Queens College Division of Education

SUMMER 2013

EDUCATION BEYOND BORDERS
QC professors teach and learn in India, Malawi, and the Dominican Republic
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Letter from the Dean

As you will read in this issue of .edu, this last year has been filled with some extreme challenges and wonderful opportunities. As dean, I could not be more proud of our world-class faculty and department chairs who thoughtfully and strategically worked with each other and our school and community partners to create a shared vision for a future in which Queens College:

- Continues to be the largest producer of highly effective teachers, counselors, school psychologists, and educational leaders in the City University;
- Expands its impact on the learning and well-being of students in New York City and the metropolitan area; and
- Advances scholarship on research validated instructional practices and support for promoting Equity, Excellence, and Ethics in urban education.

One of the major challenges/opportunities of the last year has to do with assessment and accreditation. The Division of Education has oversight of the Professional Education Unit, which in addition to divisional programs includes education departments and programs in the college’s three other divisions: Arts and Humanities, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. This past fall the Education Unit successfully met all of the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education’s (NCATE) standards for accreditation at both the initial and advanced certification levels. During this same period it also agreed to test-pilot the recently proposed national standards for the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which was formed when NCATE recently merged with its competitor TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council). I am happy to report that Queens College made history on April 25, 2013, when it was awarded the first-ever CAEP accreditation.

Another challenge/opportunity relates to the division’s work to increase the status and perceived values of teachers and other school professionals, teacher education programs, and public education. As you are reading, .edu it will come as no surprise that research suggests the importance of the work that our faculty engage in. In fact, teachers account for one-third of a school’s potential impact on student learning, and school leadership accounts for another quarter of the impact (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Walstrom, 2004).

This year CUNY and Queens College have partnered with the New York City Department of Education and the State Education Department to make sure we are producing the highest quality teachers, counselors, school psychologists, and education leaders who will meet the learning and support needs of all learners, families, and communities. I believe that our shared commitment to the values of Equity, Excellence, and Ethics continues to have profound meaning for all members of the faculty and staff and for our candidates and students.

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College Names Craig Michaels Dean of Education

After a nationwide search, Craig A. Michaels (Educational & Community Programs) has been chosen to fill the position of dean of education at Queens College. He had been acting dean for the past year, following the departure of Fran Paternomo, who left to become the director of the College of Education and Human Services at Montclair State University in New Jersey. Michaels came to Queens in 2000 as an associate professor of special education and was promoted to full professor in 2006. His research has focused primarily on the relationship between behavior (patterns of actions) and ideology (the entrenched belief systems that provide the value premises from which decisions about practical educational matters are made). He is the author or co-author of 10 books and monographs, and he has published more than 25 research studies in peer-reviewed journals, and more than 27 book chapters. In the last few years, he has presented more than 30 papers at national and international conferences. He has also been the principal investigator and author of multiple government- and foundation-funded research projects.

Michaels received his BFA in painting and photography from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1976, and then earned an MA in special education (1980) and a PhD in educational psychology (1993), both from New York University. From 1985 to 2000 he was at the National Center for Disability Services in Albion, New York, serving as its director of research from 1994 to 2000.

Velasco to Head Major Bilingual Project

The New York State Department of Education awarded two members of the Elementary and Early Childhood Education Department $497,000 in federal Race to the Top funding to develop a set of standards for language learning and literacy. This is part of an effort to better meet the needs of the state’s growing population of students who do not speak English as their first language. The project will help advance the New York State Bilingual Common Core Initiative. “It’s taking all the Common Core standards for English language arts and developing different scaffolds for emerging bilinguals,” says Velasco. “This will help children who are learning two languages meet the level of sophistication the Common Core standards are demanding. The proposals will allow students who were formerly expected to use English to achieve these standards to use their native language in the early stages.”

