Welcome to this first edition of what we are calling COST — Who We Are.

COST prides itself on being a small, close-knit group of colleagues who come together to help prepare the next generation of globally-aware and interculturally competent teachers. Being small, however, does not guarantee that we all know one another — some of us meet fairly regularly at Annual Meetings while others support our work competently but quietly in their respective schools and communities.

This new newsletter, COST — Who We Are, is an effort to build greater familiarity and camaraderie among the COST membership. This newsletter, which we hope to distribute over the coming months, is designed to feature biographic profiles with photos of Receiving and Sending Site members; introduce new members; and share alumni accomplishments.

In this inaugural issue we feature brief biographies of the current COST Director, and begin to introduce some of our long-standing COST Receiving Site Coordinators — in this issue profiles of some of our Mexican partners who so graciously have offered to host the 2014 Annual Meeting in Mexico.

Thanks for all you do on behalf of COST!

-Ken Cushner
-Rose Onders
-Shu-Ching Chang
I have been a professor of international and intercultural teacher education at Kent State University since 1987. My presence there, however, goes back much further to when I was a freshman in the crowd of students who were fired upon on May 4th, 1970, hiding behind a car that had its windows shot out. That was my ‘wake-up-call’ so to speak -- when I realized the need to understand alternative viewpoints rather than resorting to violence when there was a difference of opinion and belief. This experience, I am sure, is what sent me on one of my first overseas ventures to begin to learn about other points of views, perspectives, ways of life and communication. I student taught at the American International School of Zurich where I interacted with and learned from people different from myself. I was also introduced to a school that I found to be challenging young people and encouraging them to actively engage with other young people from around the world.

I taught in schools in Switzerland, Australia and Ohio where I began traveling internationally with young people. The need to ‘legitimize’ what I found to be transformative in the lives of young people led me to pursue a doctoral degree at the University of Hawaii through the East West Center. I returned to Kent State University where, in addition to my teaching, have served as Associate Dean and Executive Director of International Affairs.

I am a Founding Fellow and Past President of the International Academy for Intercultural Research; have been a Fulbright Scholar to Sweden; and coordinated the Teachers-at-Sea program for Semester-at-Sea in the summers of 2010 and 2011. But I continue to gain the most pleasure from serving as Director of COST, initially from 1995 – 2000 and now again since 2011. My research interests continue to focus on the intercultural development of teachers and young people. My work in the intercultural field has enabled me to consult with a wide range of organizations, including the European Federation for Intercultural Learning, the U. S. Army Research Institute; the World Bank; and ETIC – the Euphrates-Tigris Initiative for Cooperation. My teacher education textbook, Human Diversity in Education: An Intercultural Approach, will soon be published in its 8th edition. Hyla and I have been married for 39 years, have two grown daughters, and four beautiful grandchildren. In my spare time, I enjoy travel, photography, cycling, and when possible, still play percussion with my (now very old) rock and roll friends!
My name is Jeanene Bluhm and I was born and raised on a small farm in Illinois very near Hannibal, MO (Mark Twain and Tom Sawyer turf). I never dreamed that a Lutheran farm girl with German ancestry and trained in education would end up in the arms of a Mexican citizen raised in one of the largest cities in the world, Latino, Catholic and a financial wizard. We are exact opposites but in November we celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary! I guess opposites attract and instead of competing we complete each other. We met at the University of Massachusetts and immediately moved to Mexico and were blessed with three wonderful children in less than three years! (Latinos are very affectionate!)

When it was time for our children to start their formal education we searched for the right school but came up empty handed.

That is when Ricardo suggested that we make our own school according to our own standards. We wanted a school with high academic standards, excellent English instruction but one that took into account the emotional needs of each student. We must have hit on the right formula because the school was at full capacity from day one and doubled its population each year for several years.

We now have five campuses with a total of 5,000 students in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Querétaro! This year our school celebrates its 35th anniversary. We have tried to create an environment that prepares our students to be happy, successful and positive leaders all their lives. Hopefully, many of the COST students will choose to student teach at one of our campuses. Mexico and the Mexican people are wonderful! Trust me, I know!

Student comment:

I love Mexico! This has turned out to be an amazing experience and I am loving every second of it. Thomas Jefferson has felt like home since the day I arrived. My first month I taught first grade and grew incredibly attached. One of the little girls made me a card saying, "Miss Cassandra you live far very far. Please not live far.” It is fair to say they touched my heart. I am currently in the school’s adult choir and finishing up my time with fifth grade. Today is my last day with them before I move on to Kinder for one month. A few of my students have made up a game-plan for me. They think I should go home, graduate and then come back to Thomas Jefferson and teach sixth grade so that they can have me all next year.

This is a life-changing experience and I am blessed to have this opportunity. I wouldn’t be able to name just one significant experience, because it is the various small experiences which make it meaningful. The way the children love me and want me to stay, the kindness and generosity shown by my coworkers and supervisors and the inexplicable feeling I get while teaching. All teachers make a difference in their students’ lives, but teaching ESL you make an even greater impact. When I left the United States I wasn’t sure that teaching was what I wanted to do anymore; but when I arrived here, I knew it’s where I was meant to be and what I was meant to do. This experience has led me to finding the purpose in my life, and for that I will be forever thankful.

Cassandra, 2011
Buenos Dias from Mexico! As Director General for Instituto Thomas Jefferson - Campus Guadalajara and Valle Real, it is my responsibility to serve as the educational leader for an incredible team of teachers and support personnel.

ITJ-GDL is bilingual Nursery-12th grade school accredited by the New England Association, founded twelve years ago, and is a sister school to the Thomas Jefferson campuses in Mexico City and Queretaro. As Director, I am particularly passionate about preparing our students to be happy, valuable and contributing members of a global society, and being a part of that process is where I feel the most fulfilled.

