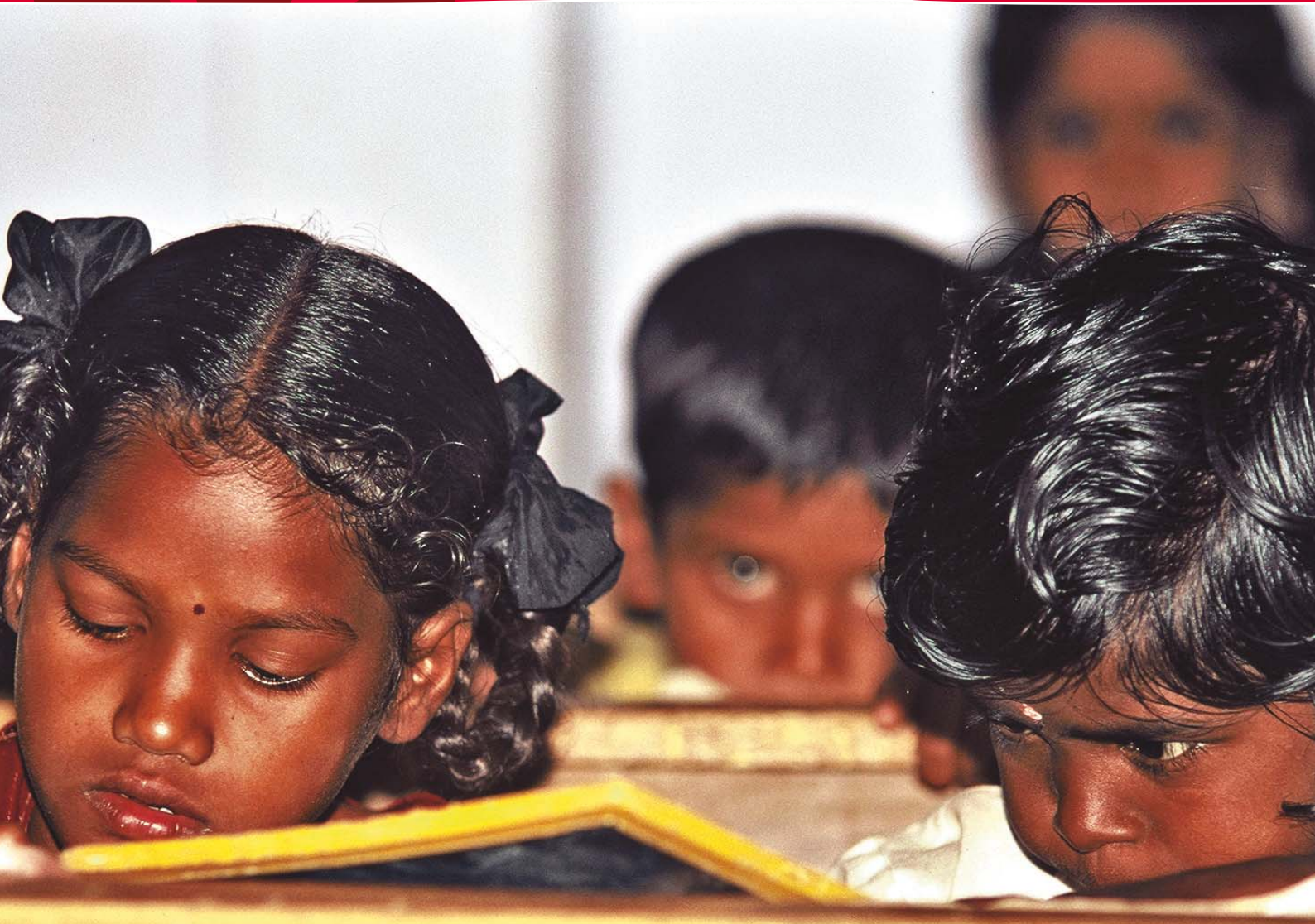


Aide et Action

Cover Story



School Failure : local realities of a global issue

© Aide et Action

Extract from magazine # 112

Download the magazine at www.aide-et-action.org

 Aide et Action

Changing the world through Education

Keys to reading

School failure is the inability of students to complete an academic term.