Implementation of these new standards would mark a departure from the traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual models for dealing with grade school students who do not speak English. State education policy requires that any school district with students who do not speak English as an academic language (other than English) must provide bilingual education classes in which teaching is provided in the student’s native language. In schools where ESL prevails, students spend part of the day outside their regular classes, working with teachers trained in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). “I know this is true for New York City teachers, but maybe not yet for New York State, that the ESL teachers must also teach content,” Velasco says. “So the pullout program and just focusing on content is something that is not going to be encouraged. It’s more like the ESL teacher working hand-in-hand with the classroom teacher, with one taking more command of the content area and one taking more the part that has to do with language.”

Velasco hopes to have the new bilingual standards completed by late summer and implemented by fall 2014.

Lab School Experiments with Teamwork

Great educators never stop learning. That’s especially true at PS/IS 499, the Queens College School for Math, Science, and Technology, where accomplished teachers—many of them QC alumni—are working with college faculty from the Division of Education to pursue areas of common interest.

“PS/IS 499 was partly founded by QC faculty,” says Theodore Keeler (EECE), who attends monthly meetings there as the college’s liaison. “It’s supposed to be a strong lab school with demonstration lessons and collaborative pedagogy.” So he was delighted when Principal Velasce Jacob proposed a joint project that would allow her teachers to draw on the expertise of Education faculty. After asking colleagues if they were interested, Keeler was able to offer Jacob two teams: He and Sara Michael-Luna (ECE) would work with schoolteachers on discourse strategies from pre-K through second grade, while Theresia Gurr (SETY) and Sun A Kim (ECP) would coach math teachers on problem solving in fifth- and sixth-grade classes.

Keeler and his colleagues have nothing but respect for PS/IS 499, which they consider an excellent school. The issue is that New York requires students to master complicated material at ever younger ages. “What I see happening in kindergartens is what happened in second grade ten years ago,” explains Michael-Luna. “Teachers are struggling to meet state standards and support children’s appropriate development.”

Both teams are observing classrooms, analyzing data, and meeting and emailing their classroom teachers to discuss their recommendations before repeating the cycle. “I really enjoy observing the lessons,” says Gurr. “It’s about honing their skills.” And for QC faculty members, this project is also about identifying specific tools that help teachers and students. “We want to see impact,” notes Kim.

Shelter from the Storm

Sometimes a college is more than a college. In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, this campus became a temporary home to nearly 600 adults and children, as well as their pets—birds, cats, dogs, a ferret, and more. Students from the Division of Education did their part to raise funds and entertain the children housed in the college’s gym and dining hall. Members of Ribii Asher’s course on Methods in Secondary Education for Art (above, with a Mother Nature puppet previously created by Asher) brought puppet-making materials and taught children how to make finger puppets, with which they performed plays in a handmade puppet theatre.
PASSAGES TO INDIA

TWO MEMBERS OF THE SEYS FACULTY STEER COURSES OVERSEAS

By Leslie Jay

When QC asked faculty members to propose projects related to the Year of India—a multidisciplinary program looking into every aspect of the country—Secondary Education professors Rikki Asher (Art Education) and Alpana Bhattacharya (Educational Psychology) were happy to oblige. Both are deeply attached to India.

A muralist who first traveled to New Delhi in 1985 on a grant from the Asia Society, Asher treasures “the sites, sounds, aromas, colors, integration of art, music, patterns, colors, and spirituality that are part of the Indian landscape.” At the invitation of a friend she made on that trip, she returned a decade later, to hold her wedding there. For her sabbatical in spring 2007 and 2008, she researched the impact of art on economically challenged girls at the Pardada Pardadi Girls Vocational School in Anupshahar, a rural village in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Asher drew on her many connections to create Portraits of India, a three-week, three-credit class combining art studio and art education components. “It was the first time that the Dean of Arts and Humanities and the Art Department granted an art education professor permission to teach a studio course,” she says. The curriculum comprised units in drawing from observation, collage, and printing with stencils; visits to museums, schools, landmarks, and an artist’s studio; and a service learning live-in experience at the Pardada Pardadi school. Held in January 2013, during QC’s intersession and New Delhi’s temperate winter, this unusual academic offering attracted students in art education and five undergrads, all but two from QC.

