

# NEWS

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Special Edition

The continuation of our Re-Visioning Journey

## Curriculum Renewal

Denise Zinn, Executive Dean Faculty of Education, NMMU

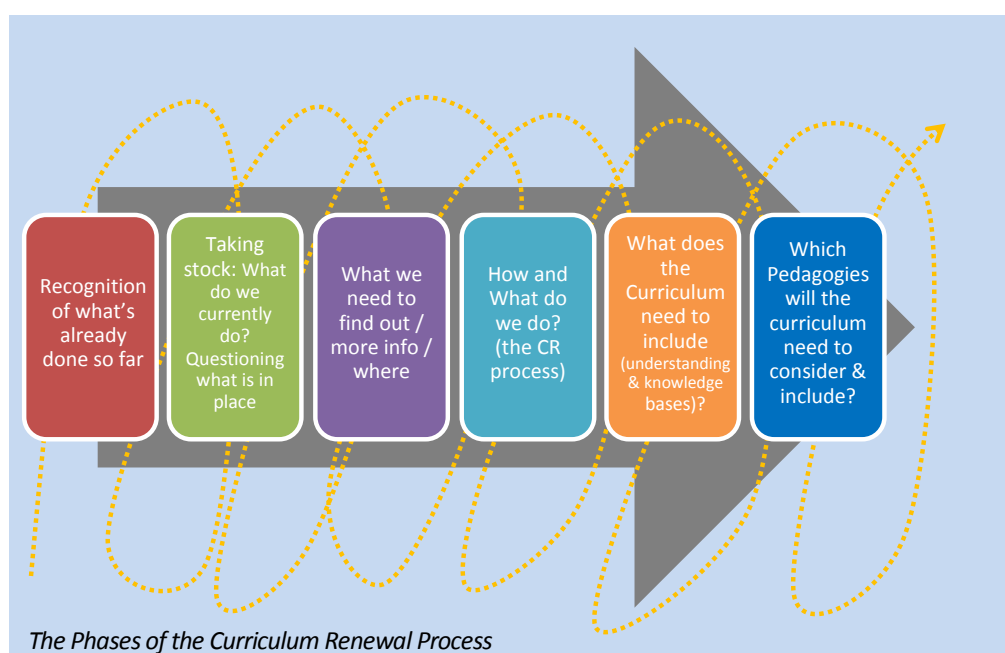
In a big undertaking such as the 'curriculum renewal' of a faculty's programmes, it is almost always linked to some significant initiating stimulus, something that spurs one into the action of re-viewing and re-thinking what we do and why. For the Faculty of Education there were several such catalytic 'spurs'. The most significant of these was a 2-yr process which we called our 'Re-visioning Journey,' culminating in a new Faculty Vision and Mission. Although there were also imperatives from 'outside', like the new HEQF and the new Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ), it was the internal imperative provided by our new Vision and Mission that got us going. The Re-Visioning Journey was a process in which the majority of faculty were involved in thinking about our purpose as faculty, the big question of 'why we are here', our *raison d'être*, and how that should inform what we offered as our curriculum.

It meant taking a hard long look at ourselves, at where we came from, as human beings, as individuals, as a faculty and university, as a profession, and at what was required of us as citizens of a developing democracy. After two years of thinking together, having collegial and courageous conversations, this is what we collectively crafted as our Vision and Mission:

**Vision: To be a dynamic community of teachers, leaders and scholars in education, committed to creating a vibrant, socially just and democratic society.**

**Mission: We are committed to cultivating passionate, engaged, knowledgeable, effective, and compassionate teachers, researchers, and leaders who are critical thinkers, and agents of hope, change, and social justice.**

**We aim to achieve this through practicing humanizing pedagogies, establishing collaborative partnerships with relevant stakeholders, particularly students, schools, communities, alumni, and governments, using future-oriented technologies creatively, and bringing the classroom into the world and the world into the classroom.**



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Each of the words, phrases, and statements in this Vision and Mission have been deliberated upon deeply and collectively. They hold meanings that require us to act, and enact our understanding of these ideas. The curriculum the faculty offers will be a significant 'showing' or manifestation of how we live our mission and vision.

Why is this important for us a Faculty? Steve Biko, almost four decades ago, stated, *"Education and development are seeds one to the other: the key is the humanisation of schools and the development of a comprehensive curriculum based on the worth of the whole individual"*. Along similar lines, Parker Palmer asks :

*How can higher education become a more multidimensional enterprise, one that draws on the full range of human capacities for knowing, teaching, and learning; that bridges the gaps between the disciplines; that forges stronger links between the knowing world, and living creatively in it, in solitude and community? (p.2)*

This question also informs our sense of purpose in the Faculty of Education. It has to join with the responsibility we have to shape a future generation of teachers, such as those we envision. And it is in our curriculum that we need to locate our aspirations and endeavours in this regard. This requires that we view curriculum not simply in its narrowest sense of the 'content' or syllabi of what we teach in the various programmes and modules in the faculty. Our 'definition' and enactment of curriculum has to allow for explicit interrogation of our ideological and philosophical orientations, of the content of our curricula, of its coherence, its pedagogy and assessment methodologies, of the environments we create for teaching and learning, and of its outcomes – the teachers we 'cultivate'. Are they able to take their place in the majority of schools that await their service? Are they ready to serve the majority and the conditions in which they need to work, committed to the education of children no matter their socio-economic conditions, their colour, creed or gender?