School dropout refers to a situation in which students are not excluded from the educational institution rather they put an end to their educational life in school on their own, whatever be the motive behind their choice.

School failure: multiple perspectives

Today school failure and dropout are realities faced by countries across the planet whatever be their level of socio economic development; however, significant differences seem to exist in the way failure is termed and the meaning attributed to it. Here's a sample:



Abdou Karim Fali, School Headmaster (Senegal):

"School failure refers to situation when dropout rates, repetition and exclusion rates owing to poor academic performance, soar. In Senegal, children who do not have the required academic level to enter highschool are said to be in a situation of educational failure."



Fabien Petit, a junior high school teacher at Saint-Ouen (France):

"School failure is "fabricated" in France by this compulsive need to get good scores, good results, and a good diploma. A student who fails to score well or fails to get the diploma is de facto termed as a case of school failure. Both parents and teachers have an important role to play as only they can guide these children and encourage them to do well outside a system that is not suitable to them."



Rakotoarimanana Tahina Lanja, literature graduate (Madagascar):

"One can talk of school failure when students are unable to complete their studies; young girls leave school to get married; so many others are forced to drop out to work and make a living."



Boureima Dahani, Secretary-Village Education Committee, Nongremassom (Burkina Faso):

"School failure is the non completion of an academic program. Dropouts, desertion and exclusion are all aspects of school failures. The failure is determined by factors that have led to it: repetition can be due to inadequate preparation during an academic session; exclusion by insufficiency of effort on the student's behalf or any other reason put forth by the school management; dropout when students decide to end their studies on their own, whatever be the reason for such a choice."



Balele Nkundi, teacher (Tanzania):

"School failure happens when students fail to clear exams at the end of an academic year. They are then forbidden to attend the next class and must repeat their academic session. But more than school failure, I believe that dropouts and absenteeism are major challenges that undermine the system."



Mrs. Nesam, Education counselor, ex-teacher Chennai (India):

"Children are forced to leave school for many reasons: parents are often not aware of the need for educating their children, especially when their economic situation needs the potential salary that their child can earn. Beside, the existing educational system is purely based on marks. So, if a child fails too often, he risks losing his motivation and may quit school quickly. People need to realize that dropping out of school is not merely being forced to accept the life of a lesser educated person; it is essentially giving up on many opportunities and the possibility to lead a decent life."

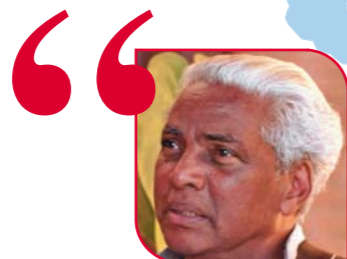


Bonaventure Maiga, counselor - Ministry of Basic Education, Literacy and National Languages (Mali):

"Any child unable to complete the primary cycle is considered to be a school dropout and/or failure. Factors that lead to educational failure are attributed to three reasons:

Academic: the prescribed curriculum may not be suitable to children.
Cultural: families need to provide adequate conditions that can bring about a successful academic experience.

Time: children also need time to assimilate their lessons so that they can apply what they have learnt correctly."



Désiré Philippe Ramakavelo, Ph.D in political sciences, ex-researcher at Madagascar University:

"School failure is a result of the large gap that exists between the academic curriculum, and the needs of the job market. Many graduates are unemployed today and many people seem to be engaged in professional activities that do not match their qualifications."



