



NEWS

May 2011

Testimonies of resilience and commitment to improving education

Action Research for School Leaders

An interactive symposium was held in May at the Missionvale Conference Centre to herald the culmination of the *DG Murray Integrated School Development & Improvement Project*. Presented by school leaders from nine of the participating schools in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan area, delegates had the opportunity to interact with these school leaders as they presented their accounts of how they improved specific aspects of school functionality through the process of action research. In presenting their stories, these school leaders highlighted their own learning's about school leadership.

This project aimed at helping school leaders learn how to imagine and accomplish a dream that they have for their school through the adoption of an *action research* approach. As constant improvement and striving towards excellence undergirds the actions of successful schools and school leaders, the participants in this project worked together with their school community to attempt to address specific issues that were impeding the delivery of quality education in their schools.

Project leader, Prof Lesley Wood, and three mentors (Randall Grebe, Brian Walters and Viv England) helped them to operationalise the values of inclusion, people-centredness, democracy, social justice, compassion and respect in their school projects. Their role was one of facilitation and to challenge their thinking during the process.

The focus in the projects was not on classroom activity and learning per se, but on improving the many social factors that impinge on education in South Africa.



Project leader, Prof Lesley Wood (centre) and mentor, Mr Viv England (back right) pictured with project participants from Malabar Primary School



Bead work products made by learners at Machiu Primary School as part of their project

The topics chosen by the school teams covered an interesting range of issues: improving safety at school (Malabar and Kama); addressing teenage pregnancy (Gelvandale); trying to instil a culture of reading (St James); reducing late-coming (Woolhope); improving parental involvement (Dower); extending participation in extra mural activities (Sapphire); providing skills development for children with barriers to learning (Machiu); and improving the moral climate of the school (Charles Duna).

"... mere text cannot encapsulate the profound shifts that took place in the participants on a cognitive and affective level. The growth in passion, commitment, capacity for critical self-reflection and motivation were evident to us as the facilitating team. At our regular sessions we were amazed by the learning that was taking place and the passion with which the participating leaders took the projects forward" (Prof Lesley Wood)



Ms Di Parker (left) presented on the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2011-2025)* at the recently held Faculty Board Meeting. She is pictured here with Executive Dean, Prof Denise Zinn.

B Ed FET Mathematics Upgrading Project in Sasolburg comes to an end

Cooperative learning trumps for graduates

The Faculty of Education, in conjunction with the Science faculty, responded to the crisis in Mathematics education at schools level, and more specifically at FET level, by creating a B Ed Upgrading degree aimed at Maths teachers, mostly with only a Teaching diploma, who were teaching at FET level. The accepted minimum subject knowledge for such teachers is second year level Mathematics together with all the educational subjects deemed necessary to teach at this level. Over the years, this three-year long course was offered not only in Port Elizabeth but in places like Durban, Polokwane, Botshabelo, Mthatha, Virginia, Tsomo, Newcastle and Sasolburg.

The petroleum giant, SASOL, became very concerned at the standard of Mathematics and Science teaching in the immediate vicinity of Sasolburg, the site of one of their major plants, as they felt that they needed to draw properly qualified learners from the surrounds. They approached the Faculty of Education at the NMMU through the *Maths Centre* in Johannesburg and an agreement was reached.

The programme contact sessions involved two kinds of attendance. One was Saturday classes involving three Saturday sessions per month. The other format was block attendance, mainly for the pure Maths modules, during school holidays. The courses were all offered in the well-equipped SASOL Maths & Science Centre, Boitjorison.

Co-operative learning is one of the buzz-words in modern teaching methodology and the SASOL group illustrated this methodology beautifully. During the holiday contact sessions they wrote tutorial tests on a daily basis, mainly on problems that covered the work of the previous day. When the lecturer left after a tough 8-hour session they would reconvene to tackle the problems. Usually one of the teachers, like Mr Guma, would take the lead. He even tutored students from other centres who were repeating – a truly amazing man.

