

Teacher Mentors Abroad



ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 2021





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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It's Canadian Thanksgiving weekend as I write this message. This year's fall colours are late and often muted, lacking their typical brilliance. But when I turn from the landscape to my home, the picture is no longer subdued. I see instead an extraordinary harvest in my small apple orchard and in the garden where tomatoes, raspberries and greens have bumper crops.

There is a lesson here for me as I reflect on the achievements of Teacher Mentors Abroad. I must look for vibrancy in different places, and open my eyes to see how TMA has experienced abundant new growth to support educational improvement into the future.

Education in the Dominican Republic (DR) was deeply affected by the pandemic. The frequent absence of technology and connectivity had troubling consequences for student learning. Often teachers were not able to deliver curriculum and the incidence of student drop-out was disquieting.

Yet Dominican mentors withstood the test by adapting to a virtual environment. Although TMA again cancelled its in-person training workshops, we saw other approaches gain strength and the Dominican mentors became the change agents they had aspired to be. They used WhatsApp encounters and they shared resources through Facebook. Mentors who spoke English were offered specialized training. Throughout a difficult year, mentors remained engaged and received valuable training.

Here in Canada, TMA used this past year to strengthen our organization. We welcomed Spanish speaking board members Abigail Falcon and José Lopez, and honorary member Laura Elliott, a retired Director of Education. The Board of Directors, with the participation of our supporters, diligently undertook the review and development of a fresh Strategic Plan to guide us over the next three years.

Looking ahead to 2022 we anticipate returning to in-person training in the DR. There will always be a significant place for in-person training in a culture that places high value on interpersonal relationships. Throughout the TMA program, Dominican mentors will assume a greater role in developing and leading workshops. They will be active in both urban and rural areas. In March, an observation and assessment team will visit mentors' schools and help identify needs to be addressed in the summer workshops.

None of our work is possible without enthusiastic and committed volunteers and donors and partners who remain steady companions and supporters in the midst of challenging times. Gracias de todo corazon, thank you with all my heart.



Nancy Threan Loraine
President

REFLECTIONS

TMA sponsored online training in Peace Learning Circles (formerly Tribes Training) for several mentors this year. The following is a reflection by one of the participants.

Sharing with colleagues from other cultures and different languages, in an exchange of pedagogical practices, was of great benefit, experience and learning.

I loved the great level of exchange, respect and passion for education and the desire to share and contribute to our respective educational systems. I saw Tribes from a different perspective because material was provided from mentor to mentor. We also learned we don't need a big budget to bring life to classrooms and for students to have meaningful learning.

Personally, it helped me discover and develop my talents, learn new things, improve my public speaking skills and develop a growth mindset.

Looking ahead...because the majority of Dominican mentors do not speak English it is very important that these workshops be taught in Spanish. It would be a great shame if these workshops are not translated live or given by a facilitator who is fluent in the Spanish language, as we would be losing a very valuable resource that can be reproduced later to future mentors.

It was a very enriching workshop, where we all came out winning, full of learning and with new friends who share the same passion and the engine that drives us to go the extra mile in education.

Gloriannie Lopez Santo Domingo mentor



**“Destino (destiny) is a dance
with the currents of life.”**

Juana Bordas The Power of Latino Leadership

REFLECTIONS

The Covid Pandemic has reminded us that there are limits to our control over the world. We have been forced to acknowledge the power of this worldwide phenomenon, and while we need to establish our defences against it, we also need to identify what it has taught us. Some of us have reassessed priorities and accentuated the importance of human relationships. Others have used the extended lock-downs to 'get our houses in order'. In its own way, TMA as an organization has done the same.

This past year has demonstrated more than ever that work with our Dominican TMA Mentors must focus on their learning. Since 2019, our planning and activities have emphasized their role as key actors in extending and multiplying the professional learning TMA provides to Dominican teachers. For two years, the pandemic has made it impossible to send summer teams to the Dominican Republic (DR), but during this time, we have turned to technology to further our work. We have accomplished much, but at the same time have acknowledged the obstacles before us. Internet connections were often unreliable, devices were often scarce, and overwhelming workloads for Dominican educators kept our plans more modest than we would have preferred.