Abiré Edjeou, a primary cycle student at Kpalimé (Plateaux region, Togo):

"For me failure means students who fail their examinations. Dropout is a situation in which they no longer go to school"



Observatories

(Central America, Nepal and Bangladesh)



Noela Haingonirina, English teacher (Madagascar):

"School failure concerns students but the State when the educational system fails to achieve its objectives."



Mr. Kolani L, parent (Togo):

"Failure in the educational context occurs when a student has to repeat the academic term and the exams. School dropout means the desertion of classes which inevitably leads to high attrition rates. Dropout refers to a situation in which students no longer want to attend school as they have failed or as they do not have the means - financial or material- to continue."

Preventing school failure

School failure is a painful reality faced by countries across the globe. Who is responsible for it – is it the student, the educational institution, parents or the State? Or is everyone responsible for it?



In Mali, classes are adapted to suit children's learning speed, to rectify the situation of school failure.

Keys to reading

School life Expectancy: Number of years that a school going child is required to spend within the educational system.

Primary completion rates: Number of students who complete the last year of the primary cycle (expressed as percentage of number of students enrolled in the first year of the primary).

Gross enrollment rate: Total number of students enrolled in a given level of education, expressed as percentage of the population of the official school age corresponding to the given level of education.

In France, school failure can be assessed, and quantified: each year 150 000 students come out of the system without qualifying themselves. However, in other countries, it is quite difficult to examine and quantify the phenomenon as each country has its own specific educational system with variable learning cycles, timeframes, age for compulsory education, disciplines covered under the syllabus. The testimonials received by Aide et Action in the previous section reveal the extent to which the term school failure does not refer to the same reality for all; in fact, school failure is nothing but a judgment delivered by educational institutions that apply a given set of assessment criteria. It goes without saying that these may once again differ according to the year under question, educational systems or subjects under consideration. Moreover, evaluation thresholds for determining that a student is in a situation of 'failure' can once again vary from one country to another, one institution to another, and even from one teacher to another. In this debate, it is therefore crucial that we keep in mind

that the causes of school failure can be manifold, and that these can be related to children's abilities as well as their living conditions and socio-emotional contexts.

Moving towards quality education for all

For most of the countries across the world, the complex notion of quality education is a reality today. In many countries like Senegal, Mali, India etc. the political decision to improve access to education for all is definitely a welcome step forward. However, the absence of a clear cut strategy to do so has had the unfortunate effect of increasing the number of students in difficulty. Faced with the target of increasing numbers across educational institutions, it is a sad fact that the infrastructural support put forth by governments in terms of books, teachers, schools etc. have not been able to respond qualitatively to the massive inflow of students or improve systemic efficiency. «Most of the educational projects are not suited to the Madagascar reality. Of course, many laudable projects like education for all, zero repetition, skill based pedagogic approach and the like have been implemented in the country, but these have been done in a context of extreme unpreparedness and disorganization which has merely led to an increased incidence of school failure» regrets Désiré Philippe Ramakavelo.



One of Burkina Faso's objective is the education of all its children

Taking children - friendly steps in education

In terms of policy, access to education for all, which was a priority for countries, is now accompanied by measures aimed at including quality education as a necessary component. Take Mali for instance. In 1990 Mali committed to ensuring access to education for all children by 2015; today the country is also seriously committed to improving the quality of its educational system. "The State now offers modalities that are adapted to children's learning speeds and difficulties in addition to providing them with extra resources and books" says Bonaventure Maiga technical advisor to Mali's Ministry of education. Mrs. Nesam, educational counselor in India goes a step further: "The State must ensure that parents understand the need and importance of education; I am convinced that this awareness can bring about a transformation."

