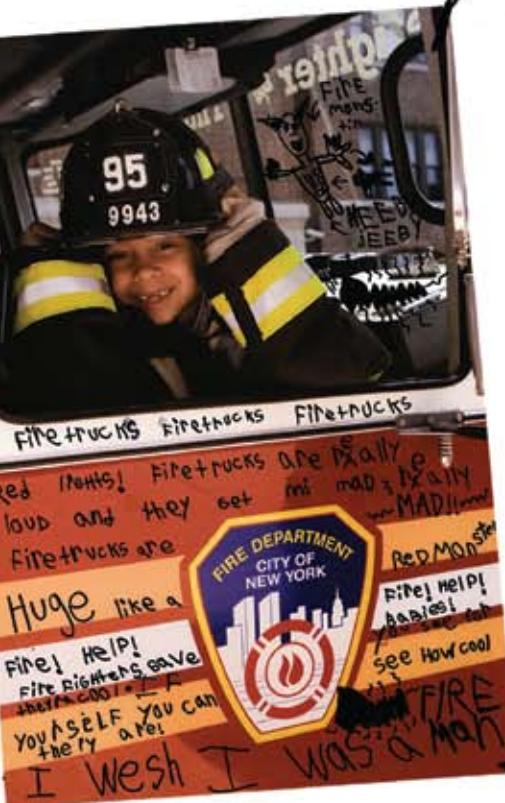
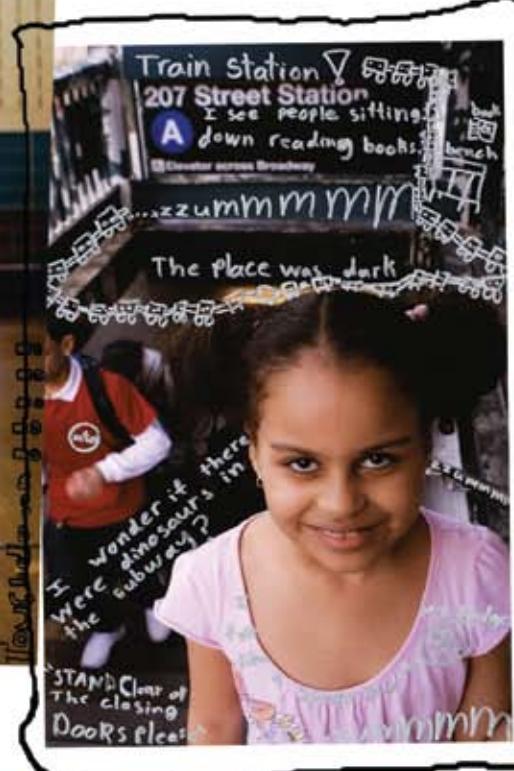
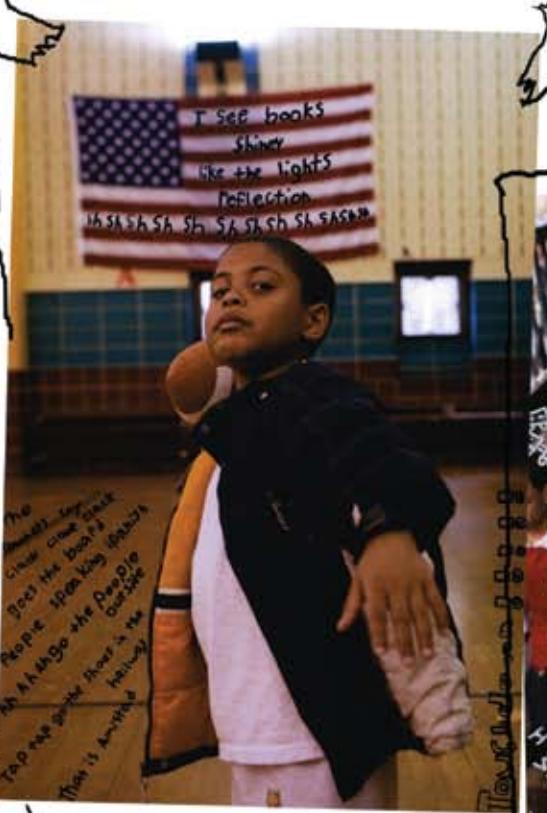
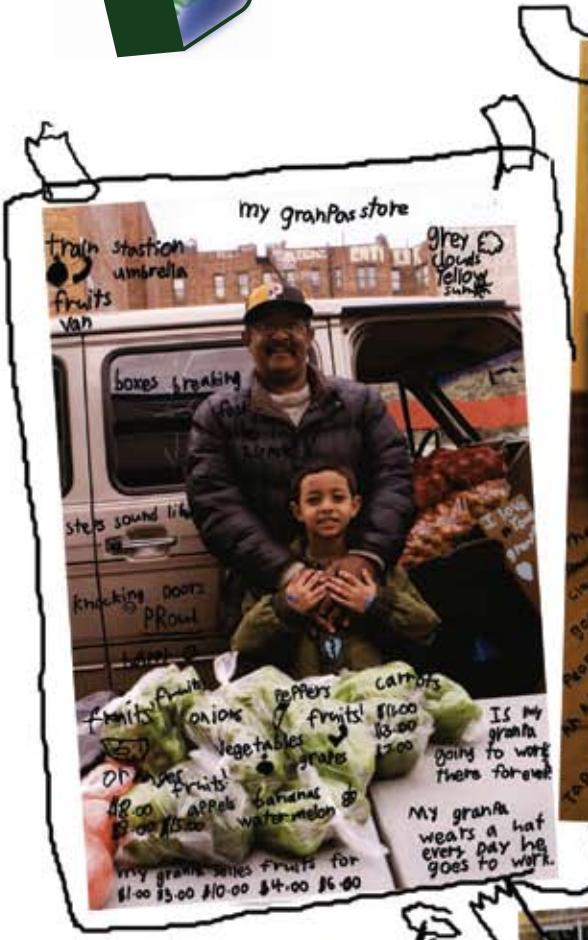


PEACE CORPS FELLOWS TIMES

Special Edition: Towards 25 Years of Service



Summer 2009



An Americorps Professional Corps and Fellows/USA Program

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Notes from the Assistant Directors' Desks

Service as Partnerships: Reclaiming Self-Interest Properly Understood

By Nicolas Stahelin, PCFP Asst. Director

Leading this nation through the turmoil of war, economic crisis, and global environmental challenges, President Obama has called on us to serve. At a time so culturally marked by the prominence of one's own self-interest, his call represents not just bold leadership but a deep and momentous shift in American society. The shift, propelled in part by rapidly changing demographics, has also been driven by a series of critical events that have forced us to reach within our collective self for a common humanity and sense of purpose. The desire to serve – indeed the need to serve – has been rekindled in the larger American spirit.