“The goal was to provide participants with an opportunity to step outside of the familiar and learn about India by really living it themselves for at least a short time,” explains Asher. “It was also a chance to learn who they are, or more important, who they can be, through developing their cultural, technical, and aesthetic awareness of art in a global context.” The course achieved all this, and more. “The work that came out of it was outstanding,” says Asher. So was the mindset of the participants. On a blog he kept during the course, QC grad student Richard Diaz admitted to being discouraged in his search for a job as an art teacher in New York. But he developed a new perspective after completing a tree-stenciling project at Pardada Pardadi, a school that helps girls overcome poverty. “Success lies within all of us,” he concludes. “You can be the master of your own destiny. All you need is the courage to see it.”

While Portraits of India was in session, Bhattacharya was using her background to explore possibilities for other programs. A native of Ahmedabad, in the state of Gujarat, she taught high school economics there for four years before earning a master’s in administration and supervision from Baruch College in 1990. “I wanted to get a master’s in school administration and go back to open my own school,” she says.

One class prompted her to change direction. “At Baruch, I was required to take a three-credit course on students with disabilities,” Bhattacharya recalls. Already interested in this
Alpana Bhattacharya (at right, in her QC office) hopes to use her experience to improve educational options in India for people with learning disabilities. In Mumbai (above, far left), she met parents of students at a school run by the Aaksha Foundation, which works with children from low-income families.

area—in India, she had served as a reader at a school for the blind—she ended up earning a master’s in special education from Hunter College in 1992, with a focus on learning disabilities. After completing a doctorate in educational psychology from the CUNY Graduate Center, she joined the SEYS faculty at QC, with a specialization in literacy.

Now a naturalized U.S. citizen, Bhattacharya remains eager to influence education in her homeland. During QC’s faculty-staff study tour of India, which took place from January 5 to 17, 2013, she explored collaborative opportunities in her field with members of the teacher education faculty at Banasthali, Delhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru Universities.

“In India, learning disabilities are stigmatized and compared to mental or emotional disorders,” Bhattacharya observes. “I want to identify universities, clinics, and centers that work with learning-disabled populations.” Then she hopes to involve QC students in that work, whether through international exchanges and experiential learning or virtual classrooms set up over Skype. “I want to make something happen, even if it’s done on a small scale,” she says.

Part of QC’s commitment to global education, the “Year of” initiative features on-campus events and study abroad options. A different nation is chosen each year. The benefits extend to faculty and staff, who may apply for slots in a tour that fosters collaboration with overseas institutions. The Year of India is the third program in the series, which began in 2010–11 with China, and subsequently covered Turkey. The Year of Brazil is planned for 2013–14.

Visiting Professor

Nathalis Wamba works with faculty and students at Mzuzu University in Malawi

By Donna Shesmer

“I am passionate when I discover new things, when my students surprise me, when I surprise them, or when we surprise each other,” observes Nathalis Guy Wamba (Educational & Community Programs), who joined the Education faculty as an associate professor in 2005. Last September, Wamba encountered a major surprise in sub-Saharan Africa. When he arrived in northern Malawi to spend 2012–13 as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar at Mzuzu University, it was shut down. “The campus workers were on strike,” he reports. “The students were not there. No one could tell me when the academic year would resume.” It wasn’t until mid-March that Mzuzu’s 1,600 students could return.

Founded in 1997 as Malawi’s second national university, Mzuzu is severely underfunded, its facilities “dilapidated,” its “resources almost nonexistent,” Wamba notes. “The challenges are multiple: financial, technological, cultural tribalism, economic (devaluation of the currency), to name a few.”

Terrence Quinn, coordinator of QC’s Educational Leadership Program, remains confident that Wamba, who was born in the Republic of Congo and knows seven languages, can rise to any daunting challenge: “He cares deeply about people, all kinds of people. Students love him.”

Throughout his career, Wamba has willingly given his charges every chance to take the reins of learning and suggest solutions. He has done so for Harlem schoolchildren, laborers, other CUNY students, homeless teens, and the metro area’s future educational leaders studying at QC. Now, he offers those reins to students in one of the world’s most impoverished countries.

