Inside

| Partnering with Local Schools |
| Dismantling the Great Wall Around Autism |
| Multiplying the Next Generation of Math Teachers |
There would be fewer teachers with the power to open up the world to young minds. And fewer children who grow up and offer the world new ideas—because they had never been inspired by a great teacher. With only a third of the college’s operating support coming from the state, gifts like yours make an immediate difference in so many lives. Your tax-deductible gift helps to fund scholarships that make sure that exceptional young students have the chance to become exceptional teachers.

You can make a gift by going to www.qc.cuny.edu/SupportQC or by sending a check—with Division of Education on the memo line—to the Queens College Foundation, 65-30 Kissena Blvd., Flushing, NY 11367.
Welcome to the first issue of .edu, the annual magazine of Queens College’s Division of Education. In these pages you can catch up with some of your professors and the latest news in the division. I am sure you will be impressed with all the different things our faculty are involved in—from partnerships with local schools to breaking down barriers in providing support for the families of children with autism here and in China. As you read each story, you’ll learn more about our division’s commitment to equity, excellence, and ethics—that are at the core of our mission and our programs.

As the dean since fall 2009, like you, I have come to know my QC colleagues as among the finest in the land—truly engaged experts in their fields who enjoy teaching, conducting research, and serving our communities in ways that make a difference in the lives of children and their families. Coming to Queens was a bit of a homecoming to me as I spent my first five years in Woodside. I have a bachelor’s degree from the University of Miami, an MS in administration and supervision from Nova University in Florida, and a PhD in secondary education from the University of Arizona at Tucson. Before coming to QC I spent 13 years at Cleveland State University as a professor, department chair, and associate dean. My own research and teaching have focuses on partnering to prepare urban teachers—as reflected in two books I’ve edited, Designing Performance Assessment Systems for Urban Teacher Preparation and Partnering to Prepare Urban Teachers: A Call to Activism.

Coming to Queens was an easy decision for me: Queens is an excellent college and the borough has a variety of wonderfully rich communities that challenge us as educators to respond to varying perspectives, lived experiences, and needs by creating innovative, responsive programs that best serve our children.

I hope you enjoy the inaugural issue of .edu. In the future we want you to be a major part of our magazine. Please let us know: What have you been up to since leaving Queens? What are your concerns as a teacher or administrator? What kinds of articles would you like to see in upcoming issues? We would love to hear from you. Please write to us at qmag@qc.cuny.edu. And, don’t be shy, send along a photo, too.

All the best,

Fran Peterman
Spring a Hit on Fall Lecture Circuit

Expertise in the globalization of education—and its impact on minority languages and cultures—has made Joel Spring (Elementary and Early Childhood Education) a sought-after speaker wherever people gather to discuss educational policies.

In early October he flew to Asia on a lecture tour that included stops at universities in Hong Kong and China. His topic was “Globalization of Education: From Confucianism and Westernization to Human Capital Economics.”

“I’ve been proposing doing away with the human capital model of education, which emphasizes the contribution of education to economic growth and global competition,” reports Spring. He also attended an event celebrating the release of a Chinese edition of his book The American School 1642–2004, which was recently translated into Mandarin.

Returning to the United States mid-month, Spring spent less than two weeks in New York before heading to Denver to give the Butts Lecture at this year’s American Educational Studies Association conference. The next day he was in New Orleans for the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration, where he had the honor of delivering the Mistifer Lecture.

Spring was also the keynote speaker for the 30th Annual Bilingual/ESL Conference held in December by the Department of Languages and Cultures at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ. Although he isn’t fluent in any language other than English, Spring speaks some Spanish, Turkish, and Choctaw—the last one a legacy of his heritage as the descendant of Native American chiefs.

Experience Adds Up

Although teaching offers many rewards, most of them are intangible. So Milton Chen ’01, a math teacher at Benjamin N. Cardozo, was delighted to receive a plaque and a check for $3000 at a ceremony the New York Times held last summer to recognize him and five of his peers from high schools around the city. Saluted as “Teachers Who Make a Difference,” Chen and his fellow educators shared the spotlight with the people who had selected them: six graduating seniors who had just won four-year grants, internships, and more through the New York Times College Scholarship Program. All 12 honorees posed for a photo featured in an ad about the program, published in the Times on July 29. Chen stands literally and figuratively behind Sion Choi, who took his AP calculus class and is now attending New York University.

“I was surprised when Sion told me she had nominated me,” says Chen, who plans to spend his $3000 on household expenses, including a college fund for his daughters “It was very nice and rewarding to see myself in the paper.”

Alice Artzt ’68 (Secondary Education & Youth Services), who taught Chen at QC, was thrilled to see him recognized for his work. Says Artzt, “We take pride in knowing that he is a graduate of our mathematics teacher preparation program.”