It is a tall order we are setting ourselves as teachers of teachers, and for the teachers we teach. Most important is the responsibility we have as a faculty that develops, nurtures, cultivates good teaching and learning, which is part of a profession which holds the development of children, human beings, and thus the future, in our hands. We know it will be an ongoing project, and inevitably, a never-ending project in response to ever-changing conditions. Crain Soudien, in a challenging essay entitled "Crafting a progressive politics of education" (2012) calls upon us "to develop the capacity to see every situation in which we are called upon to teach, to foster learning, as a moment of deep inquiry." This is the challenge of curriculum renewal. And in the process we will be building ourselves as educators, and as human beings who are part of a collective working for the public good.

### **Abakhwezeli (isiXhosa for Fire Stokers)**



The "CR Driving Team or Abakhwezeli" (keepers/stokers of the fire): from left Dalene Swanson (SERE), Kathija Adam (SCPD), Denise Zinn (Dean), Alette Delport (SCPD and who stood in for Denise during her sabbatical) and Heloise Sathorar (SITE).

Their main role being to *keep things movin'* during the process, whilst keeping in mind and reminding colleagues of the overall principle for our curriculum renewal:

- Coherence
- Identified strands must link with each other
- All must fit together into a coherent whole 'container'
- We must be able to make this explicit at the beginning of each programme, in all our brochures, how we advocate for our programmes to the world

## B Ed Honours team *breaking bread* together

Dr Kathija Adam, HoP B Ed Honours

Gathering over a meal is one of the most ancient forms of community process, as people sharing food appreciate each other at a profound level. Nourished bodies and relationships pave the way for better collaboration and higher quality work. By meeting core biological needs, like eating a container for work at a deeper level is created. This primate food-sharing behaviour, with deep biological roots in signalling group belonging and familiarity set the scene for pre-retreat discussions in the Honours team.

Faculty teaching in the B.Ed Honours programme cooked and ate together before engaging in deliberations about the programme. The unique nature of the programme means that faculty teach in cycles and at times that restrict the team from often getting together as a whole, hence the expression “this is the first time we’re all together in the same room.” It was also the first time that most faculty teaching on the programme had the opportunity to see the programme as a whole and engage with colleagues on how their modules contributed to the programme as a whole.

The discussions that emerged related to:

- The purpose of a B.Ed Honours programme and how the current curriculum map relates to it;
- The function of the core modules and whether the present ones are appropriate for their function;
- Questions around the Research in Education module functioning as a module independent of the other modules yet there were close connections in terms of the assessments in the various modules;
- The mode of delivery and suitability of the programme for off-campus centres;
- The content of the science and mathematics modules were identified as more classroom or practitioner focused rather than research focused;
- The three different streams versus a generic honours programme;
- The high dependence on textbooks as a resource;
- Using resources and activities to generate critical thinkers who are able to think deeply and debate contemporary issues in education rather than subject specialists; etc.

The act of “breaking bread” facilitated a cohesion that clearly extended beyond as smaller groups from the team met over coffee in the weeks leading up to the retreat on the 11/12 June 2012 to further deliberate.



*Although, initially, I felt a bit overwhelmed when assuming the ‘acting chief fire stoker’ role during the dean’s sabbatical, last term soon turned out to be a most exciting, enriching and unique time in my academic career, holding much promise for the future. Reflecting on our CR activities during May and June, I recall several personal ‘aha’ moments – which not only stoked the CR fire, but also stoked the fire in my heart! This fire in my heart is still burning, thanks to all my colleagues’ continued explicit enthusiasm, engagement and commitment to this process, which in most ways, require of us to enter unknown territory. The modesty, vulnerability, honesty and eagerness to learn with which we all travel together, making the road as we go, attest to the commitment to, collectively, design curriculums that will be appropriate for our unique South African contexts and improve the quality of education in our schools. What a privilege to be travelling on such an exciting academic, as well as personal journey!*

Prof Alette Delpont



Curriculum Renewal ... it may be a prickly issue but we are in this together

## Continuing the conversations in the ITE School

Heloise Sathorar, HoP B Ed FET

From early morning building 06 was a bustle of energy with bright eyed and bushy tailed admin staff running around making sure that the designated venues were donned with a tablecloth, flowers and candle. To everyone's surprise when they arrived they received a file, notepad, pen, NMMU license disk sticker and A CACTUS! This set the tone for the rest of the day as we were aware that staff just finished a very long and busy first semester and we wanted them to relax and participate in full.