His Fulbright mission at Mzuzu includes strengthening the

‘He cares deeply about people, all kinds of people. Students love him.’

TERRENCE QUINN OF QC’S EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

master’s degree program in teacher education and fostering collaborations, including with QC. During the six months Mzuzu was closed, he dove into scholarly, educational, and civic activities, including in the Luwinga ward, where he and his wife, Paula Finn, are living with their two children.

Raising Malawi, Madonna’s charity, draws attention to this AIDS-stricken country’s more than 1.4 million orphans and vulnerable children. Like the rock star, Wamba has been raising Malawi. He and Paula volunteer with the Kwitu Women’s Group, a community-based organization aiding orphans, vulnerable children, and women. Through his research project, he involves the ward’s stakeholders in identifying what he calls the “critical issues that prevent quality education” for children. Youth and Society, an NGO, invited him to advise its weekly meetings in preparation for Malawi’s 2014 elections.

“With Mzuzu back in session, Wamba is impressed by “the resiliency of its students and the academicians who dedicate themselves to whatever it takes to work with the students.” Among his dedicated efforts, he is funding the launch of Southern Africa Education Review. He solicited articles and selected the scholarly journal’s “excellent editorial board from various universities” in the region. He serves on a committee seeking a major grant to give teaching staff additional training, and is assisting Ireland’s University College Cork in establishing a research center at Mzuzu.

Fewer than one percent of Malawi’s university-age students go to college. Wamba realizes how dire the situation is. By 2015, according to Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, this region will need one million teachers to meet the U.N.’s Millennium Development goal of universal primary education. Yet with the lack of resources in schools, his students are concerned about finding jobs.

Heeding his colleague’s request, Quinn put out an SOS for books for Mzuzu that brought in 170 from QC students, faculty, and staff—an “invaluable contribution,” Wamba emphasizes. Seeing how Mzuzu faculty were amazed at his Nook, he and his wife began to solicit donations of e-book readers with downloadable books to help teachers in training.

On Wamba’s Nook you might find his own titles: Poverty and Literacy, Exit Narratives (co-author), and Learning Differences (co-editor). He is writing one book on his Fulbright experience and another on “the insanity of educational reform in the U.S.” Beyond books and Nooks, Wamba believes “There is a particular type of learning that takes place when you interact with human beings. It is a form that books cannot replace.”
Deserted Islanders

A trip to the Dominican Republic illustrates the scholastic discrimination faced by residents of Haitian descent—and its global implications

By Burton Bollag

How are the educational challenges of inner-city kids connected to extreme poverty in the Caribbean? In myriad ways, according to Soribel Genao (Educational & Community Programs), though the links may not be obvious.

To explore this relationship, Genao co-led an eight-day trip of 33 American educators—taking in two of her graduate students—into the Dominican Republic last summer. Their itinerary: three bateyes, the mostly unofficial settlements that house poor sugarcane cutters of Haitian origin. With its unabashed emphasis on social justice, the trip was designed to “infuse our academic programs with a global perspective”—one of the aims of QC’s Strategic Plan developed under the leadership of President James Muyssens. (The tour was arranged in collaboration with Friends Beyond Borders, an organization created by American public schoolteachers.)

The group, mostly aspiring principals, visited schools serving some of the estimated one million Haitians living without any legal status in the Dominican Republic; the educational discrimination faced by this population is Genao’s current research topic. Although many of these individuals were born in the Dominican Republic, most do not have Dominican citizenship. Without it, and without financial resources, they are unable to have educational access or attainment after high school. In fact, most lack Haitian citizenship; rendering them stateless.

Evidence of their educational inequality was overwhelming. The Americans saw underfunded, overcrowded facilities with leaky roofs and chairs, but no desks. “You may read about something,” says Genao, whose mother is Dominican and father, Haitian-Dominican. “But you have a much better understanding when you’ve lived it, even for one day.” Participants “cried seeing the situation in the bateyes,” continues Genao.