Scholarship Honors 9/11 Hero

At the Division of Education’s awards ceremony last May, Sarah Oberlander ’10 received the Thomas A. Gardner Science Teacher Award for graduate study at the college. The award is named after QC science graduate Tom Gardner, a firefighter who died at the World Trade Center on 9/11. Gardner’s widow and children attended the ceremony. Professor Mark Miksic, who heads the Science Teacher Careers Program at QC, noted that “Ms. Oberlander, a graduating biology teacher, has in her classes and in her student teaching at Townsend Harris High School fully demonstrated those qualities we always valued in Tom: she is a fervent, dedicated teacher, an intense learner and questioner, and a lover of nature with all its beauty and its mysteries.” (For information on how you can support scholarships for education students, please see page 2.)

Above: For Joel Spring (front row 3rd from right, wife to his left), the lecture circuit stretches from the US to Chengdu, China—where in October he and his wife dined with students and faculty at Szechuan Normal University.

At right (l–r) Scholarship recipient Sarah Oberlander with Mark Miksic, Tom Gardner’s widow Elizabeth, and the Gardners’ children Christopher and Amy.
Testing the Academic Waters

 Queens College doesn’t pretend to be Hogwarts. But for teenagers who spend a week or two here through a college immersion program organized by QC and the Queens School of Inquiry (QSI), the experience is little short of magical. “Before coming to this class, I’d probably never look at myself the way I did,” wrote a grateful QSI seventh grader who participated in Success: You Can Make It Happen, a workshop led in June by Lila Swell (Elementary Education). “After this class, I do believe that to succeed you need to achieve, and to achieve you need to believe!”

Equipping students academically and psychologically for college is one of the primary goals of QSI, which was created jointly by the New York City Board of Education, CUNY, QC, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. QSI’s students—many of whom face barriers to secondary education, such as low family income or limited command of English—may earn up to 60 credits at QC free of charge while they work toward a high school diploma.

The innovative Flushing institution opened in 2005 to sixth graders and has added an upper grade each year; the legacy class will graduate in 2012. “This is not just a college prep school,” says QC-QSI liaison Frank Signorello, who is based in Klapper Hall. “It’s a school for urban students whose parents might not have gone to college. These kids may not have thought about higher education for themselves.” The immersion program, launched in 2007, allows participants to “try on the shoes of a college student,” Signorello notes.

This year’s program lasted one week for seventh graders and two weeks for eighth graders. The former attended classes in art, music, and gym, and one of five elective workshops. The eighth graders’ schedule included an English course that emphasized essay writing and literary analysis. All the sessions were led by QC faculty. (For more information about QSI, see page 7.)
By Donna Shoemaker

For more than three decades, Queens College and public schools have partnered to create “the best places for students to learn and be successful,” observes Francine Peterman, dean of QC’s Division of Education. Editor of Partnering to Prepare Urban Teachers: A Call to Activism, Peterman is committed to building on the division’s long, rich history of partnerships.

From inspiring young pupils to explore science to smoothing older students’ path to college, from actively engaging future teachers in local classrooms to offering professional development for longtime educators in shaping these partnerships, the division draws together the college’s resources, including extensive research on urban schools. The goal is to have “an even more positive impact on the children and families we serve,” says Peterman.

In this article we spotlight four outstanding QC partnership schools. In 1979 the Louis Armstrong Middle School (LAMS) pioneered the partnership, which was furthered five years later with the re-founding of Townsend Harris High School. The two newest partners—the Queens School of Inquiry (QSI) and the Queens College School of Math, Science, and Technology—were established by the college. All four high-performers earned an A grade on their 2008-09 Progress Report from New York City’s Department of Education. Visiting the principals of these schools, Peterman says, has enabled her to “see the really good work being done by faculty, administrators, teachers, students, families, and schools.”

Last spring, to reinforce the efforts of the School of Math, Science, and Technology to close the achievement gap in math and reading for children of color, the division hosted a partnership breakfast that drew several hundred area educators and parents.

Testifying to the longevity and vigor of the division’s partnerships are two volunteers at the Armstrong School, Sidney Trubowitz and Paul Longo. Both were veteran teachers and leaders in the city’s schools before joining QC. They played key roles in shaping the LAMS partnership, co-authored two books on it, and enjoy staying involved with this renowned middle school even after their retirement from QC.

“There needs to be as much intertwining as possible between what goes on in schools of education and what goes on in...
public schools,” sums up Trubowitz, whom Peterman is enlisting to enhance school collaborations. A QC professor emeritus of education and former associate dean, Trubowitz says, “I’ve always liked to make the distinction between school and education. School takes place between four walls, but education goes beyond that.”