In most of the countries, massive awareness campaigns have been conducted to encourage parents to let their children, especially girls, attend school. Measures to improve student retention and school success rates have included setting up of school canteens, recognition of meritorious and deserving students, continuous



AEA is developing specialized training programs for slum children and youth like the programs in Chennai.

training programs for teachers etc. But are these initiatives enough? French Professor Philippe Meirieu, an expert in educational sciences has this to say: "The fight against school failure calls for significant means that need to cover living conditions, assistance to families, education, a shift in teaching approaches and practices (...)

as well as support to children through an enhanced social network mobilized specifically to improve intergenerational solidarities.(1)"

[1] Philippe Meirieu – Paper written on the occasion of the first day against school failure organized by AFEV, and published to open the debate on LE CAFE PEDAGOGIQUE http://www.meirieu.com/DICTIONNAIRE/echec_scolaire_pourquoi_comment.html

An overview of the situation in AEA's 4 countries of intervention in 2005 (except when indicated otherwise)

Refer reading keys below	Mali	France	India	Dominican Republic
School life expectancy (in number of years)	8.4	13.4	11	13 (in 2004)
Primary completion rates	64%	Data Not available	Data Not available	Data Not available
Gross enrollment rates in the first cycle of primary education	51%	111%	125%	113%
Observations	In 2000, Mali gave itself 10 years to achieve a gross enrollment rate of 95% in primary school. It needs to be noted that the number of students tripled between 1991 and 2000.	In France, more than 90% of the children are in pre-primary structures from 3 years of age. However, each year around 150 000 students leave the educational system without qualifying themselves.	Since 2005, 10% of the public budget is allocated to education.	In 2005, the Dominican republic allotted less than 10% of its total public expenditure to education. Moreover, only 6 years of primary education are compulsory in the country.

Success in school needs teamwork

To remedy the lack of academic culture that prevails among the economically deprived sections of the society, the kindergarten school of Croix-Duny (Argenteuil, France) has mobilized parents and teachers with the aim of improving the overall learning conditions for children.



At Val d'Argent, located in the suburbs of Paris, there is no question of allowing school failure to build up: its down side (adolescents without any vision or plans for their future, increased juvenile delinquency) has already proved to be very costly for this neighborhood in Argenteuil, which is also heavily hit by unemployment. Hence the decision to initiate the Croix Duny kindergarten, as a school project that involves parents, teachers and social partners together for the first time in the locality. The aim: make families, often of foreign origin, more involved in their children's education. Aide et Action has also been actively involved in this initiative by organizing meetings between parents, teachers and public partners (day care centers or municipal authorities). During these sessions, the open discussions between various stakeholders of education emerged as a crucial element for improving the situation. «The goal is to help certain families, as well as their children, integrate better with the school,» says a parent.



«There is always a family to help another family; Here we have solidarity needs» explains Xavier Rott, Director of the Croix-Duny Kindergarten school.

Increased involvement from parents

«The school has wanted to initiate this debate with you, parents, to exchange ideas with you, to know what doesn't work and see how, together, we can improve it through a collective approach» stated Laure Vidaller a teacher. «Parents should do more than just attend meetings.» (...) «Their participation should have an impact on the evolution of children», she continued. Thanks to the meetings, teachers and parents have committed to ensure an educational system that responds

to children's needs. In fact, the school has a dual role to play. In a parent's words «schools must teach children to read and write, but they should also teach them discipline, obedience and respect». Parents also feel strongly about being involved in their children's educational progress: «We want to have regular meetings so that teachers can alert us promptly if and when there are problems. And, in case we have problems with our children, we want to be able to talk about it with the teacher to find solutions», explained another parent.

In an effort to sustain the initiative, at

the end of the previous school year, stakeholders agreed on the need to create a relay group of parents for disseminating information among community members and sustain the momentum around the project.

For more information, see the documentary report on the Argenteuil experiment:

www.youtube.com/user/aideetaction
www.dailymotion.com/aide_et_action

(1) Reading and understanding school failure. Students in difficulties and teaching tools, Stéphane Bonnéry, La Dispute, 2007.

Haitian Schools on a review mode

To put a hold on school failure which has had a large hand in the country's unemployment and poverty, the Central region in Haiti has initiated the construction of model community schools. A close up of the enhanced concept.