“The trip was eye-opening for my students.”

Tour members spoke with local teachers and education reformers about the merits of education—economic and ecological sustainability, and human rights in efforts to improve the lives of impoverished people. The group also examined the connections between poverty in Latin America and trade with rich countries. One outcome of the trip was ongoing work to create new curricular elements for American classrooms, to give children a more global perspective. Through a cross-disciplinary approach, for example, a lesson might explore the complex ways that production of wooden furniture for sale in rich countries contributes to extreme poverty in the Caribbean?

At the same time, by understanding the origins of students whose families fled places like the bateyes, American teachers can reach those younger more effectively. Han Kashi, one of Genao’s graduate students on the trip, found the experience professionally valuable. “As an individual who was brought up in upper-middle-class Long Island, I was able to gain a more realistic perspective of where many of my students who are immigrants come from,” he wrote in an email to Genao.

Tinio’s large kit of behavioral and psychophysics tools developed during his Ph.D. thesis using one or two to analyze the factors contributing to an encounter with art, a field known as empirical aesthetics. To understand how people learn about and engage with paintings and photographs, he enlists surveys, interviews, eye-tracking, controlled exposure, randomized studies, and other methods. “I create measures that really get to their emotions, really get to their self-reflections,” he notes.

His many collaborations in the metro area and internationally include projects with the Whitney and Queens museums of art. His many collaborations in the metro area and internationally include projects with the Whitney and Queens museums of art.

Art Appreciation

Psychologist Pablo P.L. Tinio studies the pleasure of perception

By Donna Shoemaker

Does listening to music make kids more attentive? Does providing children in dance help them with their visual and spatial skills? In citing those benefits of arts education, Pablo P.L. Tinio (Elementary & Early Childhood Education) agrees how important they are. “But I don’t think art should be secondary,” insists the cognitive/educational psychologist. “Humans spend a great deal of time and money making or looking at art. It doesn’t make sense that it is itself of no value.” As the professor elegantly states, “Art should be the bride.”

Moving to New York at age 18, Tinio launched into college at Keen as well as fashion/portrait/documentary photography and multimedia art. “The academic and the artistic always went hand in hand,” as he puts it. Then, instead of art’s bridge, he became a keen observer at the wedding, “more interested in how people experienced art, how they looked at the aesthetic side of it, rather than creating it.” In 2006, after earning master’s degrees in educational psychology at Rutgers and behavioral science at Keen, he moved to Austria to be a research scientist at one of the world’s centers of aesthetics inquiry, the Department of Psychology at the University of Vienna, and earned his doctorate.

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Tinio’s love affairs with the arts have continued to intrigue him. Tinio also is curious about how the firsthand emotional experience compares with the secondhand (such as viewing a painting vs. a digital image), and whether pixel quality affects the pleasure of perception. “There is something to be said for the scale of things, to going to an Imax theatre and feeling the rumble in your stomach, the visceral experience of art,” he believes.

Tinio has written numerous peer-reviewed articles, contributed to The Neuroscience of Creativity, and just completed another book. Recently, he was named co-editor of the journal The Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts. In an interview in the American Psychological Association’s Monitor on Psychology (January 2012), he mentioned how his frequent talks with art historians, curators, and artists show their interest “in what scientists have to say about the experience of art.” He happily obliges. “Art is one of the most puzzling things in the world, in our lives,” Tinio reflects. “It’s such a dominant aspect in terms of it being everywhere, in everything we do—movies, posters, music while we’re driving. It’s a great challenge to be working with such a grand question.”

Pablo Tinio (foreground) takes undergraduates on a personalized tour of a show at the Q.C. Geddes-Tornbach Museum.
CREDITED WITH Success

Through immersion programs at QC, two local high schools prepare students for college

By Donna Shoemaker

M exican, Italian, Indian, Greek—just as Kunal Ramchandani can mix it up in the kitchen, the high school senior has blended a savory curry of college courses, thanks to his yearning to learn and his school’s partnership with Queens College. In his three and a half years at the Queens School of Inquiry (QSI), a grades 6-12 early college school one mile from campus, Ramchandani has earned 50 credits at QC. He has feasted on macroeconomics, Spanish, political science, pre-calculus, calculus, and the literature of the Anglophone diaspora.