Among his many roles at QC, Longo served as coordinator of student teaching and associate dean of education. Too often, he believes, colleges “act like a stork delivers students to them at 18 years of age.” However, he notes, QC fully appreciates its “ongoing responsibility” to apply its practical knowledge and “visionary approach” to enhance education at all levels, especially for underserved populations. Partnerships activate that responsibility.

“Enduring partnerships change and mutually renew,” says Peterman. “It is the strength of the ideas, the commitment of the people, and the energy and hard work and problem-solving they put into their efforts that help partnerships to endure and have an impact.”

An Early College Secondary School

The Queens School of Inquiry (P.S. 252)

Principal Elizabeth Ophals ’83 shares a former junior high classroom with, among others, a secretary, three school aides, and the parent coordinator.* At the Queens School of Inquiry, both she and her office space multitask. Ophals, who eagerly interacts with teachers and students, fields a phone call while encouraging a pupil to write—at length—about each troubling problem in class.

When Ophals served as principal of the Armstrong Middle School, she greatly valued its partnerships with QC. In 2005, as founding principal of QSI, she recalls, “one of my first goals was to collaborate” again with her alma mater. She relished having the chance “to put into effect all of the dreams I’ve ever had about what a great school could be.”

To establish QSI, Queens College joined forces with CUNY’s Early College Initiative and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Adding a grade a year, the school now has more than 300 students enrolled in grades 6 through 10. The aim is for students to earn up to 60 college credits tuition-free through QC. Ninth graders, for example, take college-level Spanish I, stretched over two semesters.

In numerous ways, this partnership expands across the mile to campus. Each semester QC English Professor Amy Tucker invites seventh graders into her classroom to discuss demanding short stories. Ophals is especially delighted to link up with QC’s Drama, Theatre & Dance Department: “I had no idea how perfect acting would be for our students,” she says. Tuesday mornings Frances Curcio, QC professor of mathematics education, brings along an entire class, a step “very much in the current thinking that future teachers should be in a school from the very first day of Education 101,” Ophals notes. All three of the math teachers at QSI are graduates of QC’s TIME 2000 program, whose writing-intensive approach to teaching math has definitely factored into the students’ “excellent progress,” the principal notes.

Sabrina Joseph, a QC senior and TIME 2000 student, would love to become the fourth math teacher at QSI. “It’s a fantastic school,” she says. As a student teacher, Joseph appreciates being entrusted with free rein in her classroom.

The school’s Career Institute, integrated into every grade, helps QSI’s students “make the connections between their academic work and what they hope to accomplish when they leave school,” explains Lourdes Rivera, QC assistant professor of counselor education. As a site for practicums and internships for counseling students, Rivera adds, the partnership enables the college to “give back to the community but learn from the community how we can better prepare individuals going into the schools.”

A Lab School Ideally Sited at QC

School of Math, Science, and Technology (P.S./I.S. 499)

Gone are the temporary trailers, replaced in 2004 with a light-filled building adjacent to QC’s athletics fields. Six years later, this lab school has reached its planned two classes per grade for K–8. They share the building with a District 75 (special education) school.

Hélène Jacob, now in her second year as principal, points out that “in 2008, when the New York City Department of Education gave us a choice about whether we wanted to stay with the textbooks or be more hands-on, this school chose the inquiry approach.”

Inquiring minds definitely reign here. As the nation steps up STEM education, this school demonstrates how to spark interest in science, technology, engineering, and math. Kindergarteners use wood and paper to learn what it means to be a steward of the Earth, third graders investigate the physics of sound, and older students collaborate on group research. “It’s not like ‘Open the book to page 500, read the first three paragraphs, and answer the questions,’” Jacob says.

“One of my leadership goals is to strengthen the partnership with the college,” Jacob affirms. “Student teachers are part

*Principal Ophals recently retired.
of the workings of our school; they do their practicums here.” QC faculty are also very involved. For example, Ted Kesler, QC assistant professor of elementary and early childhood education, studies digital story mapping and how youngsters respond to reading. “Our students are benefiting from that,” the principal observes. The college annually hosts the school’s eighth graders for an immersion program on college life. “I work with Teresa Gonzalez, the QC liaison, who brings ideas to me, and we discuss whether they will work in the framework of my vision,” Jacob says. “We have a nice give-and-take relationship.”

Re-establishing Townsend Harris, this time at QC, came about in 1984 through a partnership with the New York City Department of Education and QC’s College Preparatory Programs. Like earlier graduates, many students here are the first in their families to attend college in America. “Forty percent are on free or reduced lunch, and nearly half don’t speak English at home,” Bonamo notes.

At many high schools in the spring, seniors merely glide to graduation. There’s no slacking off at Townsend Harris. The rigorous Bridge Year Program engages all seniors in the Great Books Humanities Colloquium and enables them to take two college-level courses of their choosing at QC. Studying freshman electives on campus, according to Bonamo, “is almost like a sneak preview of college and leads to a smooth transition to the college setting.”