«Everyone is satisfied with the construction of the new school, this is a first positive step, which will definitely contribute to the development of the entire region,» says an inhabitant of Lospuertes village located in Haiti's Centre region. Wide, airy, painted in white, the new school has nothing in common with the dilapidated, often-flooded building that functioned as the school previously. With very low enrollment rates combined with high repetition and dropout rates (17 % and 12 % respectively), Haiti's educational system has long way to go in terms of institutional efficiency and delivery. The country's extreme poverty also makes learning conditions more than difficult; without adequate financial means, families are reluctant to send their children to school, and therefore deprive them of the opportunity to improve their lives and those of successive generations equally. To break this vicious circle, Aide et Action has stepped in to initiate the school quality circle project.

«Here, it is a question of mutual support and cooperation»

«Our aim is to improve the quality of education through these school-quality circles» says Emmanuel Basile, Aide et Action-Haiti's area manager, and the main agent of transformation in these quality circles is the steering committee. Parents and teaching staff on board meet regularly to ensure an efficient functioning of the school and the sustainability of the school quality circle project. This committee,

which does not have prior experience, enjoys the full support of the first model schools that were constructed elsewhere. These in turn extend equipment, materials, support and advice to the steering committee. Strategically located near the community, the reference schools are larger and more modern; they have the added advantage of offering continuous training to teachers. «Here, it is a question of mutual support and cooperation. We want teachers to work with the idea of a team so that they feel that they belong here, that they have a special place here, that they can teach with a mission and that the school is in fact their school» says E. Basile. Children have also been quick to share this sense of belonging and involvement. They have showed a lot of enthusiasm to participate in school governments that have been

instituted in each school for carrying out awareness campaigns and have also been eager to do collective work. This school-quality circle project, jointly funded by MENFP (Haitian Ministry of national Education and vocational training) and the EU covers four of the nine departments in Haiti (North, Centre, Grand ' Anse and South). It will be offering training to over 3000 teachers and 4000 schools directors, constructing and rehabilitating schools in addition to equipping them with educational infrastructure and textbooks. All these steps are being taken to ensure better quality education for children by January 2010.

(1) According to the document on national strategy for growth and poverty reduction, more than one Haitian out of two lived on less than \$ 1 per person. per day in 2001.



Thanks to the school-quality circles project, more than 8500 Haitian students can complete the learning objectives specified in their curriculum.

Making children love schools for improving their school success

For Bruno Some, Burkina Faso's renowned sociologist, making children love school is the only way to ensure their success in academic life. And it is precisely for this reason that he is involved with the «Staying in school» project that aims to help children continue their education beyond the primary cycle. An interview ...



Aide et action: How can we really make children love school according to you?

Bruno Some: I have worked with children who are sick and have dropped out of school in certain regions of Burkina Faso for a long time now and I could really sense the importance of creating a positive

environment for them; children should have a school environment in which they really enjoy meeting other children rather than stay at home with their parents, cook, go to fetch water, etc. One must not neglect all the external factors which are equally important in fostering this love for school. Teachers, parents, children should bring forth the ingredients for making school a wonderful place to be for children.

Aide et Action: To what extent does this love for school play a role in helping children «stay in school and do well in their studies»?

Bruno Some: In life without love, one does not feel involved. Without love for school, the child would get out of it at the slightest opportunity. In Burkina Faso, there are many elements that potentially push the child out of the educational system unfortunately. I can think of some regions where gold washing sites help people find gold and make money. If parents do not have financial resources, they are likely to encourage children go to these sites for making money.