Mr Sibbusiso Luvuno, the SASOL co-ordinator for Maths & Science Education, is another amazing personality. He not only co-ordinated the course in Sasolburg but also assisted as a tutor. Having an Honours degree in Maths certainly helped in this regard. All this contributed to a wonderful *esprit de corp*. When the going gets tough, which it invariably does in a course of this nature, it is very important that individuals are supported by the group.

After three years the hard work was rewarded. Seventeen students graduated on 15 April 2011 and remaining 7 should graduate next year. Most of the graduates saw their *alma mater* for the first time at the graduation ceremony! They were immensely proud of themselves and also grateful for having had the opportunity. Dr Lyn Webb, co-ordinator of the B Ed (FET) Upgrading programme, organized a wonderful dinner at Madibaz after the ceremony. Faculty of Education Dean, Prof Denise Zinn, spoke as well as Mr Guma. It was a joyous, touching affair.

SASOL also added their thank you to the project by hosting a function for the graduates, as well as Lyn Webb and myself, at the Sasolburg headquarters. They laid out a sumptuous feast. Dr Zwane, director of Sasol Corporate Investment, heaped praise on the NMMU for what it had done for the students.



The graduates pictured with Mr Sibbusiso Luvuno (back left) and Mr Flip Potgieter (back right).

Although the era of organizing and co-ordinating BEd FET Upgrading Mathematics is over, it has not finally ended as there are still a few “agterosse” that have to be herded into the “kraal” in Sasolburg. Then, we can put up our feet and reflect on a job well done! (Flip Potgieter)

Open Day 2011



Open Day 2011 (PE) at the Faculty of Education stall... Marilyn, Raj, Muriel, Les and Nokhanyo don their 'For a Better U' t-shirts and prepare to assist learners and parents



Robin talks through the FP programme with an enquiring learner



Carol takes a learner and her mom through the B Ed programme options

Service Learning Stars

Roelof Steyl – B Ed FET (George)

The B Ed (FET) 1st years in George are completing their Service Learning this month. Paddy Esselaar (lecturer) was invited to attend a show at Emmaus, a home where adult mentally- or physically-disabled people can find employment and accommodation, which was being organised by one of the students volunteering there.

The student, Roelof Steyl, organised a “production” to elect “Miss Glamorous” from the home’s residents. Participants were taken through basic training to learn the ‘catwalk’ and, when some could not remember what to do; he placed them in charge of costumes, make up, helpers, etc... Everyone was involved! The excitement tangible.

The production was thoroughly enjoyed by both the residents and staff – even staff not on duty that day arrived to watch and share in the happiness of the production. In-house psychologist, Ronette de Beer, raved about Roelof’s creativity and enthusiasm, as well as his sensitivity towards the residents.



Roelof (back left) with judges (back row) and the 3 finalists (front row)

Jason Field – B Ed FET (PE)

Jason undertook his 1st year service learning programme at Cheshire Home in Summerstrand. To conclude his time at the home, he organised a beach walk and mini-concert for the residents. He rustled up volunteers from amongst his friends and family to assist 15 residents in getting down to the beach front – the weather played along as it was a beautiful summer’s day. The total walk was about two hours, “It was very quiet on this day, but still very hot,



Residents and volunteers soak up some sun at the PE beach front

which made it quite ideal”. Upon their return to Cheshire Home, residents and staff were treated to the soothing sounds of an African Christian band who Jason had asked to play. They were a great success! Jason managed to get the caregivers and nurses to sing an item, which was enjoyed by all.

Jason says, “I think that in all the time I spent at Cheshire Homes, I was the biggest one to gain out of it, not just the residents whom I helped. This is true as I have gained a new understanding about values/moral/principles which are not taught, things which you keep inside of yourself. They are meant for active demonstration or they are just words of no value.”

