promote the idea.

### **Interviews with Teachers**

All of the teachers I interviewed are currently working at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. Many have been teachers for years, and have taught all over Dakar. Others have only worked at Sainte Bernadette. When the teachers were asked why they chose to work at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette, the majority answered because the school is

close to where they live. Three teachers answered that they chose to work at Sainte Bernadette because they were Catholic and wanted to help spread the word of the church. One teacher explained they chose the school because of its seriousness, and added that teachers at Sainte Bernadette make less money than public school teachers, so he does not believe teachers work at his school for the money.

When asked about the benefits for children attending a private Catholic school many teachers listed discipline first. A teacher explained that public schools may be unorganized, but at private Catholic schools they teach the students discipline and responsibility. Another teacher added that education is taken very seriously at private Catholic schools. One teacher said that students benefit from a solid foundation, not only in their academic education, but also in their morals and values. This teacher, along with many other teachers I interviewed, believes there are no disadvantages to attending a private Catholic school. The quality of teachers was also brought up as an advantage.

When asked the question, what do you believe to be the largest problems in elementary education in Dakar today, the most common answer was strikes by teachers, although it was closely followed by the lack of materials available in schools. A teacher pointed out that both teachers and students do not have enough materials, and that this makes it very difficult for teachers to instruct, and students to learn to the best of their ability. Another problem brought up by the teachers was the overcrowding in classrooms. One teacher explained that there are too many students in a class for a teacher to be responsible for. When a teacher has to correct, grade, and prepare lessons for 50 students, the quality of teaching is going to diminish. Organization was also discussed as being a large issue in the current education system.

All of the teachers I interviewed believe that Sainte Bernadette is working to combat the current issues in the primary school education system. Some mentioned Cultural Week as a way to promote unity and solidarity within the school. The majority of teachers believe that not going on strike is one of the most significant ways Sainte Bernadette is fighting the problems in the Senegalese education system. One teacher added that when teachers are absent, there are teachers to take their place.

### **Interviews with Parents**

The first father I interviewed has two girls attending École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. He and his daughters commute twenty minutes every morning to go to school. To him, there are too many problems in the current primary education system to name, which is an answer I received from many other parents as well. This particular father chose to send his daughters to private Catholic school because he is Catholic, and to him it seemed like the obvious choice. He also thinks that his daughters benefit from going to Sainte Bernadette because the student population is not made up of one religion. He explained that at other schools, it is all one religion or the other. The father felt that it was important for his children to be exposed and open to two religions. An event such as Cultural Week was one way he felt Sainte Bernadette is creating a positive environment to learn in.

A mother of one girl in CE2 at Sainte Bernadette chose to send her daughter to a private Catholic school because she wants her daughter to receive the best education available she can. This was the most common answer I received from mothers and fathers at the school. She, along with many other parents, feels that the teachers in private

Catholic schools are better qualified and the institutions are more reliable. When asked what she would change about her child's education, she answered that she would not change anything. She thinks that her child's education is sufficient the way it is now.

Another mother I interviewed chose to send her son to École Primaire Sainte Bernadette because of its good reputation. Many of her friend's children have gone to the school, and all have had good experiences. To this mother, strikes and unqualified teachers are the biggest problems in the current primary school education system. However, like many other parents, she does not feel that there are many problems at Sainte Bernadette, and in private Catholic schools in general. If she could change one thing in her child's education, it would be to have more Senegalese history incorporated into the curriculum.

## **V. Observations and Analysis**

### **Teacher Quality**

One of the most common problems mentioned were public school teachers going on strikes and poor teacher quality. While Sainte Bernadette has not participated in the strikes, the parents and teachers are fully aware of the repercussions it may have. If children are not able to attend school, there is no way for them to learn. Sainte Bernadette realizes this and has made sure that the school has teachers available at all times.

Having unqualified teachers arose in many of my interviews as one of the biggest issues in Senegal's current education system. I found Mr. Gomis's perspective on the lack of care for students relevant to this issue. It would appear that some teachers in Senegal are teaching for the money, and not for the love of teaching or their students. If

this is the case, there is no incentive for teachers to participate in teacher development programs or to strengthen their instruction. During my interview with parents, many of them highlighted qualified teachers as a benefit for attending a private Catholic school, and Sainte Bernadette in particular. As one teacher pointed out, teachers at Sainte Bernadette have a lower salary than teachers in the public education system. Knowing this, the teachers at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette still chose to work at the school. One possible reason for this, although it was not mentioned in my interviews, may be because the teachers at Sainte Bernadette actually enjoy their jobs.