It soon became evident that the Canadian TMA participants needed to investigate and understand more thoroughly the educational conditions in DR. To that end, the Program Committee invited the TMA Board and DR Mentors to a ZOOM session in which the Mentors described their daily activities and explained their situations. We learned about the televised lessons and the accompanying workbooks that students used with online guidance from their teacher. WhatsApp was the most frequently used technology. We learned that the situation was different in private schools where schools and students had already established technology as a key resource and were able to convert to online teaching more readily.

We heard about the challenges to Dominican families that online learning presented, especially the parent involvement it required. Since TMA supports under-resourced communities, many of our Mentors were working in areas where parents struggled to support the basic needs of their families, with little time or money left for education. Parents and teachers alike felt this strain. TMA volunteers are humbled by the dedication and commitment of the Dominican educators facing these challenges.

Our Dominican Mentors have brought these conditions and problems to our attention and the slogan "Nothing about us without us" underlines the need for their involvement in planning and decision-making. I was delighted to learn that Jose Lopez of GEMA, our devoted host and advocate in Hainamosa, DR, became a member of the TMA Board. What's more, Dominican Mentors and partners were involved in developing TMA's most recent Strategic Plan, with working sessions in Spanish and English.

The Program Committee is also working with the Peace Learning Centre. This Centre is the new owner of the TRIBES program which has been a valuable resource in TMA summer sessions, and which is now called Peace Learning Circles (PLC). The plan is to have all DR Mentors experience the basic PLC training, and several have already been trained. The greater goal is to have all Mentors trained as PLC trainers who will introduce many more educators to the principles of cooperative and social-emotional learning, and the application of these principles in their classrooms

REFLECTIONS

TMA is looking forward to renewing our in-person work with Dominican teachers. The Program Committee will be looking to our Dominican Mentors to advise and collaborate on developing relevant workshops that the Mentors can deliver, supported by Canadian volunteers. Canadian travel teams will participate in pre-travel workshops to learn more about Dominican culture, become attuned to their own intercultural competencies and promote cross-cultural understanding. As we learn to cope with new global realities, education excellence that emphasizes social-emotional wellness is particularly important.

Despite the terrible toll the pandemic has taken, it has provided TMA unexpected benefits. We have harnessed technology to enhance our communication across time and space, thus strengthening our collaborative relationship with our DR partners. As Teacher Mentors Abroad charts its course to the future, we recognize the truth in Juana Bordas' metaphor. We are dancing with and through unforeseen currents, yet with mutual trust and reliance between the dance partners, we can find our way.

Denise Taylor-Edwards Program Committee member



EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

Extract from a letter to TMA highlighting notable improvements for the region of La Vega

“We recognize that the achievements obtained were largely due to the collaboration, dedication and excellent participation of TMA men and women. In addition to their high professional level, they gave of themselves without reservation, with humility, assertiveness, dynamism, leadership and great human warmth. They became true model Mentors who awakened the leaders who today guide the teaching and learning processes in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From this reality, we can only infinitely thank your collaboration for the excellent support to the Dominican Educational System by training and awakening leadership in our teachers. As a spark plug (they) are the only ones capable of creating hope, igniting imagination, inspiring love for learning and building the world that we all long for.

Thank you... do not lose heart and go forward sowing in the architects of society the seed of leadership that will allow us to harvest a world with better opportunities for true human development.”

Aslini Ernesto Brito Gomez

Regional Technical Advisor Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic and Former Director of Education for Región of La Vega

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and all the donors who participated in the online fundraising campaign TMA 20x20
that exceeded its target, 'muchísimas gracias', thank you very much!**

Your support has allowed us to plan into 2022 with confidence