Schools in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, the ongoing reform enforces compulsory schooling from 6 to 16 years. After schooling became free in 2007, enrollment rates rose significantly; and today it stands at 71 % (67 % for girls) while it was a mere 47 % (1) between 2000 and 2006. Today, 80 % of Burkina be children enter the CP grade. But if enrolment rates have increased massively, resources allotted to education remain woefully inadequate. Consequently, classes located near large urban areas are often overloaded; each of the 39000 teachers can receive 50 to 150 children. These difficult conditions act as a deterrent for many families and even compel a majority of them to withdraw their children before the completion of primary cycle. Less than a girl out of two completes primary education. However, thanks to adult literacy programs, the percentage of literates rose from 18.4 % in 1998 to 28.3 per cent (2) in 2007.

(1) Statistics source: www.unicef.org/french/infobycountry/burkinafaso_statistics.html. (2) Statistics source: <http://www.pnud.bf>.

picture AeA : «a good atmosphere is paramount to making children love school»



Schools allows children to make friends.

A real dislike for school

Aide et Action: Why don't kids like school?

Bruno Some: Well children can dislike school for many reasons. The first reason for disliking school is that parents are not interested enough in their children's education. Then, in Burkina Faso as elsewhere, the teacher remains the focus of the school system, if they don't use alternative methods or original teaching strategies that nurture children's curiosity and desire to learn, children will feel very little love towards their school. The other reason is if parents' associations and the school management committees are not interested in the life of the school, or its quality, if there is no canteen or if teachers are absent, children don't feel they belong nor can they feel positive towards their school; we are cumulating the reasons that make children dislike schools. For children, of course it is paramount that there be a good atmosphere in school. They will want to go to school if they can play, learn together and if they can meet their peers outside school. So it is a combination of several factors that contributes to making children love or not love...school and stay there.

Aide et Action: How was this project conceived?

Bruno Some: In fact, this is not really a new project. It is rather the result of our best experiences put together over the past years. Through this project we wanted to focus on access to school and on the quality of the curriculum. We concentrated on existing programs, particularly in the ongoing ones in sponsored schools to make them sustainable and efficient. The Staying in school project focuses on three key areas:

- Strengthening capacities of existing educational structures (parents associations, associations of educational mothers, management committees associations; provide training to stakeholders.
- Improving children's knowledge and training teachers on disease prevention (HIV/AIDS, meningitis, malaria, etc.), improving and constructing where necessary hygiene and sanitary infrastructure (build latrines, tanks and rainwater storage facilities etc.).
- Supporting decentralization of the educational system (1) and the creation of village education committees and committees of local authorities on decentralization.

INTERTITRE: «Before coming to school, I use to herd animals.»

Aide et Action: And did you like school?

Bruno Some: My uncle enrolled me at school because I was away from my father who worked in the Ivory Coast. Thanks to school, I could escape the suffering I had to undergo when I used to be with the neighborhood children. Before coming to school, I used to herd and take care of animals. It was quite a hard job. After coming to school, I became aware that my true freedom was at school. I was lucky to be good in studies and I also worked hard to do well. I was often first in my class. But there was a time when I was on the verge of ending my studies in the CM2 level owing to dire financial difficulties. Fortunately, my mother managed to find some resources and I could continue. Today, I have a wife who is teaching. We have saved money to enroll our daughter in school. She is 5 years old, is in the CP grade and likes to go to school.

(1) Previously, the Burkina be school system was centralized. Today, nursery and primary schools are managed by municipalities.

A day against school failure

On the 23rd September 2009 associations and public partners organized the second edition of 'Refusal of School Failure Day'. This year the event was dedicated to theme of «transitions of academic cycles.» Organized less than 3 weeks after new academic year started in France, the refusal of school failure day offered an opportunity to mobilize people against educational failure and remind stakeholders about the attention that needs to be paid to transitional difficulties in schools.

Let every child leave school with a diploma in hand; this is France's objective in terms of education. Since the 1960s, the number of children without qualification at the end of the compulsory school education has decreased widely in France. However, it has stagnated today at 15 %. This shameful figure seems to be all the more unacceptable as policies put in place to curb this trend have remained ineffective till date. It is for this reason that the second edition of Refusal of School Failure Day was held on the 23rd September thanks to the efforts of the Association of Student Foundation for the City (AFEV) in partnership with France 5, Curiosphère, tv and Trajectoire-Reflex. Since Aide et Action has been in the forefront of access to quality education for all and the fight against school failure, the organization was actively involved in this call for action.

