

HAITI: WHAT CAN WE DO?

On April 21 I went to Haiti for a week with Karen Dross, a math teacher trainer. The teachers at St. Joseph School in Dubré had requested teacher training in math. The first day, Karen observed a math lesson in each class. The second day, after students were dismissed, Karen presented a methods workshop. We brought many materials and manipulatives to leave.

All the activities were designed for a student-centered classroom and to engage all learners. The teachers were very receptive. I was the translator for Karen. The following Monday, Karen and I and the teachers tried out the new methods in the classroom with the students. All students were engaged and seemed to be enjoying the activities.



Prior to our visit, I received the math standards for Haiti from Father Gabriel Julmice, Director of the Cape Haitian Bureau of Education. Karen was able to align the methods and instructional objectives with the Haitian standards (*le programme détaillé*).

During my previous visit to St. Joseph School, the teachers had requested an illustrated alphabet and science posters. My sister-in law, a talented artist, made an illustrated alphabet which I had copied and laminated. French students of Jessica Cuello and Robin Brown at Marcellus High School (NY) made colorful science posters by hand copying pictures from a French visual dictionary. As requested by the teachers, they made posters of the systems of the body, photosynthesis, etc. During my last visit, I noticed that the two preschool classes had no developmental materials. I was able to bring developmental toys that would help the children learn colors, shapes, and numbers. The teacher had also requested paints and paper. We brought donated watercolor sets and paper. All the materials were donated by individuals. I realized that if I asked for something specific, people were eager to donate.

Karen and I traveled and spent the week with Bob Hood from St. James twinning parish in Cazenovia, and with Dr. Dave Eldridge, a dentist who was volunteering his time in the dental clinic across from the school. I did some translating for him. It was difficult to see so

many people lined up for hours in pain waiting to see him. The dental clinic was last open seven months ago. Most of the people had to have extractions because the disease was so far advanced. Young teenagers were losing teeth due to a lack of access to dental care. One first grader had such an infection that he had to have an antibiotic before it could be treated.

To get the antibiotic, Bob Hood had to rent a motorbike and drive 30 minutes to the health clinic and, of course, pay for the antibiotic. The little boy's teacher went in person to explain to

the mother how to give the medication. The dental clinic was operating on a generator, and Dr. Eldridge had no running water. The surgical instruments were sterilized by pouring alcohol on them and igniting them. There were so many dental emergencies lined up that the dentist was not able to provide the preventative care he had hoped for the school children.

Everyone can't go to Haiti but everyone can help make a difference! I was overwhelmed this time when I looked out the window as we were landing in Port au Prince and saw the thousands of tents where people were living. We visited two tent cities, and the heat and odor of sewage were almost unbearable. Even before the earthquake, I felt that quality education was the key to long term change in Haiti. As French teachers, we can do something to improve the educational system. Marcellus High School students have done it by making the science posters, which will help students visualize the systems of the body that they need to know in order to pass the 6th grade state exam. If they don't pass, they are not allowed to go to high school. The alphabet cards that my sister-in law made will be hanging in the classroom and will help students in first grade learn to read and write.

What can you and your students do for Haiti? I asked the principal, Serge Louis-Jean, that question, and he has given me a list of needs that the school has. Even if you can only help with a

small part of the needs of this one school, that will be significant. If you are interested in helping this year or next year please e-mail me. These are the needs of the school according to the principal and teachers:

1. Seven metal French globes to be purchased in Cape Haitian for \$30 each (this supports the Haitian economy).
2. Seven corner wooden shelves for globes at \$20 each made by the local carpenter in Thibeau.
3. Uniforms (12) for the school soccer team (purchased in Haiti, if possible).
4. First aid kit for the school
5. Shelves for the principal's office/ teacher workroom (to be made by local carpenter in Thibeau).
6. Desks for teachers and principal (to be made in Thibeau by local carpenter).
7. Gym uniforms (beige t-shirts with school name & brown shorts) for 280 students. The principal would like to have two hours of physical education every Friday, and students can't wear their school uniforms.
8. Money to make a playground. St. Joseph School has been cited by the state as having an unsafe play area because there are jagged rocks and large pieces of concrete in the area where the children have recess. The principal would like to level the area, plant grass, and put a concrete platform under the flag area to reduce the dust in the classrooms. He would also like to have space for volleyball, basketball, and soccer, and swing & slide for the youngest children.
9. The principal was also asking for financial help in celebrating teacher appreciation day. He wanted to have a dinner for the teachers and give each a small gift of appreciation.
10. The principal is looking for yearly funding (\$600) so that he can hire one combination art/music/sewing teacher.

Please consider meeting one or part of one of these identified needs. St. Joseph School is just one of 90 schools in the rural north, but it can become a model school with our help. Change in Haiti will only come through education. Even before the earthquake, there were 500,000 children in Haiti not enrolled in school. Is it any wonder that less than half of the adult population in Haiti is literate?

Georgette Schmidt✚
[gschmidt@twcny.rr.com]