Bridge Year seniors blend right in at QC, not only in classrooms but in clubs and activities, observes Helen A. Gaudette, QC’s director of College Preparatory Programs and the liaison with Townsend Harris. “No one on campus realizes these are high school students,” she says. They can “go off to college with all these college credits under their belt. They can do more, graduate early, double-major. They’re so successful,” she adds. “The people I work with at the high school are so smart, so dedicated, and very energetic. They’re devoted to the students.”

Harmonious Collaboration

Louis Armstrong Middle School (I.S. 227Q)

From controversy and conflict in the mid-1970s emerged a magnet school “that would deliberately seek to address some of the problems of integration,” recalls Paul Longo about the founding of LAMS. Busing in children countywide, this middle school opened in 1979 as a close collaboration between a Queens College president who valued pre-college education and a New York City schools chancellor who understood that such partnerships didn’t have to be contentious, according to Sidney Trubowitz and Longo in their book How It Works: Inside a School-College Collaboration.

In East Elmhurst, this school named for the jazz legend flourished by trying to “create porous boundaries” between its classrooms and QC, Longo explains. LAMS thrived because “different ideas were brought into it from outside,” he believes. He cites several examples: The college’s faculty taught several classes here; free tuition for a master’s degree in education attracted individuals with a wealth of experience in other fields; and QC interns created enrichment courses for early-bird students. Some interns returned as teachers, and still teach here. Many innovations survived, including the school’s organization into three houses, each with about 500 students, to address its “large, impersonal” size, according to Longo.

In holding workshops for area teachers, Longo often confers with principals to keep current. He is very impressed with LAMS principal William Fahey, who “really has a lot of good ideas.”

Trubowitz likewise values how this partnership has shaped LAMS. Future teachers “learn good teaching by seeing what is strong and effective in a classroom,” he believes. “That will strengthen you even when you go to a place that isn’t ideal.”
Dismantling the Great Wall Around Autism

Shenyang native Peishi Wang works to improve the services that China offers to people with disabilities—and their families

By Bruce Felton

When Peishi Wang moved to the U.S. from China in 1991, she had never heard of autism.

"It wasn’t until the early 1980s that the term had even appeared in a Chinese medical journal," says Wang, now an assistant professor in QC’s programs in special education. Over the next few years, she worked with children with disabilities in a variety of settings in and around Washington, DC, as a teacher, caseworker, and early intervention specialist. The experience gave her a firsthand view of childhood autism and, in 2005, she created and ran an innovative training program in China for parents of children with autism.

Building on that effort, Wang and Craig Michaels, QC’s coordinator of graduate programs in special education, traveled to Beijing this past summer as part of a multifaceted collaboration between the college and China’s foremost center for the treatment of autism in children.

Wang’s interest in autism in China dates back to the late 1990s, when she accompanied a Gallaudet University professor and his students—virtually all deaf or hard of hearing—on several study trips to China. "I was serving as the group’s Chinese-English interpreter," she recalls. "With each visit, I saw with increasing clarity that services for children with disabilities are minimal to nonexistent in most parts of the country." Indeed, children with autism are generally shut out of a public education system that is largely unprepared to meet their needs. "I thought I’d like to come back someday and apply my education system that is largely unprepared to meet their needs. "I thought I’d like to come back someday and apply my experience to make a contribution," Wang says.

In the summer of 2004 Wang returned to Shenyang, her hometown, to conduct her doctoral dissertation research. She organized a training program for families of children with autism in which 27 families took part—15 in the treatment group, 12 in a control group.

"By and large, these were parents who suspected their children had autism or some sort of learning delay," Wang says. "Some may have gotten a definitive diagnosis, but were stymied in their search for treatment."

The program consisted of group and individual training. "At group sessions, each family was invited to have one or two parents present," says Wang. "The group sessions provided parents with a rare opportunity to meet others dealing with the same situation and share their experiences and frustrations."

Wang observed that prevailing attitudes toward disabilities differ markedly from those in the West. "The families tended to blame themselves—or their ancestors—for their children's disability, and for the fact that their children looked and acted differently from their peers," she says. "Many felt that they were being punished for something they’d done in this life or a past life. There was little understanding of the scientific basis of autism and a great deal of embarrassment and shame.”

The lack of understanding of autism also manifested itself in the way some of the parents related to their children. In home visits, Wang noted that some parents were impatient with their children for not grasping academic concepts quickly enough.

“Some of the parents were initially resistant to the very idea of a stranger coming into their home to observe them,” Wang says. “But in China, as in the U.S., the value of home visits was that I could directly observe parents interacting with their child, make suggestions, and provide feedback.” It was often a revelation to the parents that their children were not being willfully defiant or slow to learn, but that they were impeded by a real disability, she says.