How do we respond? This question may be specially interesting to people who are currently serving, such as Peace Corps Fellows teaching in public schools. Those of us who have been serving for many years, often in lieu of pursuing more lucrative activities in times of prosperity, may feel vindicated in times of crisis when others finally join us. But it would be unwise to assume that because we serve as educators, we have already met the need, for rather than complacence with our chosen profession, a bold response to President Obama's call would be to deepen and sharpen our ability to serve the community. As progressive educators, we strive to do this not by simply helping those who are in need, but more importantly, by working together with others to forge positive social change.

The concept of the fearless individual leader helping or even saving those in need – a popular Hollywood image of the urban educator – is not the correct depiction of how progressive educators serve communities. Instead, service for progressive educators is a matter of participating in partnerships. These are partnerships with parents, administrators, teachers – and yes, even with students. In the long-run, successful teachers tend to have strong partnerships with their students and those who make up their school community. Deepening our commitment to service may very well be about strengthening these partnerships.

As several of the articles in this special edition of the PCF Times make clear, one of the most innovative and exciting opportunities for partnerships can be found in the numerous service-learning projects that Fellows take on each year. Through service-learning, teachers and students work together to apply what they are learning in the classroom to projects in the community. Fellows have repeatedly demonstrated that integrating service projects into the curriculum opens educational avenues to parents and community organizations. And to students it opens up avenues to the world. Where exclusion becomes inclusion, the outcome is participation, a democratic principle. The old adage, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" – such an abstract and elusive concept – crystallizes its implications for democracy when teachers and students partner with the community in educational endeavors.

Through a social justice lens, service-learning redefines the notion of self-interest. From the increasingly ubiquitous notion of self-interest as merely accumulation and consumption, we can reclaim de Tocqueville's original notion of "self-interest properly understood," where working for the good of others is working for one's own good as well. Together we are stronger. In no time does this apply more than in times of crisis. Educators can be great teachers, but failing to inspire youth to work together for positive change in their communities and in the world leaves

out a major ingredient of democratic problem-solving. Therein lies at least one major challenge for progressive educators seeking to deepen the reach of their service. It is difficult, but the process is what counts.

But we must remain sharp when deepening our commitment to service. Youth in marginalized communities have reasons to be skeptical about engaging in service activities. All too often their families or communities have been recipients of community-service in ways that leave the structural roots of inequality unexamined and unattended. The narratives employed in these types of service initiatives paint marginalized families and communities full of deficits, while histories are ignored and cultural resources and community assets overlooked. Particularly where access to political and economic resources can be limited, it is important for progressive educators to account for the inevitable cultural differences that arise in collective efforts across social groups. While our task as educators may be to model the notion of "self-interest properly understood" for the next generation, we must do so in constant dialogue with how they see and experience the world. Through service-learning methods that maximize youth voice, we can do so while retaining core academic competencies at the center of our practice.

Each of the articles in this special edition of the PCF Times takes up an exploration of service. Together they are a mosaic that comprises the philosophical landscape the program has created over 25 years of partnership with schools and communities throughout New York City. This publication thus aims to be a slice of our program's history, current practice, and vision for the future.



Patricia Chang (PCF '06) and students at Bronx International High School
(photo by Mike McGregor)

Why Social Justice?

By Shelly Chin, PCFP Asst. Director

My favorite

time of the year is during the summer when the new cohort of Peace Corps Fellows arrives at TC. They're filled with mixed emotions - excited about embarking on a new journey as educators, yet overwhelmed with the anxiety and stress that accompanies the immense amount of work and preparation packed into such a short few months. Time seems to escape them as they try to acclimate to NYC while establishing themselves as professionals and graduate students. Before they know it, panic may set in about finding the right teaching placement.

What seems to galvanize the group even more is the push our program makes to disrupt and interrogate our institutionalized notions of race, culture, language, privilege, identity, and, of course, the role of the teacher in the classroom. Our program embraces a philosophy of culturally relevant pedagogy and social justice education. With that comes the challenge of deconstructing and disentangling the highly charged and complex social, cultural, political and economic issues ingrained in mainstream American society. Often, there is struggle and resistance from the Fellows to what can be a painful process.

This experience is similar to my own when I was preparing to become a teacher in South Los Angeles. One of the many reasons I became interested in public education was because of the often negative experiences I felt as a minority in a predominantly white community. We all want an educational experience that provides a positive reflection of ourselves, but schools often marginalize students who are not of the dominant culture, leaving them disengaged and disenfranchised from the educational process.

As Angela Valenzuela states, it's not education that students reject, but the messages they receive in schools that neither affirm nor value individual identity and personal experience. My goal was to serve as an educator who embodied a caring practice that could bridge the gap between the home cultures of my Black and Latino students and the culture of the school. As a new teacher, I felt passionate about what I was about to do, but knew little about how to do it or about the community I was getting ready to teach in. While I felt I could relate to

my students in one way as a minority, I was still culturally and racially different. I was an outsider born into a wealthy suburb with the privileges of a first-rate undergraduate and graduate education. It was a daunting and emotional process that made me question myself, my abilities and whether I could do right by the students and families with whom I'd be working.

We all go into teaching with the best of intentions – energy, idealism, optimism – but somewhere along the way we become frightened and overwhelmed by the demands of even the preparation of our teaching careers, especially when we don't know where we'll be working. Teaching is a highly rewarding profession, but the work IS never ending. The process can be grueling, but it is extremely comforting to know there is a group of peers who share similar visions of what schooling and education can be in a society in which we want to live. Teaching is a unique profession in the way it requires us to develop our own agency by critiquing ourselves, deconstructing our thinking, and then reconstructing it to keep students' learning and empowerment our primary mission.

