Visiting Scholar Doria Daniels Shares Cross-Cultural Research

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In October 2014, Doria Daniels, professor of educational psychology at South Africa's Stellenbosch University, joined the College of Education as a visiting scholar. For one month, Daniels lent her expertise in visual-based research to the DePaul community, delivering guest lectures, attending conferences with doctoral candidates and working with faculty and students from across the university. This visit marked the latest collaboration between Daniels and Karen Monkman, professor of educational policy studies and research at DePaul.

“I have a small grant from the National Research Foundation in South Africa to do research on how parents support their children in their academic engagement in schools,” explains Daniels, who discussed this research while at DePaul. In her pilot study, Daniels examined Somali families, building upon Monkman’s research with immigrants. “Oftentimes, when you’re looking at the literature, they are talking about parent engagement based on the school’s agenda,” Daniels reveals. “It is a discourse that is about how parents can support the school, and seldom about what the parents can bring to that environment.”

Daniels and Monkman believe that schools should broaden their understanding of parent engagement as more than homework help, fundraising and volunteer efforts. “Not all parents have the resources to support children in the ways that schools value,” asserts Daniels. “Because of the schools’ narrow way of engaging parents, some may look as if they aren’t caring or doing enough, whereas in actual fact, they do care and support their children, only it is in ways the school hasn’t talked about.”

Their initial literature review supported this hypothesis, and Daniels and Monkman have begun to set the theoretical framework of their larger argument. They speculate that once the framework is established, their research will apply to parent engagement on a global level, and Daniels hopes to integrate more visual resources to increase comprehension across language and cultural divides. “Ethnic and linguistic minorities are often being asked to leave their own traditions at the door,” says Daniels. “The visual is especially useful as a research tool to help minorities to better engage linguistically and could serve as a bridge between the researcher and the participants during interviews.”

Daniels was impressed by her experience at DePaul. “Students are taking ownership of their education,” she says. “They are being valued as contributors, and that for me is very powerful.” Daniels advocates for similar experiential learning opportunities in her own courses at Stellenbosch.

“The classroom isn’t the only place where people learn,” she stresses. “By sending students out into the community and exposing them to real-world situations, you equip the students to cope with the challenges that their future careers hold for them.”

Monkman enjoyed having Daniels at the college. “It has been intellectually stimulating for me, as it is always good to have someone involved in similar work to discuss things with in more depth,” she says. “Some of my peers and students are still talking about visual methods, so she has made a lasting impact.”