After completing her dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University, and arriving at QC in 2005, Wang attended an international conference on applied behavior analysis in Beijing. Through contacts she made here, Wang was introduced to Menglin Sun, a Chinese philanthropist and head of Beijing Wucailu Children Center, a school and treatment facility that supports autistic children and their families.

“Menglin is a true visionary and the school is extraordinary—a model of cutting-edge techniques and evidence-based practices,” says Wang. “The problem is that while the center is growing rapidly, so is demand. There is always a long waiting list.” Sun visited the U.S. in 2009 to discuss future collaborations with QC. Last July Wang and Michaels spent two weeks at the school, conducting a needs assessment, running workshops for staff and parents, and creating mechanisms for exchange programs with QC.

“What we’re looking to do is create opportunities to learn from each other through a collaborative partnership,” says Michaels. “The overall goal is to improve special education services and supports to individuals with autism and their families in China through the sharing of information, faculty exchange, research activities, teaching, technical assistance, advocacy, and ongoing support.”

The college will also benefit from the partnership. “Ideally, Beijing Wucailu Children Center would send some of their teachers here to do on-site practicums and internships,” says Wang. “We are also arranging for the center’s clinical supervisors to spend at least a semester at QC.”

Likewise, QC special education graduate students could have the option of fulfilling their internship requirements in Beijing. In time, adds Michaels, “we hope to see a shift in public policy in China—one that will make it possible for all children to be educated.”
Fifteen years ago Alice Artzt was feeling deeply concerned about the state of math education in America, and with good reason: International comparisons showed American children near the bottom in the understanding of mathematical concepts. And the profession of math teaching was not attracting young people.

“Most of my students were change-of-career people,” recalls Artzt, a professor of math education in QC’s Department of Secondary Education and Youth Services.

So Artzt worked with three QC colleagues—education psychologist Eleanor Armour-Thomas and math professors Alan Sultan and Elliott Mendelson—to develop an innovative program to recruit high school graduates and give them an intensive preparation as secondary school math teachers. Established in 1998 with a grant from the National Science Foundation, the TIME 2000 program provides scholarships to students who commit to at least two years of teaching after graduation. (The program’s name stands for Teaching Improvements through Mathematics Education.)

Like programs at other colleges, TIME 2000 provides a solid foundation in mathematics. But unlike most programs, it also places great emphasis on developing participants’ teaching abilities, providing education courses and fieldwork starting with the first freshman semester instead of waiting until the junior or senior year.

Lee V. Stiff, a professor of mathematics education at North Carolina State University and past president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, calls TIME 2000 “unique” in the way it gets entering students fired up about math and in the strong preparation it gives future teachers. The program is a good response to the twin problems facing math education, Stiff says. For two decades there has been a serious shortage of qualified math teachers. On top of that, “you have people who are qualified in content, but don’t have a good feel for how to make sure children understand and enjoy learning.”

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education and private donors, TIME 2000 recruits 25 to 30 freshmen annually. They must have good high school math grades and agree to the two-year teaching commitment. But their first two years are considered a trial period; during that time students can drop out of the program with no obligation to repay their scholarship or fulfill their teaching commitment.

In 2002 the first class of 18 students graduated. That rate has turned out to be typical—about 60 percent of each starting class graduate from the program. More impressive has been graduates’ performance. They have been in high

**Doing the Numbers**

TIME 2000 multiplies the supply of secondary school math teachers
demand and over 90 percent are still teaching math after five years, says Artzt.

TIME 2000’s approach is intentionally different from that of many other programs. Students take all their math and education classes together and quickly form a cohesive group. They attend conferences and other events, and participate in a monthly breakfast seminar where guest lecturers discuss issues from the world of math education. And faculty members stay in close contact with students, says Artzt, “to learn what is going well and what is not.”

“In a regular program you could feel isolated,” says Eric Glatz, a graduate of the program’s first class in 2002. “In TIME 2000, you work with faculty so directly. You become part of a math teaching community.”

Glatz has been teaching in public middle schools since graduating. For the last five years he has helped build up the math department at the Queens School of Inquiry in Flushing, which works with Queens College to help struggling sixth- to twelfth-grade students prepare to enter college.

A key element of the program is the 10 weeks students spend in their first semester sitting in on a math class at the Louis Armstrong Middle School in East Elmhurst, with which the program cooperates. Once a week students go to the middle school for an intensive introduction to issues of math education. On each visit they first spend 45 minutes with the middle school teacher, discussing the day’s lesson plan and expectations of the schoolchildren’s likely strategies—and possible misconceptions—in dealing with the math challenges they will receive.