Like students, teachers may suffer from the priorities and policies of schools in an era of highly standardized tests and curriculum. Peter McLaren's research on critical pedagogy looks at the ways schools construct knowledge, which he categorizes as: technical, practical and emancipatory. He notes that technical, quantifiable, measurable knowledge such as test scores is highly valued in schools today, and results in the maintenance of an unequal and a socially stratified society to which students react with resistance and disengagement. Beginning urban teachers often leave the profession due to "poor working conditions" or "poor student behavior." Social justice education and culturally relevant pedagogy counters these deficit models that posit the student as the source of failure in the school system. When teachers embrace not only technical, but also emancipatory knowledge and sociopolitical consciousness into their pedagogy, students become engaged, improve their

academic skills, and become empowered to work toward a more socially just and democratic society.

During our training process we grapple with the question of whether this form of education is possible and if so, whether it somehow becomes another form of indoctrination. The purpose of social justice education is not to replace one dominant ideology for another, but to create a more democratic society involving collective decision-making. Because the voices of low-income communities of color have been historically marginalized, our mandate is to reshape education for the public good by providing students with multiple perspectives, allowing them to shape and challenge the curriculum, and developing the tools to critique, navigate and transform society. Martin Haberman reminds us that "Graduates who lack basic skills may be unemployable and represent a personal and societal tragedy. However, graduates who possess basic skills but are partially informed, unable to think, and incapable of making moral choices are downright dangerous. Before we can make workers, we must first make people. But people are not made – they are conserved and grown."

This enormous challenge produces much of the fear and anxiety in beginning progressive teaching, because it requires constant work, which can sometimes seem ever elusive. In my own graduate experience, I felt my professors left me with more questions than answers, allowing me to dig deeply into my own beliefs and values without providing a blueprint for implementation. I had to learn to be comfortable with the unknown and the possibility that sometimes my practices would contradict what I value and believe. But by embracing the journey and process we can build our confidence, continue to learn about ourselves and our students, and deepen our commitment to the practice of social justice education. As educators we ask our students to face challenges, overcome their fears and make sense of their local and global identities in an ever changing society. Thus, we must be willing to do the same with ourselves. This summer is only the beginning.



Wanda Dingman (PCF '96) and students at Marble Hill High School for International Studies (photos by Mike McGregor)

Welcome Peace Corps Fellows 2009



Peace Corps Fellows 2009 – Back row, from left: Greg Landrigan, Devin Ackles, Mark Fox, Kolter Kiess, Joseph Deschenes, Jennifer Lyons. Middle row, from left: Sergeant Donovan-Smith, Tom Tortorici, Nathan Simonini, Sandi Spaziani, Samantha Adams, Heather Marr. Front row, from left: David Davis, Adam Lammers, Dayla Rogers, Sarah Richardson, Heath Kirkendoll. Missing: Alexis Austin, Amber Bennett, Taina Torres (Photo by Chris Westcott)



Hindsight: The Peace Corps Fellows Program 25 Years Later

Jody K. Olsen, Ph.D., Acting Peace Corps Director



(Photo by Mike McGregor)

In 1985, around a wooden table nestled in a small office at Teachers College, over sandwiches and sodas, six people discussed the initial ideas for what has become the largest, oldest, most prestigious, and influential Fellows/USA program in the United States: The Peace Corps Fellows Program at Teachers College. Today, with over 50 Fellows/USA programs in graduate schools throughout the country and over 600 graduates of Teachers College Fellows/USA program alone, it seems that the power of that table conversation should have been obvious. But at the time, it was just an uncharted idea, backed by a strong advocate and a great college.

Having sat at that table 25 years ago, and given the recent opportunity to visit the program and one of its partner schools in my capacity as the Acting Director of the Peace Corps, I would like to share my impressions of where we have come from and how we have ended up where we are today.

Perhaps the most intense energy and passion behind the idea that eventually became the first Fellows/USA program came from Beryl Levinson, a doctoral student at Teachers College at the time, and a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) from

Colombia (1967-69). She knew that Teachers College, RPCVs, and the New York City school system could bring together experienced and talented teachers for special programs and disadvantaged students throughout the city.

Her passion for the idea convinced then-Peace Corps Director Loret Ruppe, one of the six attendees who sat around the table, that the Peace Corps could embrace the idea, talk to potential donors, and partner with Teachers College to create this Fellows program. That same day, in the multistory, glass headquarters of Xerox Corporation, a new grant was approved, and the program was launched. The enthusiastic first group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers entered the Fellows/USA Program at Teachers College in the fall of 1985.

The initial program recruited RPCVs as math and science teachers. The Memorandum of Understanding noted: "The program has been developed to attract and train a professional pool of Math and Science educators to teach in the inner city schools of the United States and to upgrade present levels of instruction in the fields of Mathematics and Science." (1/30/85)

Other financial supporters, in addition to Teachers College, soon joined the program: the New York City Board of Education, the Hebrew Technical Institute, the Prudential Insurance Company, and Chase Manhattan. Later the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, supplemented by funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, added significant scholarships.

As broader needs became evident a few years later, the initial Fellows/USA Math / Science Program at Teachers College's expanded to bilingual education, special education, and TESOL. The Peace Corps

Fellows Program at TC has continued to grow and change to meet new Fellows' skills, New York City's education needs, and Teachers College own evolving academic assets. This dynamic evolution ensures that the program maintains its reputation of leadership and its service to the NYC School System.

This program's impact is one teacher, one student, one classroom, and one institution at a time. In 1997, a 10th grade student from the Bronx said, "You've been the best teacher we ever had. You're also the perfect teacher because you don't criticize anything and you're funny. You made humanities fun. You're also the only teacher that's open-minded and who concentrates on developing the positive side of things."

That same year, a Peace Corps Fellow communicated: "Since I arrived in New York, I have experienced the worst and the best; I have felt painfully naïve and joyously wise; that I made the worst choice and the best that I could for myself. Like an aging and battered prize-fighter, I don't know when to quit. Maybe this is endemic to most Peace Corps Fellows. Maybe it's just me."

Another Fellow noted: "Teaching humanities in the South Bronx has changed my life almost as much as my Peace Corps experience had in Lesotho, Africa. My job as a teacher allows me to make very real human connections everyday that I couldn't have with practically any other job. I've always been accused of wanting to change the world by my family and now I see that I have 45 chances a day to change the world: one chance for each student."

Similar sentiments have been documented throughout these 25 years. In a meeting that I attended a few years ago, a senior staff member in the New York City Board of Education Office of Personnel praised the work of our Peace Corps Fellows and talked specifically about their language and cultural sensitivity, their commitment to public education, and their flexibility and passion for their work in classrooms and in schools. One administrator said that they look for TC Peace Corps Fellows knowing that they can succeed in challenging school environments.