### **Role of Religion**

Educators at Sainte Bernadette also have another incentive driving them to be the best teachers they can be: Religion. To work in the primary school, you must be Catholic, as well as hold a strong sense of morals and values. Many teachers listed spreading the word of the church as reasons they chose to work at a private Catholic institution. Teachers at a private Catholic school are driven by internal motivation and incentives, rather than just the external motivation of money that many public school teachers may be facing. To ensure the school is employing qualified teachers, Sainte Bernadette requires their teachers to participate in a teacher development program once a month, as well as sets up opportunities for collaboration between teachers within their institution, and with teachers at surrounding schools.

While it was not one of my main objectives, I became increasingly more interested in the role of religion in the education at Sainte Bernadette. Around seventy percent of the population at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette is Muslim, and yet during

my observations, I saw no sign of religious tension at any point during my time at the school. In the morning, after the CM1 students have filed in and taken their seats, they recite as a class: “Seigneur, donner nous la force et la courage de bien travailler. Merci, Seigneur pour cette journée qui commence”<sup>3</sup>. When I asked why everyone has to recite this prayer, even though the majority of the class is Muslim, my CT replied that no matter what religion you practice, you believe in a higher power that gives you strength and courage and lets you live another day. She explained that she had chosen this prayer specifically so that the whole class could participate.

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning the teacher I observed holds Mass in her classroom for both fifth grade classrooms. Out of about one hundred students, there are only around twenty Christian students that attend each week. The Muslim students move to another fifth grade classroom, where they participate in a morals and values class until mass is over. Parents, teachers, and administrators all agreed that one of the main advantages for attending a private Catholic school is building a strong moral foundation. Religion does not seem to be imposed on the education of the students, rather the students are exposed to the morals and values of the Catholic religion. Both religions seem to be accepting and understanding of the other, which is a reflection of Senegalese culture in general. For example, Christian neighbors bring their Muslim neighbors dessert during Easter, and Muslim neighbors bring their Christian neighbors part of their meal during Tabaski.

Tolerance and solidarity came up during many of my interviews as a benefit for attending Sainte Bernadette. One father stated that he chose to send his daughter to Sainte

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<sup>3</sup> “Lord, give us the strength and courage to work well. Thank you, Lord for this day that begins.”

Bernadette in particular, because of the diverse student population. In an interview with Pierre Gomis, he also mentioned that students at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette benefit from the tolerance of different religions at the school. Cultural Week was also brought up in many interviews as a benefit of attending Sainte Bernadette, however, this may be because Cultural Week was taking place around the same time as my interviews.

### **Available Materials**

Both administrators and teachers also discussed a lack of materials as being a large negative factor in Senegal's education system, however parents did not mention it. This may be because parents are not exposed to the affect a lack of materials may have on their children's education. While teachers and administrators have to deal with the repercussions of not having enough textbooks or chalk everyday, parents may not be aware of it.

The lack of materials was also one of the problems I observed during my time at École Primaire Sainte Bernadette. To me, the whole school day seems to be designed around the resources that are available. Students do all their work on individual chalkboards to avoid wasting paper and room in their notebooks. The teacher does not have extra materials to hand out, and the students have to rely solely on what their family can provide for them. My CT has to copy all of her lessons and tests on to the chalkboard, which takes up a considerable amount of time. She rarely is able to fit the whole test on the board at one time so she writes the test up the board in sections, waits for the entire fifty students to recopy and complete the section in their notebooks, and then erases and starts writing the next section. In classrooms I have observed in the United States, a

teacher would hand out a piece of paper with the test on it, or place the test on an overhead projector to save time. Unfortunately, my CT and the other teachers at Sainte Bernadette are not able to do that. Students lose a lot of valuable time copying, when they could be learning.

## **Discipline**

When the participants were asked about why they chose Sainte Bernadette and the advantages of attending a private Catholic school, discipline seemed to be the deciding factor. Teachers, parents, and administrators all agreed that discipline and order created a successful school. When there is discipline within a school, students are learning obedience and respect. One teacher explained that when there is discipline, teachers and students can be productive. Another teacher added that many schools in Senegal today have become chaotic. Both teachers and students are acting out, leaving little time for learning. It gives parents confidence to know their children are attending a school that is in full control.

