“Educators are facing a huge challenge” states Sister Lisandra Pedraza Burgos, IHM, an auxiliary professor at Universidad de Puerto Rico in San Juan.

“True education is about more than developing cognitive ability. It's about creativity and humanity and respect for all creation. People are not machines taking in information; they can be happy and learn. It is a challenge to bring this about.”

With the exception of two years in pastoral ministry, education – as both a student and as a teacher – has been the focus of Sister Lisandra’s ministerial life. Since 2008, she has coordinated the Early Childhood Education program at the University of Puerto Rico. She works with graduate students, most of whom are already teachers and want to continue growing as professionals.

“I look forward to being with my students,” she says. “It’s rewarding to share a vision of sustainability and justice. And it’s rewarding to see these professionals become advocates for children and families and educational leaders. They recognize how critical those early years are in the life of a child.”

Through her ministry, Sister Lisandra lives out her Catholic faith and IHM commitment.

“There’s no dichotomy between my life and my ministry,” she says simply. “I’m inspired by the IHM charism – an extension of the liberating mission of Jesus. In whatever I do, I try to live a life that witnesses the IHM mission and values.”

There is a research component to Sister Lisandra’s ministry as well. Her work has focused in children's spirituality, the transformation of a teacher during the reconstruction of the child's portfolio, and, currently, the impact of a short-term international experience to the Republic of Ghana for preschool teachers, special education teachers and a counselor.

“I taught at a teacher training college in Ghana in 1994,” she notes. “When I left, I knew I wanted to go back with students one day, and I had this privilege in February 2012.

“After the trip, my students told me they felt they had been ‘transformed as new beings.’ They noticed many common elements between our two cultures. It was also amazing to them to see how much the children in Ghana wanted to live and to learn.”

In addition to the unusual “classroom” of the Ghana experience, Sister Lisandra uses everything around her in her teaching.
“Life experiences, professional journal articles, computers, iPads, television, newspapers, videoclips, – they help students become their own resources,” she observes. “I create a space where we can grow together as a community. Students can share their opinions. They may disagree with one another – or with me – but we are respectful.

“A university should have room for this kind of diversity of opinions and ideas,” Sister Lisandra continues. “It’s enriching and allows exposure to new ideas every day. In this atmosphere, I watch my students become the teachers they want to be – teachers with humanity and high standards, people who reach out to others. Seeing their students smiling and happy – that’s my reward.”