

Cambridge College: A Lasting Effect on Education

By Kimberly Dunbar

Every summer, students from across the United States gather at Cambridge College's summer campus in Massachusetts for the National Institute for Teaching Excellence (NITE) program. However, there are two students who travel a little farther for their education.

Idamay P. Denny, the Deputy Chief Education Officer of the Ministry of Education, and Sylvia Henry, a Senior Education Officer for the Ministry of Education in Barbados, first attended the NITE program in 2005. After receiving their Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (CAGS) in February 2007, the women continued on to Cambridge College's Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. This summer, they will be in Massachusetts finishing their dissertations and preparing to defend their work in July 2008.

"When I attended NITE for the first time, I thought that I was at the zenith of my career," said Denny. "As much as I thought I had developed, I realized I still had a long way to go in terms of growth. My experiences were nothing compared to what they were about to become," she added. Denny said that she has grown tremendously since her first Cambridge College experience because of her exposure to a number of colleagues from different places and education systems. "I have heard and seen how these systems operate and have been exposed to instructors with myriad experiences. These two things came together to shape my perspective and show me how I can develop and how I can help those leading the education system in Barbados," she added.

Denny said that her career goal is to make an educational contribution to the children of Barbados. Denny grew up in a rural neighborhood with working class parents and credits education for being where she is today. "I feel a very strong responsibility to help a lot of other children to reach where I have reached. My passion is to make a difference and to get the children of Barbados to a point where, when my colleagues and I reach old age, we can be comfortable that our country is in the hands of people capable of leading us," she said.

Denny has already put her Cambridge College experiences and education to good use. "An issue that is critical for both American and Barbadian educators is the underachievement of many of our students, especially male students," said Denny. While the increase in television and video games are symptoms of this trend, Denny and her colleagues are trying to uncover the underlying causes in hopes of finding a solution. Last summer, Denny and her NITE colleagues worked together and developed a project focused on helping boys to become interested in reading. Denny shared the plan with a number of Barbadian principals who have reported positive results and an increased interest shown by the boys in their schoolwork.

"One of the things I have recognized is that we are asking a lot of our principals who are guiding education in Barbados," said Denny. "We are asking them to take on all the instructional as well as the organizational aspects of education but we are not giving them the exposure they need in order to do those things well. I believe we have to give those principals the experiences that are required, those experiences that I have learned in the NITE program, so that they can really make a difference in the education of our children."

Drawing again upon her NITE experience, Denny has started a collaborative network among principals where information is shared and they can collectively learn from each other. “The most significant thing I learned is that when you join with other people what you know multiplies exponentially,” said Denny. “I have learned that together you can make a strong difference.”

Denny said that NITE is not easy, but once an individual is engaged in the program his or her horizons are opened so broadly that he or she will be able to look at education from a totally different perspective. “This has been a transforming experience. I cannot look at education the same way I looked at it pre-2005, even though I thought I had a really good perspective of how education in Barbados should be,” said Denny. “This program has given me an overarching lens that allows me to see where we need to be. I have learned from this program that that system cannot be transformed unless those people leading it are themselves first transformed. I believe that my involvement in the program has certainly given me the perspective to help people begin to transform themselves so that they can transform the system.”