Teachers College took a risk 25 years ago, and like the risk Peace Corps Volunteers take when boarding a plane to begin two years of service that will change their lives, Fellows/USA has changed RPCVs, graduate schools, and most importantly, the communities where they have served in New York City and beyond.

I have seen these changes first-hand while visiting fellows and former fellows at three different schools in New York City. In one neighborhood school with a strong immigrant population from the Dominican Republic, the principal praised a former PC Fellow, whose Peace Corps service was in the Dominican Republic, for her sensitivity to individual student needs and tailored ways of gently integrating the students into new cultures and systems.

In April of this year, I spent a morning at the Marble Hill High School for International Studies in the Bronx talking with the founder of the school and watching current and former Fellows teach at the school. Returned Volunteers comprise one-third of the faculty who teach a student body almost entirely made up of immigrants. Their teaching programs affirmatively integrate English as a second language with the math, history, science curriculum into one strong curriculum. The students spoke proudly about "their" teachers living two years in some of their own countries of origin, speaking local languages, and knowing their own home traditions and cultures. That trust, built on the foundation of the Peace Corps experience, encouraged and allowed the students to take risks in their own adjustments to language and culture.

The support from Elliot and Roslyn Jaffe has made many more Teachers College programs possible, including innovative high-quality service-learning projects. This last year, over 1,000 students engaged in 14 mini-grants projects from HIV/AIDS education to video and website development to raise awareness on crucial social issues. The Fellows at Marble Hill talked of using this grant opportunity to bring students and classrooms closer to social issues and their communities. Innovations in service-learning have also become a major focus of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the agency of which the AmeriCorps branch has become a major partner and funder of the Peace Corps Fellows Program at Teachers College.

I am honored to have been one of those sitting around the table 25 years ago, and now to have seen, 25 years later, the profound affect that committed educators, a graduate school of education, and over 600 RPCVs can do to honor the Peace Corps' third goal, helping to promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans, and to improve the lives of dozens of thousands of New York City students. I have no doubt that the idea that created the first Fellows/USA program in the country will continue to evolve, develop new partnerships, and extend its reach to ever more partner communities.

Jody Olsen Visits the PCFP

Acting Peace Director Honors TC, CU, and the Fellows; Acknowledges Contributions to Service

25 years

after being involved in the creation of the Peace Corps Fellows Program at Teachers College, Jody K. Olsen, the Acting Director of the Peace Corps, was back in TC to honor the College and Columbia University for their efforts in support of the Peace Corps over the years. At the ceremony, which took place on March 2, 2009, Olsen presented President Susan Fuhrman, Provost Thomas James and Kavita Sharma, Dean of the Center for Career Education at Columbia, with certificates of appreciation and lauded both institutions for their longstanding commitment to the Peace Corps.

Since 1961, Columbia has produced more than 1,600 Peace Corps volunteers, the eighth highest number of any university. "A third of all Peace Corps volunteers are involved in education and upward of a third of all returning Peace Corps volunteers stay in education through many years of their careers,"

Olsen said, "so it makes the strength of the Teachers College Fellows Program that much more important."

The Peace Corps, meanwhile, has produced over 700 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers for the TC Peace Corps Fellows Program (PCFP) since its inception in 1985. "It's an obvious and simple logic: People who have committed to serving high-need populations in diverse settings are well prepared to come back and work in the New York City schools," Fuhrman said, "and we are delighted to provide them with an understanding of how children learn, the pedagogical skills and the other preparation that they need to be successful teachers."

Fuhrman acknowledged Elliot and Roslyn Jaffe for their support of the program. In 2003, Jaffe and his wife Roslyn donated nearly a half million dollars to the program, and income from a separate \$900,000 scholarship

endowment established by the Jaffes is designated for Peace Corps Fellows each year. Likewise, Fuhrman acknowledged Amity Buxton, who has been a generous supporter of the program.

During the ceremony, Patrick Bernal, an English teacher at the Marble Hill High School for International Studies in the Bronx and a former Peace Corps Fellow (2005), presented Olsen with plaque on behalf of the program. Kirsten Larson, Principal at Marble Hill who was a Peace Corps Fellow (1999), said that a third of the teachers at the charter high school are Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. Larson and other Fellows founded Marble Hill in 2002 as one of the first small high schools in the Bronx. The presence of so many Fellows has made the school, she said, "a really rich and diverse place."

"I had an incredible experience," said Larson of her three years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Senegal. "And the doors that have opened since I attended Columbia and the Fellows program have been unbelievable. Many volunteers are hired just because of their Peace Corps experience. In my case, I was instantly asked in one phrase 'Are you ready to work in the South Bronx?' That was it. 'If you want the job, it's yours.'"

For Olsen it's hard to believe the program that she helped create at Teachers College is now almost 25 years old. Olsen reflected on the meaning of the success of the Peace Corps Fellows Program, "It is really the flagship that said to other universities across the country: 'Yes, we can do this and we can do it very well!'

Editor's Note: This article has been adapted from TC News, originally written by Victor Inzunza.



Jody Olsen with staff at Marble Hill High School for International Studies. Back row, from left: Rick Weller, Econ and Government; Wanda Dingman (PCFP '96), ESL; Nicholas Pesola, Math; J J O'Connell (PCFP '96), Chemistry; David Meek, (PCFP '05), Biology; Mary Helen Hughes (PCFP '92), ESL/Humanities; Pat Bernal (PCFP '05), English. Front row, from left: Sara Lowes (PCFP '00), Asst Principal; Jody Olsen, Acting Director, Peace Corps; Kirsten Larson (PCFP '99), Principal; Scott Wahl, Math.

Walking and Smiling

By Dara Ross

Even though I can't feel my toes anymore, and the cold from the huge metal pole is steadily seeping through my mittens, I have never felt better. The horns and the drums from the high school marching band are blaring ahead of me. I am walking. Groups of people, huddled and bundled in blankets are screaming, "Peace Corps! Woo Woo! Woo hoo!"

As I am walking by, proudly waving my Mongolian flag, small bands of people are jumping up and screaming, "We love you Peace Corps!" Everyone is so excited and happy to see us. We are so excited to be here. The other RPCVs say to me, "Hey! Mongolia, doesn't this weather make you homesick?" We joke and gasp and walk and giggle the entire way.

