

*"We Owe All of Our
Children an Apology."*

Schools Not Slavery Takes Violence Out of the Classroom

By Brian Stevens
Bouziyet, Lagonav —

The crack of a whip against a child's back used to be an ever-present sound in classrooms like those here at Saint Yves, a modest school with red dirt floors and walls fashioned from woven palm fronds.

Saint Yves' use of the whip was far from unique though. Corporal punishment is common in Haitian classrooms and remains so, dating back to the time of French colonial rule.

But now at Saint Yves, the whip is a thing of the past, replaced with a new, nonviolent approach to teaching.

"Who would've thought this little school would help lead the way," said Jean-Venel Despazin, as he gathered with others in the Saint Yves school yard one afternoon.

Encouraging Curiosity, Participation and Democracy

At Saint Yves and 34 other schools that make up the *Schools Not Slavery* network, gone is the use of physical violence to control classrooms, replaced with an approach that is nonviolent and designed to encourage curiosity, participation, and to teach students the value of democracy.

"These are the values we want to teach our children," Despazin said, "not violence and intimidation."

At a March gathering of Saint Yves parents, one father expressed the deep sense of regret that many of his fellow parents have for tolerating the widespread use of violence by teachers in the classroom.

"We owe all of our children an apology," he said, while praising the new approach, which, in addition to nonviolent classroom management, includes five other strategies that collectively represent a fundamental departure from the traditional model of education here.



Above, fourth grade students at Saint Yves. Right, teachers at Matènwa use a non-violent approach to classroom management designed to encourage intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. An MIT study found that reading scores at Matènwa were nearly three times higher than those at traditional Haitian schools.

"Nonviolence, democracy, equality. These are the values we want to teach our children." — Jean-Venel Despazin, community member

Despazin, community member

Rooted in Partnership

Beyond Borders' approach to education is, like all of our work in Haiti, rooted in partnership with a local grass-roots organization. On the island of Lagonav we partner with the Matènwa Community Learning Center as part of the *Schools Not Slavery* initiative to increase access to quality education for rural, impoverished children, many of whom are among the most at risk of being trafficked to cities as household slaves.

In December 2014 the Public Radio International program *The World* featured a story on this distinctive approach to



education first developed at Matènwa and currently being rolled out to the entire *Schools Not Slavery* network on Lagonav.

The story highlighted a recent Massachusetts Institute of Technology study that examined the approach, comparing Matènwa students with students in a sample of 84 traditional Haitian schools. MIT researchers determined that the Matènwa students had reading scores nearly three times better than the national average.¹

"We are proud of what's happening here," said Despazin. "We are creating a new model of what education can and should be in Haiti," he added. ✕

Learn how you can partner with a school like Saint Yves at www.SchoolsNotSlavery.org

¹ <http://www.pri.org/stories/20141222/villageschoolhaiti>
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