Then the whole group of about 25 TIME 2000 students sits in the back of the class and watches the lesson. After class, participants spend another 45 minutes as the teacher debriefs them on what they have just observed. The routine is “a very big advantage,” says Frances R. Curcio, a QC professor of math education who runs the field visits. In other programs aspiring math teachers also sit in on grade school classes, Curcio says, but usually without the intensive analysis of what they are observing. “Students need guidance to understand the relation between theory and practice,” she says. Glatz, the TIME 2000 graduate, adds that by emphasizing both math and education from the start, the program gives graduates “a pretty broad arsenal of educational approaches to draw from. When you start student teaching, you’re ready to go.”

All TIME 2000 participants maintain a portfolio during their four years in the program. It helps them remember strategies and techniques they have encountered, says Artzt, and is often useful to show to prospective employers when graduates seek their first job.

One reason for the program’s success, faculty members say, is its close relationship with QC’s mathematics department. “My colleagues at other campuses have practically no cooperation with the education department,” says Wallace Goldberg, chair of QC’s Department of Mathematics. “We are the exception to the rule.”

Goldberg says that in assigning faculty members to work with TIME 2000, he takes care to pick model instructors who will make themselves available for any extra help the aspiring teachers may need. He credits the program with helping to build up the math department from only 12 majors when he became chair in 2001 to around 250 today.

Many math educators concede that all too often children must sit through math lessons that are boring and seemingly unrelated to their lives. TIME 2000 is preparing teachers who are excited about math, and ideally have the training and skills to make lessons fun and relevant for secondary school students.

“When you teach young people that they can do math, they start thinking they are smart,” says Artzt. “You feel you are contributing to the country by raising a generation of young people who can contribute to science and politics. It’s the most rewarding thing in the world.”
Encouraging Development

Lillian Moncada-Davidson improves the outlook for a poverty-stricken town in El Salvador

By Leslie Jay

In 1992 a pact brokered by the United Nations brought peace to El Salvador after a devastating civil war, but prosperity has yet to follow: Much of its population is beset by poverty, illiteracy, and preventable illnesses. A pilot run by Lillian Moncada-Davidson, a member of QC’s Secondary Education and Youth Services faculty, is making inroads on these problems.

“I have a social conscience,” says the professor, a native of Honduras raised in El Salvador. “It is my responsibility to give back to my country.” Her experience makes her uniquely equipped to provide an international perspective at QC, where she teaches an undergraduate course in educational foundations and graduate classes in comparative education and school and society. In addition, she advises foreign students, especially those from Latin America.

In the 1970s Moncada-Davidson had operated a Montessori school that educated upper-class children in San Salvador, El Salvador’s capital. Her decision to start an afternoon program for the less affluent aroused suspicion that she was a leftist sympathizer. In 1980, when civil war engulfed her homeland, she immigrated to the United States with her family. “My husband had grown up in New York,” she explains. “It was natural to come here.” Taking her career in a new direction, Moncada-Davidson earned a master’s in community psychology at New York University and a doctorate in sociology and education at Columbia University, and began teaching at QC in 1988. She also established an education program in a very poor area in Guatemala as part of a major community development project.

In 1994 she turned her attention back to El Salvador, where more than 70,000 people had died in the civil war and countless others had fled, with disastrous impact on their families. “Women were left behind because so many men had been killed or left the country,” says Moncada-Davidson. She created the Hilda Rothschild Foundation (HRF)—a nonprofit,
nongovernmental organization named for a Montessori teacher who was her mentor and friend—and began devising strategies to assist struggling communities, such as Joya Grande.

A semirural settlement that’s close to San Salvador, Joya Grande is isolated by unpaved roads that make travel difficult during the six-month rainy season. Because of the war, vacationers stopped visiting the area, eliminating the employment opportunities that had existed for residents. Some people earn money by picking coffee, but another source of earnings, fishing, has diminished because of declining catch from the nearby lake. To ensure that women working in the project received a stipend for their efforts, the foundation opened a bakery and coached local women to staff it. Today, that business is self-sustaining.

Meanwhile, HRF has promoted free education in a wide range of topics. Its initiatives include Montessori classes for children up to age 6, when they enter El Salvador’s public school system; home-based family literacy programs that help the parents of young children learn to read and write and become effective parents; after-school enrichment for 6- to 12-year-olds; and computer workshops for adults. Moncada-Davidson would like to create a Study Abroad course that brings QC students to Joya Grande to work with HRF’s clientele.

Health is the population’s main concern. Malaria rates had been high in the village, which lacks plumbing. People accumulated water in buckets, unwittingly providing an ideal environment for mosquito larvae. Moncada-Davidson’s grassroots solution was to train women to make weekly house calls to teach their neighbors basic information about health, hygiene, and nutrition, and identify issues that require intervention. As a result, malaria rates declined and the incidence of dengue fever and pneumonia is falling; diabetes has been recognized as a threat. Medical help is now available. The town boasts a doctor and a pharmacy, thanks to the foundation, which had no problem finding qualified personnel in a tough economic climate. “Unemployment is high in El Salvador, even among professionals,” reports Moncada-Davidson.