15% of French children leave school without qualification.

A lot of interest was actually generated on the theme thanks to Laurent Cantet's film 'Entre

les murs' (between the walls) that showed the life of junior high school goers in a difficult institution in Paris. After winning an award at Cannes and being associated with the Refusal of School Failure Day 2008 operation, the story of these young students facing educational failure ensured that the theme was once again at the very heart of the ongoing debates on school.

Transitional phase and stress related to entering Junior High School

The 2008 edition of Refusal of School Failure Day focused on the relational difficulties that exist between family & schools; this year's reflection focused on the transition from the primary level (CM2 grade) to the junior high school level (6th grade): this phase is crucial in the lives of young students as it can aggravate the difficulties and stress levels that children face in the primary. «Children may say that they are not scared, it is not true. They need a lot of attention towards the end of the year, they ask many questions. They may be in a hurry to enter junior high school, but it is always with a sense of anxiety. Junior High School is a much larger world than the one they know in their primary schools and children definitely need hand holding at this stage» says Dorothea Laroche, teacher at La Pierrerie de Roissy-en-Brie a primary school in Seine-et-Marne in a film that's available on curiosphère.tv. The report also highlights the benefits of information and awareness sessions organized for



primary school goers who participated in activities aimed at preparing them to face this stage of their school life: actions included visiting a junior high school, meeting senior students for exchange of experience and also attending a few classes in the junior high school.

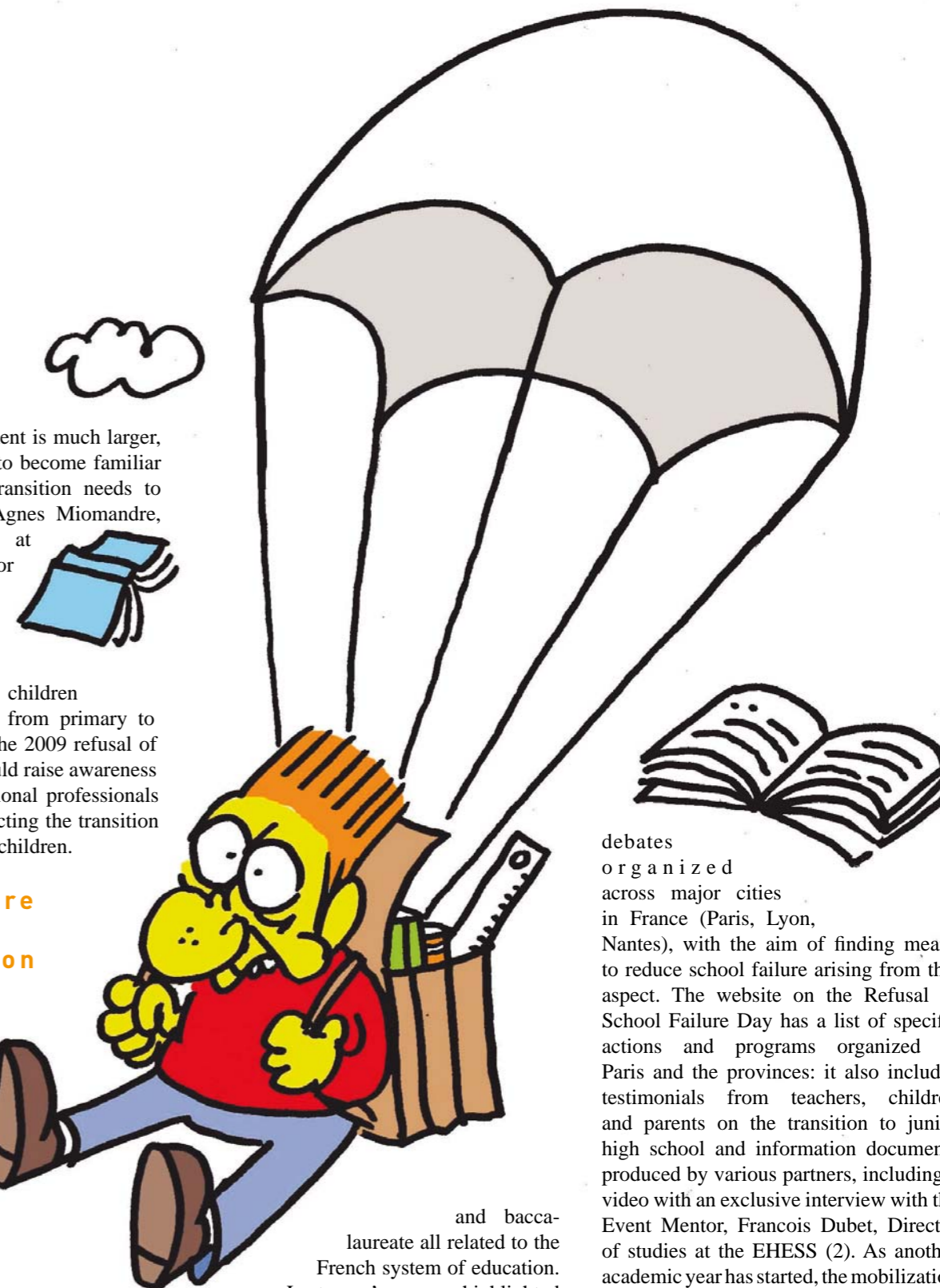
These experiences can provide a gentle eye opener to the reality of life in secondary schools in addition to giving children a first hand experience of the secondary cycle.

