

## Message from the President of TMA

### Reflection

This past spring I spent three days being a helper in a small, coastal village public school in the Dominican Republic. It was a JK-7 school, in a newly renovated building, bright and freshly painted. There were new desks and shelves with curriculum materials and learning resources. But it masked the huge obstacles faced by the teachers in each of the four, multi-grade classrooms. Margarita teaches a split grade 1 and 2, with 55 children, ranging in ages from 6 – 15. Ursula teaches a split grade 5 and 6 with 45 children, ranging in ages from 10-16. A majority of students are Haitian immigrants or have a Haitian mother or father. Spanish is not necessarily their first language and teachers said it's not uncommon for a student to be absent for a month without explanation.

For three days I used a Spanish version of Scrabble and a variety of seashells, I collected from the beach, to reinforce language and math skills among small groups of students. The kids were highly focused and eager to do variations on the games. One teacher was particularly engaging with her students as they used new strategies for learning. I couldn't help but think she would jump at the chance to attend the Teacher Mentors conference in July. But getting there I knew would likely be an impossibility for this teacher.

But I have good reason to hope that next year will be different. Over the past year the Dominican team mentor team has grown in numbers and skill. It's exciting is to see how a true professional learning community has developed, the result of excellent leadership and mentoring by the Canadian teams. They have become instructional leaders ready to extend their learning to their colleagues in other parts of the country, to teachers like the one in the little coast village school. If you could step into the workshops and conversations of our teams you would see and hear people for whom teacher mentoring is a labour of love. They are bursting to move ahead. We at TMA are ready to give them our full support.

Teachers world-wide face huge obstacles in educating children in classrooms like the one's I visited at Escuela Surinam. And yet, seeing the enthusiasm and unswerving commitment of the Dominican teacher mentor team to improve the educational opportunities for all students in their country; I'm affirmed that investing our time and resources in people will yield the best results in education for children. If you agree, we would welcome you on board.

Nancy Threan Loraine

## TMA Board of Directors

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Nancy Threan Loraine

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## Thank You

to Richard Muir who is retiring from the board this year. As a founding director Richard provided wise counsel and vision through Incorporation and achieving charitable status. We are grateful for his unfailing and generous support.

## Doug Wilson

is new to the board this year. Douglas lives on farm in Uxbridge Township with his wife Susan and his dog. He has practiced Real Estate and Business Law, Corporate/Commercial Law and Estates Law in Uxbridge since 1976 with his Master of Laws from King's College in London, England. In his free time he enjoys golfing.

Douglas has served on numerous boards and societies including Chair of Board of Directors of The PIC Group Ltd., founding Director of Uxbridge Cottage Hospital Foundation, Charter President of Uxbridge Rotary Club, Immediate Past Chair of the Board of Governors of Durham College and Immediate Past Chair of the Board of Governors The University of Ontario Institute Of Technology.



## The Way Ahead: TMA Program Update

The Dominican Republic has proven a rich laboratory for TMA to pursue its vision of supporting teachers in impoverished communities. The TMA Program Committee has prepared a document entitled *The Way Ahead*, a three year strategic plan for building on our work in teacher development. The *Way Ahead* identifies important priorities and challenges that will be addressed in three phases.

Phase 1: Continue to build teacher capacity and resources with a focus on the effective instructional use of print material in the classroom. Host a summer conference for sharing strategies, with TMA support.

Phase 2: As an outcome of the establishment of multiple professional learning teams, the Dominicans present-- one or more-- summer conferences- with a self-identified theme. This--these events-- would be planned and delivered entirely by the Dominican leadership group.

Phase 3; Dominican community has ownership of a permanent learning institute, complete with staff devoted to cultivating professional learning activities throughout the region. Summer conferences could continue and courses will be offered on improving instructional practice, training emerging leaders and supporting professional learning in school communities.

## Team Experience Reports

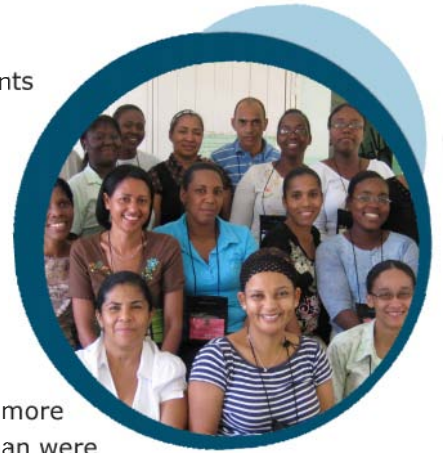
Visiting the Dominican Republic on behalf of TMA was an experience of a lifetime. Never have I worked in an area where living conditions were so basic, facilities were for the most part in an unfinished state and resources were limited bearing on non existent. From the moment I was met at the airport, until I left for home, I felt comfortable and "at home". What warm people.

My first impressions of the village would indicate extreme poverty compared to our villages - no hydro, tin shacks, mud floors and streets. However, upon reflection, these people only lacked what we would consider needed material things. They certainly were not poor in spirit. Never have I been in the presence of educators where everyone was motivated and committed. They were very thankful, receptive and gracious for everything shared and extremely dedicated to creating an engaging learning environment not only for their students, but also for themselves and other educators. Their desire to learn more was infectious.