All told, HRF has served about 4000 people. “We have a group of empowered women who have become breadwinners in their families,” says Moncada-Davidson. “The children are excelling in school. Hopefully, they won’t drop out; we’re teaching them to develop independent skills so they will become self-reliant.” Long term, the foundation is trying to create a model that can be replicated and, perhaps, stem the tide of illegal emigration. “Millions and millions of dollars have been given to El Salvador for development without results,” Moncada-Davidson notes. “Over a million Salvadorans are living in the United States without documentation. We’re trying to work in a way so that they will stay in El Salvador.”
Inclusionary Philosophy

Jason Sand offers a college experience to young adults with severe and multiple disabilities

By Leslie Jay

At 8:30 am on the last Monday before spring break, the students in Room 208 of Kissena Hall are a little subdued; perhaps, like many college-age adults, they’re not morning people. But Jason Sand, an approachable guy wearing casual attire and a stud and a hoop in his left ear, has enough energy to ignite the room. Bolstered by the coffee he brewed on his arrival two hours earlier, he conducts a lively review of the worksheets in everyone’s hands.

“What is history?” he asks one student, and another, distributing praise and fist-bumps for good answers, which he loudly repeats as some of the participants have difficulty speaking, or retaining information, or both, and need prompting from their paraprofessional. “Do you agree? Don’t answer all at once,” Sand teases the group before he calls on someone else. When the interactive session ends, he watches as a few students gravi- tate to computer stations at the back wall and log on. “That’s the longest password in the world,” says the instructor to one of his pupils. “Don’t tell me you can’t remember things.”

As a special education teacher support service provider with the Queens Occupational Center’s Inclusion Program at Queens College, Sand encourages the people in his classroom to exceed their own expectations. His students come from Special Education District 75. A citywide category rather than a neighborhood, District 75 serves “students who are on the autism spectrum, have significant cognitive delays, are severely emotionally challenged, sensory impaired and/or multiply disabled,” explains the website for the New York City Department of Education. Every year, two dozen District 75 alums, age 17 to 21, participate in the inclusion program at QC. They take classes, accompany if necessary by paraprofessionals; work at prevocational training sites on and off campus; and attend extracurricular events, such as college concerts and games.

“We try to replicate the experience of nondisabled students,” reports Sand, who launched the inclusion pilot at QC 10 years ago and helped introduce similar initiatives at CUNY’s Brooklyn, Medgar Evers, and Lehman campuses, as well as Pace University. “President James Muyskens, Vice Presidents Sue Henderson and Joe Bertolino, and CUNY Assistant Dean Christopher Rosa have been phenomenal in supporting our program. It’s the largest and oldest inclusive educational program in the United States.” Among its beneficiaries are graduate students in QC’s Division of Education, where Sand teaches one night a week as an adjunct in special education. “It’s nice to have grad students ask my advice,” he comments.

Personalized services, such as speech, physical, and occupational therapy, are integral to his inclusionary formula. So is assistance with email, voter registration, and applications for free transit passes. The program’s team members—two special education teacher support service providers, including Sand, and eight paraprofessionals—emphasize the practical, everyday knowledge that can be elusive to people with disabilities. “This campus is my classroom,” Sand says. “It gives me so many indirect opportunities to teach skills, such as how to cross a street or read a map.” He also has the chance to tap the talent of members of the QC community. “It’s a symbiotic relationship,” he observes.

For the population he works with, the biggest challenge is making the transition to adulthood, preferably with some degree of independence. “Our society looks at success by traditional measures,” muses Sand. His standards are a little different. Maybe an individual will be able to get part-time employment or move into a group home. “We have students who come back to visit,” he continues. “One is a 28-year-old man with extreme autism. Now he has a job delivering packages. He has a Facebook page. He has friends; he is happy.”

Sand’s understanding of alternative paths may stem from the fact that he followed one himself. “I fell into this field,” says the Parkway Village native. Raised in a family of educators, he was more interested in cars. A mechanic, he returned to school through the Labor Education Advancement Project (LEAP), the precursor to the Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies at CUNY. Majoring in English and minor- ing in secondary education, he took special ed classes as electives. He went on to earn a master’s in special education, K–12, from Dominican College in Blauvelt, NY, and came back to QC for a post-master’s certificate in administration and supervision.