BRIEFS

Research Seminar Series 2011



Dr Mathabo Khau presented at May’s research seminar. Her topic “*Researching sensitive and taboo topics: Methodological challenges and innovations*” discussed

her journey into the lives of Basotho women science teachers who teach sexuality education in rural schools. It highlighted the challenges posed by the research journey for a researcher studying sensitive topics, more specifically in gaining and maintaining access in the field, dealing with emotions, cultural and gendered norms, as well as innovative ways of making a difference in the field.

Strengthening international ties



Visitors from the Dominican University of California pictured with faculty staff during their recent visit to the NMMU and Faculty of Education.

Bizana action research projects

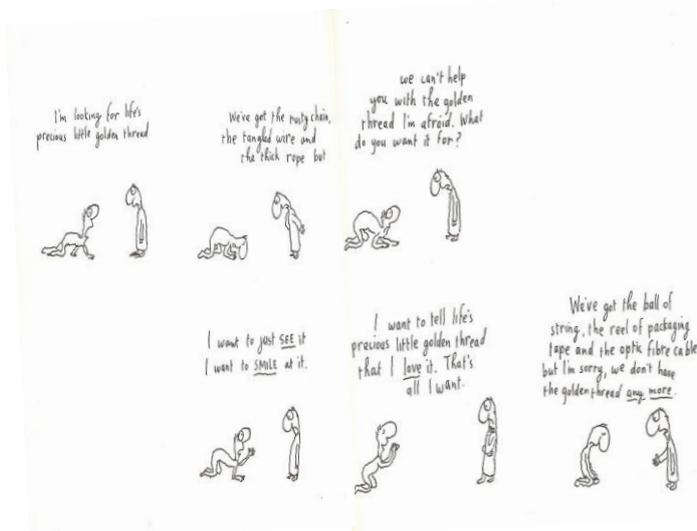
Dr Logan Athiemoolam and Mr Joe Slingers (a part-time lecturer) visited the Bizana off campus site this month. One of the reasons for their trip was to observe the presentations by students of their action research projects (within the ACE SL programme). Logan was pleased to report that the students’ presentations were of a very high standard. *Well done!*

Doctoral celebrations



New staff doctorates celebrate with their supervisors and faculty colleagues at a recently held function that aimed to highlight the academic achievements of these colleagues as well as acknowledge the contribution of their supervisors. *From right:* Prof Denise Zinn (Dean), Dr Issa Badenhorst, Dr Les Meiring, Prof Prakash Singh, Dr Pam Austin, Dr Chris Dali, Prof Paul Webb, Dr Percy Sepeng, Prof Bill Holderness, Dr Marius Botha and Dr Christo Pienaar.

Notice The final workshop of the Revisioning Process, which constituted the first phase of the Faculty's transformation journey, is scheduled for **7 and 8 June** at the VIP Lounge (Missionvale Campus). Part of the focus of the workshop will be to envision the next phase of the journey, which will be about the process of renewal of the curriculum and living into and sustaining the new Vision, Mission and Pedagogy of the Faculty.



Social briefs

7th Two Oceans marathon!

This year **Vernon** (CERTI) completed his 7th 56km Two Oceans marathon, in 5:57.

Vernon also took part in the 5km walk on the Friday with his wife, Leanne, their two sons and his mom-in-law (see photo) - having convinced the family that running and walking is the ultimate fitness experience!



Our Singing Sensations!



From left: Helena, Marilyn and Logan show off their musical talents at the recently held Staff Variety Concert. Hugh is in the background playing the piano. They had the audience singing along with them! Well done colleagues.

Sporting success

The NMMU Rowing Club participated at the recent South African Rowing Championships and **Benji Ekron** (4th year B Ed FET student) was part of the team who won the Schweinfort Trophy in the Men's B4x section in a time of 7:07.82 over 2000m.



Winners of the gold medal are (from left to right) Benji Ekron, Jason Taylor, Brad Taylor and Andrew Dunn