During the past year, we’ve been extremely busy in Guadalajara with the planning, construction, and inauguration of our new Valle Real campus which has as its focus the providing of educational options with opportunities beyond traditional settings.

ITJ-GDL, and now Valle Real are both enthusiastic supporters of COST and are thrilled to be hosting this year’s conference. My personal relationship with the organization extends back to the 80’s, when I was the coordinator for the program at another receiving site. My contact with COST has been professionally interesting, in addition to introducing me to great colleagues and good friends over the years. What a wonderful chance to play host to all!

My personal background includes over 30 years in education, with experience as a teacher at every level from university through preschool, principal, educational consultant for an international organization, and school general director. I am married to my lawyer husband, Luis, mother of two exceptional educators, and grandmother of David, 8; Gael, 6; and Mia, 3. Our family is made up of avid readers, and we all share a love of our mountain cabin and six horses. Besides those interests, my husband says I look happiest when I’m packing my suitcase!

My team and I hope to see you all soon.

Student Comment:

My student teaching placement was in a third grade classroom at a school in Guadalajara, Mexico. The teacher, the children, the staff, and the school far exceeded any expectations I had. The children, families, and staff were all so great to collaborate with. Establishing relationships with everyone I met at the school was the least bit difficult. I was also able to learn so much from my mentor teacher, who had gained years of experience teaching in schools all over the world. Aside from the teaching aspect of the experience, what I loved most were the opportunities I had to experience the culture. This occurred through living with a wonderful host family, making new friends, and traveling the country. Student teaching through the COST program opened a lot of doors for me. It really allowed me to consider teaching opportunities I had not previously known existed. My student teaching experience was an amazing opportunity that I will always remember.

Christina, Mexico
My name is Silvia Manzano. I was born in Mexico City. But as a child I had the amazing opportunity to live in various countries. My experience surely helped me to broaden my understanding of other cultures.

My father was a very hardworking person; through his daily example he taught me the importance of responsibility and a passion for acquiring knowledge, which I continue to value to this day. I still love to travel, I take after my parents! I enjoy reading with an aromatic cup of coffee in the morning and green tea in the afternoon. Listening to music and visiting museums are two things I also enjoy doing in my spare time.

I have a true passion for education. I realize that teaching is a privilege, as well as a tremendous responsibility! Jeanene always says, “We touch our children’s souls.” This is so true! I have been at ITJ for 27 years! Throughout these years I have had the privilege of sharing and learning Jeanene’s wisdom and experience.

As the Elementary School Principal I try my best to make sure that each student has a motivating and joyful learning experience at ITJ. I absolutely believe that the end results will be excellent when working hand in hand; Teachers, Students and Parents. Furthermore, we transmit to our children the importance of love, honesty, responsibility, and respect for every living being.

I have been part of COST for over six years. Not only is it a group of highly respected educational authorities working together providing opportunities for student teachers, it is also a group of mutual friends, sharing good moments. Each coming year I am anxious to see everyone again, “old and new friends”. Miss Jeanene has been a COST member for ages!!

Student Comment:

This has been single-handedly the most frustrating, work-intensive, extensive, cultural, and overall best learning experience of my life! I cannot put into words the experiences and vast opportunities a program such as COST opens up for you. COST gives you something you will never get staying at home; a real opportunity to learn another culture as well as practice your teaching in a completely new learning environment. I would have never have met teachers and students from places such as Australia, France, Germany, China, Scotland, Britain, Brazil, and Spain without taking the leap. I would have never made teacher friends who have worked internationally in places such as Japan, Spain, Canada, and Saudi Arabia, and many more who will continue receiving opportunities to go places such as Taiwan, Germany, South Africa, and China. A placement through COST means opportunity. Not simply opportunity for you, but also opportunity for your own future students. Whether I choose to take an opportunity to work in places such as Taiwan (Job openings have already been forwarded my way) or not, I will inevitably take back a better worldly knowledge to my classroom so that I can ensure my own students are not simply knowledgeable of their own home, but of much of the world. Find your inner explorer and get out there!

Zack, Mexico
Graciela Cortés-Camarillo started her teaching career as a Spanish high school teacher. Then she began her international and intercultural experience by teaching Spanish to American college students who visited Yucatan as a part of study abroad program. She has been a teacher educator since 1993.

She earned her Ph.D. in Education from the Autonomous University of Yucatan, in Mexico. Her dissertation was focused on the field practicum and student teaching experience of future public school teachers in Mexico. Currently, she is the chair of a continuing education program for school principals at the public education system.

COST has been part of her Dr. Cortés-Camarillo’s life since 1997, when she began placing American student teachers from many universities. Some of them have been fluent in Spanish; some others not. All of them have dealt with cultural and international issues and doing so, have faced the challenges while learning how to become an international teacher.

Even more, COST participants have learned how to develop intercultural competencies in teaching, transforming not only their teaching approaches but also their life styles.

Many good stories can be told about each one and every one of them. From teaching math in Spanish in a public school, teaching Spanish to Spanish speaking students, teaching art in English to first graders who were not totally fluent in English or teaching History in English to a group of teenagers who was not really interested in History. What about teaching in a special education school that had diverse educational needs and handicaps in the same classroom? Oh! I can only remember smart, brave and well-educated student teachers.

Graciela likes traveling! And because of this, she understands that student teachers want not only to explore and experience education abroad but also to expand their understanding about children and teaching; doing so, contributing to a better world.

**Hope to see you in Mexico**

*Annual Meeting in Guadalajara, March 18—22, 2014*

*Pre-Meeting in Merida, March 16—18, 2014*