Keep this moment with you, I am thinking to myself. The lights, the drums, the laughing, the crowd, the screaming. The sea of multicolored flags waving in the bitter cold wind. Am I really here? I still can't believe that I got the e-mail, "Congratulations! You have been selected out of a lottery of nearly 1,000 people to march in the 2009 Inaugural Parade on behalf of the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Community!"

It is because of my Peace Corps service that I have made a ton of gifted and amazing life-long friends, (I think I am making some more right now while walking). Peace Corps is the reason that I was able to not only attend, but to afford an Ivy League Master's Degree at the Peace Corps Fellows Program at Teachers College. I was able to snag a competitive teaching position at one of the best schools in New York City for teaching English Language Learners because of Peace Corps. The Peace Corps Fellows Program even paired me up with my soul mate as a teaching partner! And now here I am, participating – not just watching on TV – but participating in one of the most historical and awe-inspiring events of my lifetime.

Oh! There he is, our beautiful nation's first black president. I am so proud. He is waving. I am elated. His face lights up when he sees the Peace Corps. Does he see me? Michelle looks so beautiful. He is waving at me. I hold my Mongolian flag up high and wave back at a smiling Barack Obama. I am smiling the most wide and delighted smile ever. I can't believe it just happened! I am trying to keep this blur of a moment with me always.

About the author: Dara Ross served in Mongolia from 2001-2003. She graduated from the TC Peace Corps Fellows Program in 2005. She works as a Humanities teacher at the Brooklyn International HS. For more Inauguration and Peace Corps stories check out Dara's blog: www.bayanjargal.blogspot.com



(Photo by Erica Burman, courtesy of NPCA)

Environmental Service-Learning in the South Bronx



Students interview environmental activist and community organizer Majora Carter (Photo by Nate Wight)

Honorary PCF Nate Wight (2003) Leads Students in Green-Roof Project in a South Bronx High School

By Barbara Sadick, PCFP Program Assistant

In the fight against environmental racism and the movement toward social justice in low-income neighborhoods, the South Bronx has emerged as fertile ground for progress thanks to activists like Majora Carter, a local resident and prominent advocate for environmental justice. Inspired by Carter's work, Nate Wight (Honorary PCFP 2003) and his Science Club students at the Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education High School are now at the forefront of urban "inner city greening." Thanks to the Science Club, Carter is now a hero to many youths like Melany Javier, a 16 year-old student, who has become increasingly aware of and concerned with environmental damage and wants to become a "green" architect. Motivated by what she's learned in her after-school science club, she feels an obligation to do her part to change the planet. "I want to get into a good college, become an architect, and design green buildings. I'll find someone who wants a green building."

Melany is one of 15 students who belong to Nate's science club, recently renamed The Energy Environment Green Science Club by its members. In 2008-2009, Nate and his students brought to the club renewed direction and a strong relationship with Sustainable South Bronx (SSBx), the grassroots environmental justice organization founded by Majora Carter. With knowledge, work, environmental awareness and concern, and a strong vision for education as a means to empowerment, Nate is inspiring students to take personal responsibility for minimizing the impact of energy-use on the environment. The club has thus raised its profile both in the school and the community with a sharpened focus on energy and environmental issues.

At the start of the school year, science club members went on a field trip to SSBx so they could see an example of a local grassroots organization devoted to eliminating environmental injustice. There they met

Majora Carter, who told Nate about a grant SSBx had secured from New York City Gardens to fund a school green-roof project in the South Bronx. As he explained to his students, a "green roof" is a rooftop which, by adding insulation and a reflective barrier made of plants and dirt, has environmental benefits. A green roof's dirt and plants absorb rainwater that greatly diminishes the building's contribution to urban runoff, playing its small part in minimizing the ecological impacts of urban sprawl. A green roof also adds to the local ecosystem, providing a natural habitat for birds and animals. In addition, it acts as a reflective barrier to decrease solar radiation, so that in warmer weather the heat flow throughout a building is decreased and less energy is spent. While in New York City green roofs can save 25%-30% in energy costs during the summer, few buildings have shown interest.

When Majora Carter learned of Nate and his students' effort to take a proactive stand on urban greening and environmental conservation, she decided to collaborate with them to make a green roof possible at Alfred E. Smith. Since then, from identifying the roof site, to negotiating with school system officials for approval of construction, to surveying the area, science club students have been involved in all beginning steps of the Green Roof Project. Much of the effort has become school-wide since Alfred E. Smith is a technical education school, and thus provides easy access to many of the occupational disciplines that would normally be used for a green roof project. "Engineering students helped to evaluate the roof, carpentry students worked on how to erect a garden perimeter, and drafting students digitized measurements on a drafting program. We talked with the club members about the social, environmental, and economic benefits of a green roof, and the project is generally viewed as a community garden on the roof," Wight proudly stated.

Although the project is in a holding pattern as it waits for the approval process to make its way through the Department of Education, Alfred E. Smith's carpentry students are busy constructing crates for the planting of community and vegetable gardens. "We're figuring out now what we want to plant. There will definitely be tomatoes," Hector Polanco, an 11th grader and a member of the club, excitedly explained.

In February, just before beginning to study electricity, the science club made a trip to the Climate Change Exhibit at the Museum of Natural History. Students spent most of the day looking at exhibits, filling out worksheets, and thinking about ways in which they can personally contribute to saving energy. Since that trip, the club has been exploring what electricity is, where it comes from, and how it is transformed from one state to another. Using the exhibit as a starting point, Nate has challenged the class to think about other, simpler ways in which they can personally decrease energy consumption. "Putting on a green roof is a big deal, but it's very easy to change a light bulb," he prompted them.

How, he wanted to know, could each of the students make a contribution to energy conservation? What small ways would add up to a large impact if all were encouraged to act? How can students participate in hands-on environmental training? Out of this push to consider their options, students have come up with

Continued on page 18



Top and Middle: Students prepare weather station to monitor climate conditions on the school roof. Bottom: Student interviews Adrian Benepe, Commissioner of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. (Photos by Nate Wight)

Service–Learning Projects with Young Students Link Literacy, Creativity, and Community–Building

By Barbara Sadick and Nicolas Stahelin

Each year, Peace Corps Fellows implement service-learning projects. The two projects described in this section encouraged young students to become interested in their communities, to link community and home in the classroom, to take pride in their languages, and to find their individual voices. Each project improved literacy skills, showed students how to share their thoughts and ideas, to see how words and pictures interact, and to revel in the accolades of audiences composed of parents, neighbors, friends, and teachers as they read, wrote, and publicly displayed their words and illustrations.