“The courses have been very fun and challenging,” says Ramchandani. “Back in India, I used to struggle a lot, but this has helped me excel in math, and when I excelled, I gained confidence. Queens College has been a very good experience.” Applying his math skills to calculating the value of those free credits, at $230 each (the part-time undergraduate rate), he has saved $11,500. Even if not all of them transfer to the Culinary Institute of America, where Ramchandani will begin studies next fall to become a chef, he’s way ahead—financially, emotionally, and educationally.

As QSI’s liaison, Suzanne Solomon looks for opportunities to nourish students like Ramchandani. “I’m just constantly impressed with how sophisticated they are,” she says. Invited by a QC professor, Solomon and Meredith Inbal, QSI’s principal, took
Every one of our students has been able to benefit. . . .

It changes the trajectory of their lives.

MEREDITH INBAL, PRINCIPAL, QSI

On Board for Supporting Schools

Susan Bergtraum is a powerful advocate for public education

By Donna Shesmeker

Call it the Bergtraum Credo. It was drafted while its namesake was teaching third grade at Washington, D.C., and refined during decades of educational advocacy on Long Island. I really do believe ferociously in public education,” affirms Susan Bergtraum ’68, ’72. In 2005, she was elected to the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA), and is now second vice president and area director for Nassau County. NYSSBA speaks up for 5,000 school board members from 700 local boards—one-half of the state’s elected officials. “Boards of education are not paid. What are we doing this for if we’re not the advocates of kids?” she asks.

A year later, Bergtraum was elected to another entity close to her heart: the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) of Nassau County. It provides 100 pooled services for 56 school districts, including teacher training, adult education, cooperative buying, and tech services. “We serve the most disabled children whom schools cannot house, and we have a wonderful, wonderful Long Island High School for the Arts,” she beams. Aided by the BOCES’s range, she added, “I still, every day now and then, say to the superintendent, ‘We do that, too!’”

Bergtraum is past president of the Nassau-Suffolk School Board Association (NSSBA) and course at QC on environmental science. Her Bridge Year elective in spring was Spanish, her third language. “QC made me feel proud that I was actually taking college courses,” she reports. Bergtraum’s career has taken her from the class of 700 local boards—one-half of the state’s elected officials. “Boards of education are not paid. What are we doing this for if we’re not the advocates of kids?” she asks. Bergtraum is past president of the Nassau-Suffolk School Board Association (NSSBA) and course at QC on environmental science. Her Bridge Year elective in spring was Spanish, her third language. “QC made me feel proud that I was actually taking college courses,” she reports. Bergtraum’s career has taken her from the class of 700 local boards—one-half of the state’s elected officials. “Boards of education are not paid. What are we doing this for if we’re not the advocates of kids?” she asks.

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Diane Ravitch Addresses the Class of 2013

On May 30, Queens College awarded an honorary doctorate to Diane Ravitch, research professor of education at New York University and a highly regarded historian of education whose major works include *The Great School Wars* and the best-seller *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*.

From 1991 to 1993, as assistant secretary of education and counselor to Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander in the administration of President George H.W. Bush, Ravitch led the federal effort to promote the creation of voluntary state and national academic standards. She subsequently served seven years on the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the federal testing program.

Given this background, Ravitch made headlines with her opposition to the Common Core standards adopted by 46 states and the District of Columbia. She pointed out that because the standards were implemented without any field test, no one knows how they will affect students, teachers, or schools.

Speaking to an appreciative crowd at QC’s commencement ceremony, she faulted the growing tendency to collect, and misuse, information culled from people browsing the Internet. “We are not data points, we are not gadgets and we will not be programmed,” she told the class of 2013, to enthusiastic applause. After the college-wide ceremony, Ravitch also spoke to students at the Division of Education’s graduation ceremony.