A decade into his second career, Sand remains committed to it. “Every student should be entitled to inclusion,” he declares. “I still love my job. I love coming here to work every day.” But he no longer has the time or the inclination to handle his own auto maintenance. “I’ve become lazy,” he admits. “I take my car in to the shop most of the time.”
Two for the Road
Big Buddy volunteers pair up with homeless children for weekly excursions

By Donna Shoemaker

“Oh my gosh, we’re on a boat!” For a 6-year-old boy living in a homeless shelter, the ferry ride to Governors Island, followed by free mini-golf, kite-flying, and a picnic, was sheer joy. Sabrina Joseph, the Queens College student showing him the ropes on that idyllic Saturday last spring, likewise found the island, only 800 yards from lower Manhattan, to be just as much fun. “I’ve lived here all my life, but I never really knew what was out there,” admits Joseph, who graduated last May with a mathematics major and a secondary education minor.

The Big Buddy Program brought these two together. This Division of Education program pairs QC students with children ages 6 to 12 from three homeless shelters: Hillside House, Briarwood Family Residence, and Jamaica Family Residence. Hand-in-hand each Saturday during the academic year, these best buds become savvy about New York and its child-friendly attractions. When Big Buddies become parents, Joseph laughs, “we’ll know all the things to do”—especially the freebies.

At the shelter, before linking up with their little buddies, the Big Buddies spend a few minutes talking with the children’s parents. The students then enlist the youngsters in using subway and bus maps to get to the day’s destination. It might be fishing at Harlem Meer, hands-on science center exhibits, or a stroll through South Street Seaport. Each Big Buddy receives $12 for the day’s expenses, plus an introductory letter that usually can reduce a $20 admission fee to a manageable dollar or two. Everyone brings along a brown bag lunch. Four times a year, all the buddies get together for excursions, including skating at Rockefeller Center and a New York Mets game (both donate tickets), and a bus trip to Harriman State Park.

In September, prospective little buddies and their parents come to campus for an orientation session, complete with four-foot-long subs. These children “have been through so much,” Joseph observes. “When they get more comfortable, they tell you more about their life. You fall in love with them, and they fall in love with you.”

In 1989 Arty Salz enlisted two colleagues, Gloria Harris and Julius Trubowitz, to establish this supportive mentoring program after seeing a similar one at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. “My interest was elementary education and open education,” notes Salz. “When I came back after that sabbatical, I found out about the enormous number of homeless children in New York City—10,000 at that time.” Even with the city’s effort to shorten shelter stays (now down to eight months), there are 16,000 homeless and at-risk children, according to Salz. Retired five years ago, the professor taught for almost four decades at QC. He’s now an adjunct and directs Big Buddy. Seeing students with these youngsters zipping around on ice skates—often for the first time—“is what keeps me going,” he says.

On each outing, “Together with our little buddy, we create a photo essay,” Joseph explains. This year the children have been writing up their adventures in the form of a letter to be added to their scrapbook, then shared with their families and one another. The QC students also have writing assignments: a journal reflecting on the day’s experience. As one of Big Buddy’s two paid coordinators funded by the division, Elizabeth Schneider ’97, ’99, reads their essays and offers feedback. Saturday mornings, she’s on hand at two of the shelters to make sure everyone is paired up, and she stays on call all day in case a little buddy isn’t listening carefully to his or her mentor—their safety is paramount.

Majoring in elementary education and urban studies, Schneider became a student coordinator for the program. She loved it so much she wanted to stay involved after graduation. Now the school librarian at P.S. 144 in Forest Hills, she taught sixth grade and earned her master’s degree in elementary education. She graduated in May with her second master’s from QC, in library science.

Running on a bare-bones budget, the program has received some foundation funding, as well as several thousand dollars from its alumni last year. Come spring, Salz canvasses the Student Union and puts up signs to enlist 30 to 35 students for the following fall. Many, like Joseph and her husband, Deepak Joseph ’07, take part for several years.

“We end up with a terrific group with tremendous commitment,” Salz affirms. “A large number of QC students work part-time. Anyone who comes into this program is giving up a Saturday of income.” Instead, Big Buddies earn three credits as an elective. Most of the half-dozen letters of recommendation Salz writes each year are for students who have switched to teaching or social work because of their positive experience as a Big Buddy.
Rikki Asher Recognized for Contributions to Art Education

Rikki Asher (Secondary Education & Youth Services) was recently honored as the Higher Education Art Teacher of the Year by the New York City Art Teachers Association (NYCATA). In recommending Asher for the award, renowned philosopher and Columbia professor Maxine Greene wrote, “I became an avid admirer of Dr. Asher’s work following her career as a teaching artist in the Lincoln Center Institute, as Assistant Professor of Art Education at SUNY New Paltz, and currently at CUNY Queens College. . . . For me, she is a model educator and artist always in search of wider visions in a troubled world.” Asher received the award on October 24 at the annual NYCATA Conference at the LaGuardia High School of Art and the Performing Arts.