The purpose of the July trip by the Canadians to the Dominican Republic was to support the Dominican teachers in preparing for and organizing their conference for other teachers throughout their country. About 120 teachers were planned for BUT over 200 attended. The apparent confidence and comfortableness on the part of the Dominican presenters indicated that they had been well prepared, believed in what they were doing and were eager to share their learning with others. A great deal of credit goes out to the Canadian trainers who have volunteered tirelessly over the past three and a half years, sharing their expertise to help these teachers to develop and realize their potential for teaching and learning to this skill level in a relatively short time.

Feedback from participants

at the conference was they wanted more, sessions were too short and the information and strategies were very useful. The Dominican presenters were pleased with the feedback and were very flexible when more participants appeared than were expected – an indication of how well prepared and confident they were about their presentation.



This experience has challenged me to look at many things from a different perspective. I now reflect on what really is important in life – what does one really need to be truly happy. As far as education goes, I question what is really needed to provide a happy, safe and engaging learning environment for all? The requirements for success with students in my mind seems to be dedication, commitment, time to build relationships, a caring attitude and a desire to be lifelong learners together, It has little to do with pupil/ teacher ratio or resources. I will continue to remind fellow educators how lucky they are. I will also encourage educators to become part of an experience where they can learn and share with others. Sharing with others who SEEM to be less fortunate can be a very rewarding experience for all. Everyone learns. Thank you for giving me this opportunity I will be forever grateful.

Marie Geelen, July team

## Mentor Spotlight: Olga Cruz

“Every teacher is always looking for something new to learn, to share with their students. A teacher is the one that ‘makes the difference’ in student’s learning, so I’m always looking for and implementing new ways by which to reach my students”.

Olga comes from a family of educators. Her first classroom teaching experience was at the age of 16 when she was called in to a high school to substitute for a relative who went into labour. A university graduate in Education, she most enjoys junior and intermediate grades. Olga has taught in the private and public sector for 19 years and is currently at a public elementary school with over 3,000 students. That was her preferred choice, but it has proven hugely demanding. Olga teaches language arts, science and art to grades 5 and 7, with 43-46 students per class. The morning school day starts at 7:45 a.m. and finishes at noon. But there’s an afternoon school day also. Olga teaches the same grades, different group of students from 2:00-5:30p.m. She often doesn’t get home until 7p.m. Prep time is during lunch and she always journals, even if it’s only 15-20 minutes, to assess what did or didn’t work that school day.

“I’m always seeking out new people who will challenge me. I’m a very reflective person and I believe that if you want to initiate change and move education to another level then you must take what is new and good and incorporate it into your teaching. I do a reflection with my students daily, knowing that something of what goes into them will be some day be incorporated into society”.

“The experiences we are gaining through TMA are changing people’s thinking and creating a new standard. But we must reflect deeply about the revisions we need to make. I am committed to this work for the long term”.

“I’m always a teacher...it’s my calling. I believe in professional learning communities, and the demands they make on us as educators. I am a willing servant to others. That’s what I live by, whether in my education community, my faith community or my broader, everyday part of life, community.

Olga Cruz—Co-Leader, Dominican team



## Mentor Spotlight: Patricia Obadia

Sometimes people’s journeys through life take such unexpected detours! Patricia Obadia, an Argentinean who went to university in Israel, and came to Canada “just to improve her English” 22 years ago, first knew about TMA through one of her friends, Janet Giberson, in August of 2007.

Her experience as an educator and currently as a curriculum consultant, her fluency in Spanish and her commitment to support those in need led her “to start a new experience which turned into a wonderful bond”, as Patricia reflects. She continues, “In the past year and a half, since my trip to Santo Domingo, I have grown with the Dominican team. Working with the Canadian team and with the Dominican teachers has allowed me to reflect and to marvel at all we are able to do when we collaborate.

Countries, cultures and languages have no boundaries; we all share the same passion for our students, for education and for the wellbeing of our countries. The Dominican teachers’ gratitude for the support the Canadian team is so unassumingly providing is demonstrated through not only their learning, but their commitment and their willingness to share it with other educators in their country.”

Patricia continues her work with the Dominican team in her new role of communication liaison, a role she enjoys and allows her to further tie the bonds with the Dominican team.



## Bulletin Board

### Thank You Donors

Teacher Mentors Abroad is totally funded by volunteers, public and private foundations and individual donors. We acknowledge, with sincere gratitude, the support from these donors.

East York-Scarborough Reading Association Inc., (Reading For The Love Of It) through their Outreach Committee, once again supported our work of improving educational methodologies in the Dominican Republic. "We greatly appreciate the dedication and passion behind the work of your organization and know that by promoting effective instructional skills of their teachers, Dominican students benefit greatly", Kathy Lazarovits, Chairperson, Outreach Committee.

Jericho Foundation, a faithful supporter of our work since its inception, again extended their generous support to our program.

Retired Teachers of Ontario, District 28

Teacher Mentors Abroad-Dominican Republic was approved for a provincial Project-Service to Others grant. This grant enabled TMA to purchase print materials in Spanish for literacy and instructional resources for use by teachers in teaching literacy and math; resources for the July conference and translation costs and reproduction. Several RTO members have been members of TMA's team from the outset.



Retired Teachers of Ontario District 28/Durham. RTO presented TMA with a cheque for \$3,200. for the purchase of instructional resources for the Dominican teachers and to support the Summer Conference.

Left to right: Karen Rynard, Linda Raney, Tom Jakabfy, Nancy Loraine and Joe Allin