Editor's Note: If you would like to share your story with the Peace Corps Fellows Times, contact Nicolas at: stahelin@tc.edu.

If I were
President Obama...

Written and Illustrated by

Class 3-306

PS 1K-The Bergen

Brooklyn, New York





Si yo fuera el
Presidente Obama...

Written and Illustrated by

Class 1-207

PS 89, The Elmhurst School

Queens, New York

The cover of the bilingual read-along book, which features first and second graders' thoughts and illustrations about what they would do to improve the world if they were President Obama.

“If I were President Obama...”

“...I would lend my \$4.00 because I have a lot of money to share,” Jason, a first grade student from PS 89 (The Elmhurst School, Queens) read in Spanish. “...I would make a piggy bank for people that don’t have money. They could use it to buy food and clothes and also shelter to stay warm,” read Darien, this time a third grade student from PS 1K (The Bergen, Brooklyn). “If I were President Obama, I would make the world safer by stopping fights and telling people to stop littering...” read Fernando, another third grader from PS 1K.

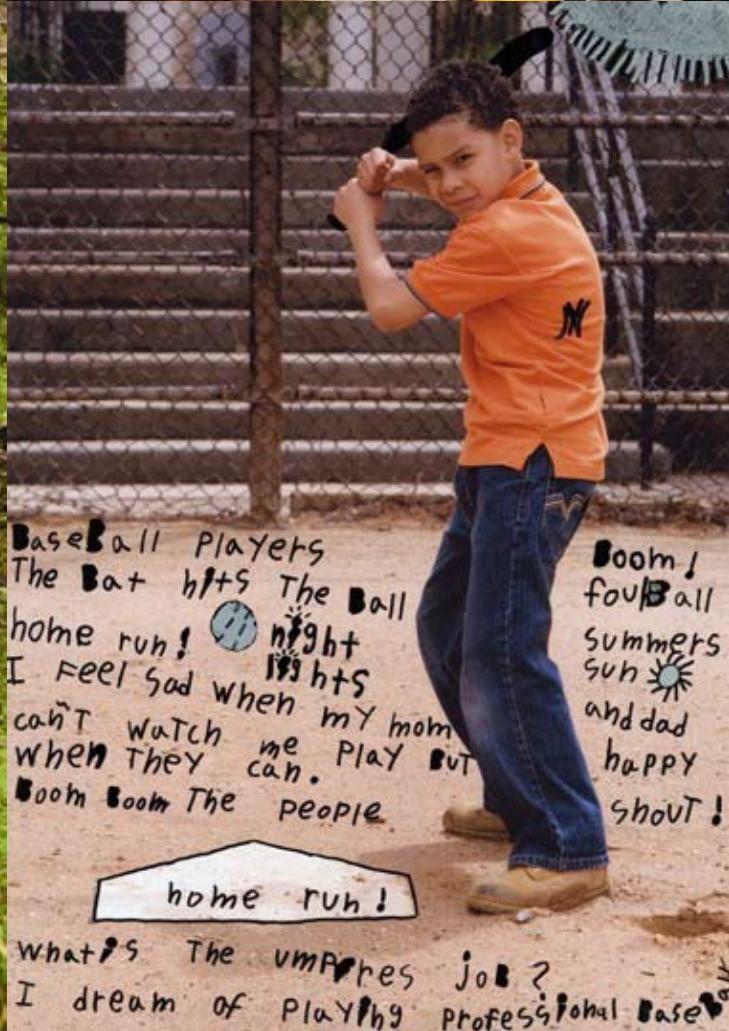
A total of 42 first and third grade students read such statements out loud at a service-learning celebration event held at Teachers College on May 29, 2009, sharing their hopes for the future with their families, friends, and colleagues. The event was a culmination of a bilingual service-learning project led by Rowena Castillo (PCFP 2007) and Adi Arad (PCFP 2007).



Rowena Castillo's first grade students from PS 89, The Elmhurst School, reading their pieces to the audience (photo by Nicolas Stahelin)

Rowena and Adi joined forces to collaborate on this project just after the election of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency in 2008. Using President Obama's election as a focal point, they held class discussions about history, reading, and social studies to explore social problems in the world and the role of the president. Writing in Spanish at PS 89 and in English at PS 1K, each student embarked on a writing project using the prompt: “If I were President Obama...”/ “Si yo fuera el Presidente Obama...” They also created a drawing illustrating what s/he would do if they were the president.

Together, Adi and Rowena planned and implemented the production of a read-along bilingual book that featured the original students' writing pieces, illustrations, and voice recordings on a CD to be listened to along with the book. These books will serve as a learning resource for current and future students at their respective schools. To celebrate this accomplishment and for the students and families to get to know each other, the two classrooms held a book-publishing event at Teachers College on the morning of Friday, May 29, 2009. The event brought together the students and parents of each class as the books were “released.”



Top left: Noah Ingber (PCFP '07), Katie DelaVaughn (PCFP '06), and Kristi Ley (PCFP '08) at the opening night of the Inwood POP exhibit. Top right: A proud father and his daughter at the exhibit, standing next to his portrait with his two sons. Bottom portraits: Students selected the locations where they were photographed and expressed the meaning of these places through poetry written directly on the photos. The photos were displayed both in the community and at a community exhibit. (Photos by Katie DelaVaughn)

Inwood POP: Portraits & Poetry

At Amistad Dual Language School in Inwood, three other Peace Corps Fellows collaborated on a project linking social studies, the arts, and literacy for first and second graders. Kristi Ley (PCFP 2008) and Noah Ingber (PCFP 2007), who both teach at Amistad, worked together with photographer and educator Katie DelaVaughn (PCFP 2006) who guided them through a Pedagogy of Photography project. Over the course of six months, Katie regularly spent time with Kristi, Noah, and their Amistad kids, photographing them at their favorite places in the neighborhood. After having their students reflect on the meaning that their favorite places had on their lives, the kids wrote poetry in Spanish or English to express themselves. After some rounds of editing, the kids then wrote poems all over the photo prints with Sharpies.

"Pedagogy of Photography, otherwise known as POP, is for students to improve their literacy skills through the media of photography, technology, and community service-learning," said Katie, who has been developing this model teaching through community and photography for ten years.