At Sainte Bernadette, you are aware of the discipline immediately. The school day begins with all the students lining up in alphabetical order by grade in the courtyard. When the teacher gives the okay, the students file into their respective classrooms and wait. When the teacher arrives, the entire classroom stands, recites a prayer, and then formally greets the teacher, only sitting down after the teacher has dismissed them. My CT then begins reviewing the material learned the day before, calling on students who are expected to stand and recite the correct answer. Giving the wrong answer is unacceptable, and a student who answers incorrectly must stand for the rest of the review.

While this method of teaching may be very different than methods used in the United States, it has been successful for Sainte Bernadette. In 2010 and 2011, the school had a one hundred percent completion rate of the *examen d'entrée en sixième*. Statistics also indicate that one hundred percent of the students who completed the exam were admitted to secondary schools.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Throughout my observations and interviews exploring the largest problems in primary education in Dakar today, many of the findings I collected from parents, teachers, and administrators closely paralleled the information I had found in past studies and secondary sources. The quality of teachers, and teacher reliability remains one of the most prominent problems. Furthermore, the lack of available materials for both student and teachers, as well as a lack of order and control in the schools has also been identified as important factors leading to an inefficient education system in Senegal.

During my research at Sainte Bernadette, the quality of education that children in Senegal are receiving remained the most important concern. If implemented effectively, research has found that “schools can provide children with a safe, structured environment, the emotional support and supervision of adults, and the opportunity to learn how to interact with other children and develop social networks” (International HIV/AIDS Alliance 2003), making the attendance and participation of all students in school extremely important. Education has the potential to better the lives of children by providing them with the support and attention they may not receive anywhere else, along with academic knowledge that will allow them to succeed in the future.

Many parents in Senegal are now choosing to send their children to private schools to prevent dealing with the current issues in the Senegalese education system, and to give their children a chance to succeed. Despite all the problems, students, parents, and educators have not given up. The parents and teachers I spoke with expressed the desire for children to leave primary school with a strong foundation, not only in their academics, but also in their sense of morals, in hopes that building a strong foundation in both areas will provide students with the tools to succeed in the future.

École Primaire Sainte Bernadette has proven that it is possible for students in Senegal to reach high levels of academic achievement. Through my time at the school I discovered that order and discipline are necessary for an institution to be successful. Sainte Bernadette has also proven the importance of the educator's internal motivation to teach, and showed me that a school cannot run on money alone, but requires the care and attention from parents, teachers, and the community as a whole.

### **Applications and Further Study**

My research will hopefully draw attention to the current problems in Senegal's primary education system. If more people become aware of the problems, there may be more motivation to strengthen the system. Furthermore, my research highlights the importance of quality education in a child's academic and overall achievement, as well as illuminates a school that has found a way to overcome some of the problems holding back the Senegalese youth.

For future research, I suggest completing interviews with parents and teachers who are not affiliated with École Primaire Sainte Bernadette on the current state of

education in Senegal, and their perspectives on private Catholic education. This would provide a different insight into the topic and a larger range of data to analyze. I would also suggest completing similar studies on well-reputed schools around Dakar. If more data is collected on what factors create a successful school, it might one day be able to transfer into the public education system of Senegal.

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## **VIII. Interviews By Author**

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Parent 4. Interview by author. Formal Interview. Dakar, Senegal, May 2, 2012.

## IX. Appendices

Table 1: *École élémentaire* (Primary school)

Age	Grade	Abbreviation
6-7 yrs	Cours préparatoire	CP / 11ème
7-8 yrs	Cours élémentaire première année	CE1 / 10ème
8-9 yrs	Cours élémentaire deuxième année	CE2 / 9ème
9-10 yrs	Cours moyen première année	CM1 / 8ème
10- 11 yrs	Cours moyen deuxième année	CM2 / 7ème

Table 2: Educational outcomes in Mathematics and French, 1996 (1)

	Burkina Faso	Cameroon	Cote d'Ivoire	Madagascar	Senegal
<i>Average Rate of Correct Response (5th grade)</i>					
Mathematics	46% (0.33%)	50% (0.37%)	40% (0.31%)	58% (0.33%)	38% (0.40%)
French	44% (0.33%)	55% (0.39%)	50% (0.35%)	42% (0.34%)	34% (0.40%)
Both Subjects	45% (0.30%)	53% (0.34%)	45% (0.29%)	51% (0.31%)	35% (0.39%)
<i>Minimum Learning Achievement, (MLA)</i>					
Share of Children Reaching					
MLA	20%	59%	34%	25%	20%
Enrolment (5th grade)	34%	77%	54%	33%	55%

Source: Michaelowa (2000).