



El Maestro en Casa, Inc.
ADULT OUTREACH EDUCATION
Ciudad Cívica, Intibucá, Honduras
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<http://lencaeducation.org>
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Dear Friends and Generous Supporters,

I hope you all had a wonderful year and are looking forward to more of the same in 2014.

We had another successful year, although we've now learned to measure it by different yardsticks. For the last couple of years Honduras has had a Secretary of Education who has actually worked very hard to clean up and improve the education system. He was met by myriad protests from the teachers' unions, and has tried to do too much too fast—because he knows he'll be replaced when the new president takes over this month—but hopefully he has paved the way for some long-lasting reforms. Unfortunately we won't feel the positive benefits of his work for some time, as students entering our 7th grade are still the products of the old system. But at least we now have hope that public education will gradually improve in the future, and that students will eventually enter our program at or near grade level. Ahhh, how sweet that would be!

Meanwhile, we're trying our best to adapt to the new reforms. The great majority of them will begin in February, with the new school year, but one of them began in the middle of the last school year. Suddenly all graduating high school seniors were required to successfully teach basic literacy to a group of illiterate adults, in order to graduate in November. After decades of failed government literacy programs, logic tells us that six months of weekly classes run by inexperienced teenagers has no better chance for success, and of course it failed. But the amount of data and detailed reports the government required from the schools completely

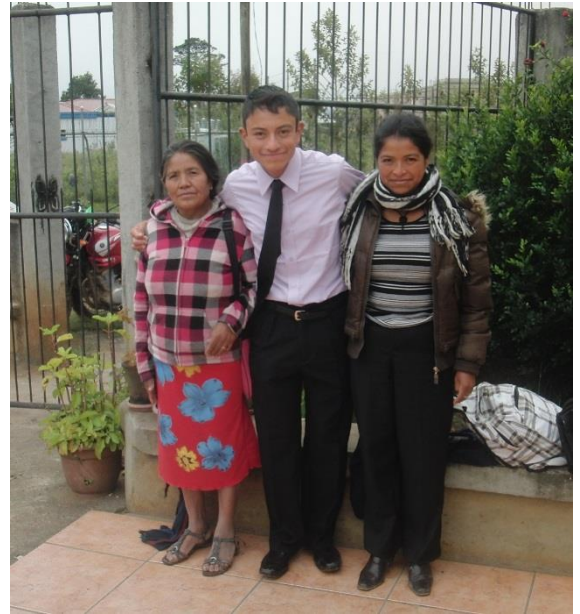


Graduating class of 2013

overwhelmed the department of education, so all graduations were postponed until they could sort through it all. We had always scheduled graduation for the Saturday before Thanksgiving, to allow me to spend my favorite holiday with my family, but since the postponement meant graduation would be later than that, I decided to just come home early! So, for the first time in 19 years, I missed graduation, but I was home for Halloween! I of course felt a bit guilty at first, but my teachers are so well organized, there really wasn't much work for me to do—so why not spend more time at home with my grandkids? As you can see, the graduation took place without me, but nevertheless, 11 more sons and daughters from rural mountain villages have overcome the obstacles of poverty and prejudice to insist that their voices be heard in their communities and, eventually, in their country. Another small step.

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Some other reforms which will take place in February will require even more work to adapt to them. Although we've been required for several years to divide the school year into 2 semesters, it didn't work well for our students and the special conditions of a distance education program, so we just ignored it. Since we were only required to turn in grades at the end of the year, no one seemed to care how we arrived at those grades. We taught math all year long, Spanish for 4 months, and divided the other 7 subjects into 9-week modules. Art, Music and Practical Activities were not given class time—the students just handed in a project and took an exam—so the students only studied 2 core subjects at a time. This year, however, we're required to turn in grades for specific subjects at the end of each semester. The 1st semester we must teach Science, Social Studies, Civics, Art and Music, and the 2nd semester Spanish, English, Math and Practical Activities. The problem with this is that math remains a huge obstacle for all Honduran students, and we want to keep teaching it all year. Also, many students who enter our program in the 7th grade can't read, or don't understand what they read, which of course means they won't understand a text book in other subjects. It's also very difficult to teach English without first establishing a foundation in Spanish (think about how much you needed to understand English grammar in order to learn a foreign language!) So, we've decided to continue year-long math, only reporting the grades at the end of the 2nd semester. We'll combine Social Studies and Civics, and teach them, along with Science, with an emphasis on reading comprehension and sentence formation. Our administrator, Bertha, is busy designing additional materials for us since the books provided by the program are designed with bulleted sentences and only a very few, very brief paragraphs, and don't lend themselves to the skills we want to emphasize. (Bertha will soon receive her university diploma in Spanish, after many arduous and often frustrating years in the Teachers' University distance program.) Art, Music and Practical Activities will continue to be independent study, so students will now have 3 core subjects, instead of 2, each semester. We will still have the students for just 5 hours a week (due to transportation limitations), and Math will continue to be 2 ½ hours each week, so the core subjects will now be an hour each, but for 20 weeks. It will be a bit complicated at first, but I know we'll eventually adjust and we'll still be able to maintain our academic standards.



Franklin was our best, and youngest, graduate.

We will continue with the “willfulness” program that our wonderful Canadian volunteer, Wendy Elliott designed for us last year, but this year we'll start it the first day of class, in all grades, and implement more of the exercises Wendy provided us. We had already lost students by the time we introduced it last year, so I'm sure this year we'll see better results in our drop-out rates. Convincing students that they are capable of learning if they just hang in long enough is not an easy task, but this program provides us with some very practical tools, many of which have been put into action in the public schools right here in Vermont. Wendy has also finished the first half of the English materials for the 7th grade—and they are beautiful! Since we are a distance program, and only see the students for a few hours each week, it emphasizes grammar-based translation, with a phonetic pronunciation key, and will form a strong foundation for the students if they go into any advanced English studies. It also provides a review of basic Spanish grammar, a much needed reinforcement.

We now have one greenhouse completed and planted! Although we still don't have the funds to complete the second greenhouse, we decided to at least start it with the materials that are left from the USAID donation we received last year. We'll be able to finish it when we harvest the tomatoes from the first greenhouse, if we don't find the funds in the meantime. It's a terrific project, and once the two are up and running, they will be an enormous financial help to us.



Arturo with our first tomato crop.

I'll be returning to Honduras January 21, and as much as I'll miss my family, I look forward to the challenges the program always provides. I'm also awed by and extremely grateful to the continuing support that we've had from many of you through the years, from personal friends, to my local Congregational church, to Cup for Education, who is sponsoring one of our teachers for the 4th straight year! An intern from Colorado will be joining us in February, and a few short-term volunteers have expressed interest in working with us. Then in July the team from Teacher2Teacher will be coming down to share their experiences and expertise with our teachers. We always look forward to volunteers because they bring us new ideas and new perspectives, and who knows, maybe one day one of them will want to take over!! Meanwhile, there's still much that needs to be done. We need to pay for the printing of our new English materials, our library needs expanding as more students discover the joy of reading, and we need to complete our second greenhouse so that we can be more self-sustaining in the future. And of course our graduates need sponsors to be able to attend university. Any ideas on fund raising, or if you feel like just coming down to lend a hand, you can always reach me at lencaeducation@gmail.com .

All of us at El Maestro en Casa are eternally grateful for your continued interest and support. We wish you the very best in the New Year.

Susan