Some of the students' favorite places that were chosen include John's Doo-Wop Deli, the Dyckman Dominican Bakery, and Dunkin' Donuts, as well as a local church, hospital, parking lot, veterinarian, laundromat, and a local baseball field. Luis, a second grade student, was photographed sitting at his father's station at the barber shop. "When I walk in," he wrote, "everyone says me veo como mi papa [I look like my dad] and I feel proud." Another student, photographed sitting on the floor of an Amistad hallway, wrote, "I am always pondering who will be in my class! Nervous on the frightening first day / loud children like blue whales yelling."

The final products consisted of the prints with layers of poetry. They were exhibited on storefronts wherever the proprietors allowed it. Of such public nature, the project got great press. A Manhattan Times article (July 2, 2009) reported, "If you live or have been to Inwood recently, you've had to have seen them: adorable portraits of children, displayed in store windows all along Broadway and beyond." In a video interview with AfterEd TV, Noah reflected on the value of this experience: "I think this project was very important because I think it marries the community and the school together in a beautiful way. We bring the kids out into the community, and the kids bring the community back into the classroom, writing their poetry, and now we're going to bring it back to the community – it's just this cycle that's ongoing."

In the same video, Kristi also shared her thoughts, "My favorite part of the project was probably the creative process. A lot of thought and conversation went into creating that, and it was special to be able to sit with kids individually to do that and see them taking ownership over their final piece."

In the Manhattan Times piece, Katie further expressed the philosophy behind this project, "I believe this type of project praises youth voice and language diversity, instills community pride, and supports and gives thanks to local neighborhood shops and organizations," she said. "It is my hope that the stories and creativity of Inwood community's diverse children and their special places within the community are valued."

For more photographs of Inwood POP please visit: <http://pedagogyofphotography.ning.com/photo>. For the AfterEd video, visit: <http://aftered.tv/index.php?q=node/517> (fifth video from the top). If you are interested in bringing K-12 POP to your school or organization, contact Katie: info@katiedelavaughn.com



Portraits were exhibited at over 50 stores/organizations throughout the community and also at the Amistad Dual Language School auditorium on June 10, shown here (photo by Katie DelaVaughn)

He Crush Me

by Timothy Blackburn

"Mista, he crush me!" cried Moustapha in protest, bemoaning his brother's not so obvious verbal transgression. "You no hear him?"

"Moose, how could I hear him? I can't even hear myself think. How did you hear him over this noise?"

As usual, my head echoed like the inside of the Tower of Babel. Around a conference table we sat, Dominicans next to Guineans, noisily completing one of the many steps in our portfolio project. We worked in English, but we collaborated in myriad tongues from all over the world. Our class is many things. For instance, we are small, numbering only 8. We are close - we meet three times per day. We are many things, but quiet, we are not.

"And anyway, how could I possibly understand what he said to you?" I replied with temporary exasperation.

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. At this, Djan, Moustapha's twin brother adorned what my father would call a 's\$#t-eating grin'. Moustapha was incredulous and let his brother have it in Fula. I asked him if "crushing" his brother would solve the problem, and he sheepishly acquiesced. Then I said that I was sorry that I hadn't heard what his brother said, and that, no, of course it's not ok to "crush" a classmate, much less one's own brother, in class. As I turned to my gradebook to note a faux demerit next to Djan's name, I could barely contain the smile bursting across my face. "He crush me," oh, Moustapha, that's just hilarious. When I first heard him say this it took me days to figure out what he had meant. Once I did, it took me days to stop laughing. Now my wife Lisa and I use it at home.

He crush me = He cursed me

He crush me = Hilarious

Yes, our class is many things. Fun? Absolutely. Loud? Most definitely. I've never heard so much noise from 7 little people. Curious? Indeed, we study language through science and social studies with reckless abandon. Officially, we are an L1 Beginner ESL class, but this label does us no justice. There is no one in our class that is a "beginner" in language. My students struggle to articulate themselves in English, but each of them is multilingual. Last week I heard Aminata, a speaker of Fula, Susu, French, English, Arabic, and now, apparently, Spanish, ask her classmate Kilsy for a pen by saying, "Prestame tu pluma." I couldn't believe what I heard, not only has her English proficiency exploded this year, but she's now learning Spanish from her friends.

I pretend to have rules about language use in class. I should say, that I adhere to one religiously, "Don't say anything in class that I can't say." It's only fair. The others, however, I have had little success with, largely because I haven't the heart to enforce them. In the parlance of ESL teachers, the use of a student's L1 (a student's first language) is tantamount to linguistic heresy. I have met teachers that have little tolerance for L1 use in the classroom, squashing it like an insurrection whenever it rears its ugly head. Others hang cute signs over the door that mark the "English Only Zone" – all ye who enter shall speak English! I imagined my sign with a razor wire border and armed guards hanging from the tops of the letters.

I, like most teachers, have a list like the Dead Sea Scrolls of things that I'll eventually get around to completing. I always figured that I would create some sort of elaborate system (I have a penchant for spreadsheets) to track a student's use of English. Recently, however, I realized that I hadn't the energy to (1) reprimand a child for expressing herself and (2) make cute little signs and abide by the sovereign English-only rules of our class fiefdom. So, in the spirit of inclusion, plurality and common sense, our class adheres to a model that very much follows the same doctrine that a dear friend and language coach employed with me when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer and language learner in Guatemala. Practice patience. Try to say it first in English (or Spanish, as was the case in my experience), and if you're really frustrated, then, and only then, use your first language to make your point.

I tell my students that I too was a language student, and that I too had to really suffer to become bilingual. I remind them of the years of study and the occasional very embarrassing linguistic faux pas. During my first few weeks of service in Guatemala, my counterpart organization arranged a large meeting of all the teachers that I would be working with. I was nervous, as I had never spoken in front of such a large group in English, let alone Spanish. I introduced myself to the group and proceeded to tell them that I was "bien excitado" to be here with them. The bashful smiles and muffled chuckles indicated that this probably wasn't the best choice of words. Later I learned from my very patient tutor that I had basically said, "Hi my name is Tim and I'm very horny to be here." Not what I was going for. But you can bet that I never repeated that error.

Although our class is a perfect advert for Advil, my students are better for it because they can comfortably express themselves, knowing that what I want most from them is effort, not perfect English. The community we have built in our class is unique in its diversity and tolerance, and very much reflects the sense of unity espoused by both Peace Corps and our new president. In the short term, I know that our class will foster language development. However, in the long run, I hope that my students will regard their experience with their classmates and me as an invaluable cultural exchange.



About the author: Tim Blackburn (PCFP 2005) is an ESL Teacher at Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology. Check out our class blog – www.podcastingwithmrb.blogspot.com.