«The passage from the CM2 grade to the sixth grade (primary to junior high school) is a big step in the school life of primary students.» «There are many changes at the junior high school level: there are more

teachers, the environment is much larger, there are more adults to become familiar with, therefore this transition needs to be ritualized,» adds Agnes Miomandre, education counselor at Seine-et-Marne Junior High School. But these initiatives may still remain insufficient to resolve the fears and anxiety faced by children as they take the step from primary to the secondary level. The 2009 refusal of school failure day should raise awareness of parents and educational professionals alike about issues affecting the transition and bridge the gap for children.

Combat failure through communication

Reports should be made available on operation partner's sites, and media should be used to relay the message widely; professionals and people at large should also be encouraged to participate in this collective reflection. On the 23rd September, the AFEV also published its results of the educational survey conducted among children and youth of the locality. This year's answers revealed the need to help students prepare for various transitions that they face in the course of their schooling, these relate to CM2 grade, third grade,



and baccalaureate all related to the French system of education. Last year's survey highlighted the lack of interest children felt towards school; a third of the respondents even stated a high level of anxiety at the prospect of attending school every morning.

Many education professionals, educators and scientists examined issues related to transition on the 23rd September over

debates organized across major cities in France (Paris, Lyon, Nantes), with the aim of finding means to reduce school failure arising from this aspect. The website on the Refusal of School Failure Day has a list of specific actions and programs organized in Paris and the provinces: it also includes testimonials from teachers, children and parents on the transition to junior high school and information documents produced by various partners, including a video with an exclusive interview with the Event Mentor, Francois Dubet, Director of studies at the EHESS (2). As another academic year has started, the mobilization of the media and important personalities on this theme will surely propose new avenues of thought. A momentum which, with time, should definitely help improve the situation for many youngsters in difficulty.

(1) To learn more about the Refusal of school failure day and its partners, log on to: www.refusechecscolaire.org
(2) EHESS: Ecole des hautes Etudes en sciences sociales.



for more information log on to www.curiosphere.tv