Continued from page 10, "Environmental Service Learning in the South Bronx"

the idea of performing energy audits. "We've measured kilowatt usage," Melany announced. "We've found out what appliances are used in a house and have measured the amount of energy being used by plugging the appliances into a watt meter. Then we tested different kinds of bulbs – incandescent, fluorescent, and energy saving light bulbs – and figured out how much energy is being used every month. We had to figure out how much energy we thought energy-saving bulbs would save, and then change the light bulbs and get the real figure."

While this year's two big projects have been the preparation for the green roof and energy audits, incorporating the concept of "greening" into their lives has become an ongoing process. Every morning, Melany makes daily announcements in which she gives a tip on one way to save energy. This week, she recommended that students use cloth handkerchiefs when they have a cold instead of using paper, so as to lessen the impact on forests. On Earth Day, all students were asked to wear green in solidarity with environmental conservation. In addition to wearing green, Hector handed out cards containing environmental tips.

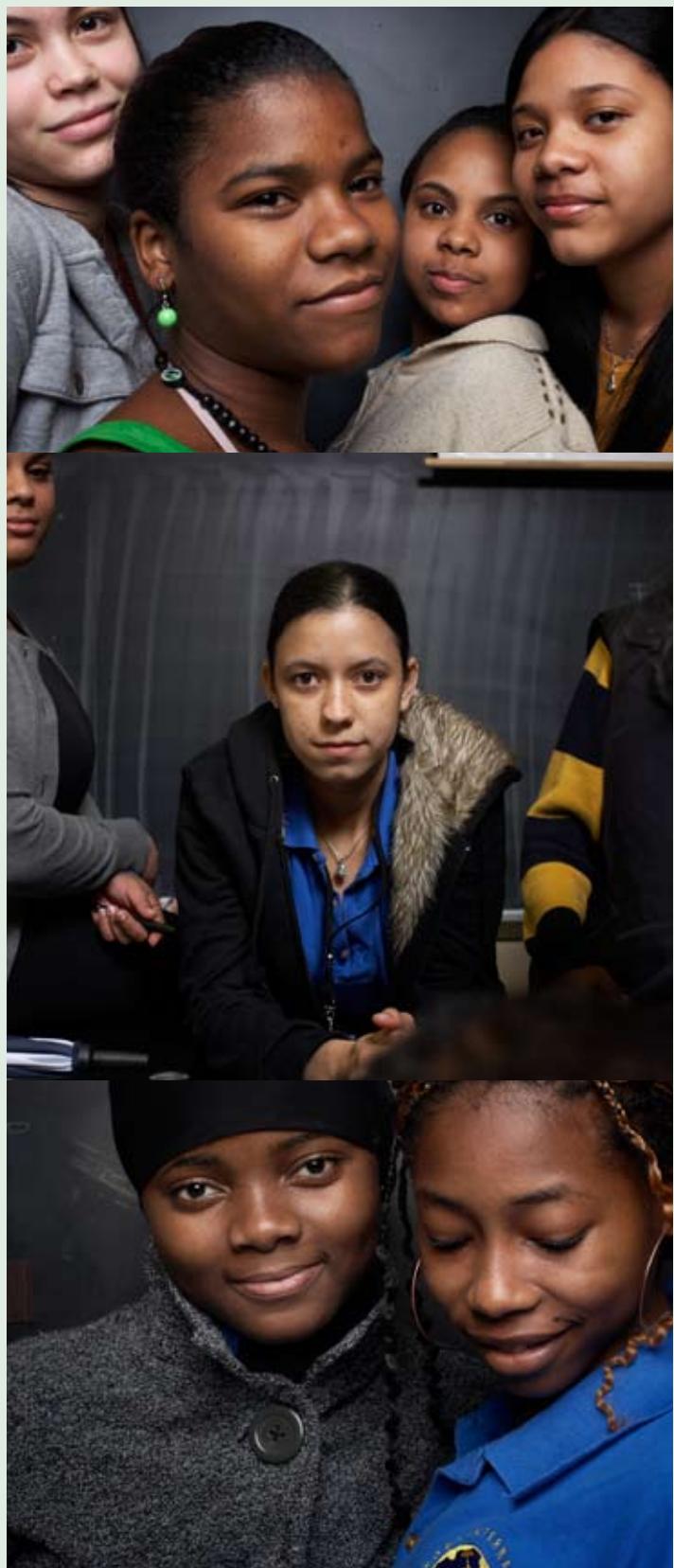
"We're starting a petition to sign the pledge to only throw paper in the blue bins," explained Hector. "So far, I have 34 signatures from students and 13 from teachers." He elaborated on other personal initiatives: "When I brush my teeth I don't leave the water on, and I don't keep my lights on as much."

Nate was hired at Alfred E. Smith while finishing his Master's degree in Speech and Language Pathology at Teachers College. His involvement with the science club mirrors his Peace Corps service in a village of 250 people located five hours from San Jose de Ocoa, in the Dominican Republic. There he worked in organic agriculture, helping to build community gardens and working with village women to build small-scale organic plots. Upon completion of his Peace Corps service, Nate traveled for a year in Central America before returning to the United States to live and work in New York. A Peace Corps baby, Nate is a son of parents who married in 1979, joined the Peace Corps, and left together to serve as teachers for a year in Turkey and two years in Barbados. Twenty years later, Nate has brought his experience and commitment to one of New York City's toughest neighborhoods, training youth to take on some of the most pressing social and environmental challenges.

Editor's Note: If you would like to share your story with the Peace Corps Fellows Times, contact Nicolas at: stahelin@tc.edu.

Photo Project with Mike McGregor

The Peace Corps Fellows Program collaborated with pro-photographer Mike to create new photos of our Fellows and their students. Students were given a presentation on the art and profession of photography, followed by creative photo-shoots. Here are a few of the wonderful portraits that were taken.





Top: Wanda Dingman (PCF '96) and students at Marble Hill High School for International Studies. Middle: Rachel Blair (PCF '07) and students at Bronx International High School (BxIHS). Bottom-left: Heather Bush (PCF '07) and students at BxIHS; Bottom-right: Emily Giles (PCF '07) in science lab at BxIHS. Opposite page: More portraits of students at BxIHS. (photos by Mike McGregor)



Peace Corps Fellows BBQ 2009

for more photos visit: www.tc.edu/pcfellows



Photos by Francis Lee