Tulsi welcomed all to the workshop and Heloise, in true "Thinking Environment" style, started the day with a round asking: "As we start this day long workshop what is the first thought that comes to mind(how do you feel) about Curriculum Renewal?" The most common answers from the group was 'anxious' and 'excitement' ... evidence of the expectations from the day.

We then broke into programme teams where the HOP's used programme diagrams to explain the current programme structures to their teams. The key questions for this session were: "What is the central purpose of each of the programmes and whether a golden thread can be identified in the programmes?"

During morning tea you could sense an air of excitement as colleagues eagerly shared with each other what had transpired in their programme teams. Staff was also given the opportunity to show their commitment to CR by placing their thumbprint or lip print on a CR poster. This gave rise to many a fun memory!

After tea we broke into module\specialization groups for reflection and discussion on how each module fits into the current programme. Module co-ordinators shared what they thought worked in the modules and what they would change. Lunch was another special affair as we were treated to a scrumptious meal in a fine dining setting thanks to our delightful admin staff.

We continued with module group discussions across the programmes and concluded with a general session focusing on Teaching Practice. Heated debate during this session indicates the need for change to our current TP model. Although the day was long it was characterised by many fruitful discussions. During the final round people articulated their gratitude for the rich discussions, for insights gained as well as expressing a sense of hopefulness for future! A Cheese & Wine function was enjoyed by all who attended!



### Lessons from the humble Cactus...

1. Let us emulate the resilience of a cactus during curriculum renewal.
2. Curriculum renewal may be prickly problem...but we are in this together!
3. Curriculum Renewal might be a thorny topic, but let's continue the conversation...
4. Let's stay committed to Curriculum Renewal, because the result will be like flowers in the desert after rain...

# Getting Creative with Curriculum Renewal

Prof Bill Holderness and Dr Kathija Adam

Given only two days, how do you get a large Faculty of Education to become acquainted with their all their current programmes and discuss a number of elaborate complex curriculum designs and implementation issues?

The venue chosen was Thatchwoods, on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth, and the curricula considered were the four-year B.Ed degree programmes (Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Further Education and Training Phase), as well as the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGCE) and the B.Ed Honours programmes. It was intended, amongst other things, that by the end of the two days colleagues would have a better understanding of the current design and structure of the various programmes, discover potential cross-curricula linkages and articulations and be better informed and equipped to climb the mountain of Curriculum Renewal that lies ahead. The background to this looming mountain or 'new horizon opportunity' are the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) and the Faculty's re-visioning journey, termed the 'Groundation' (Sauls, 2011). How was this was this all to be achieved?

Given the time constraints, an expected response would be to use efficient 'direct instruction,' to present a number of slick explanations, supported by PowerPoint slide shows. However, we decided to take a very different route. With one of its priorities being to promote and practise a 'humanising pedagogy', the *Abakhwezeli* (isiXhosa for Fire Stokers) and various Programme teams collaborated in planning two days of active problem-solving and animated discussions, interwoven with 'creativity'.

A creative dimension featured throughout in 'fun-developmental' ways to build an ethos of supportive collaboration. Examples of this were in the way in which staff were familiarised with the "architectural constructions and inner furnishings" (Lynn Webb) of the various complex programmes. These included requiring colleagues to build a four-level

brick wall in which each of the A4 pages distributed represented a brick in that edifice. Prompted by the picture of this large visual aid, delegates were able to have a 'clearer picture' of how all the components fitted together with their respective credit weightings. They could also consider other possible arrangements of the bricks, or even consider whether a complete demolition and re-building would be the better way to go. Another creative strategy involved using packs of playing cards in a *survivor-style* challenge (see pg 5) whereby teams had to construct the 'tallest edifice', in which the cards represented modules currently presented at the four year-levels of the current PGCE curriculum.



At the midway mark, before leaving for home on the afternoon of Day 1, colleagues walked to a barn where they had an opportunity to put their hand to creating a painted piece of a giant jigsaw that will ultimately be mounted at the Faculty to represent the role each colleague plays in making possible a bigger and beautiful picture.



A combination of innovative approaches was also applied in introducing staff to the B.Ed Hons programme. These activities occurred outdoors – with 5 groups of 8-10 colleagues, sitting on blankets, feeling the sun, breathing the chilly wind, recognising how challenging it must be for many outdoor school classes that daily brave the elements for an education. "Where's the tree?" asked Deon Swartz, amused at the chosen theme. To enable colleagues to learn about the B.Ed Hons programme, which tends to happen at Missionvale Campus and various off campus centres, a combination of treasure hunting and co-operative learning (jigsaw method) was used. Each team set off to find a hidden B.Ed Hons Curriculum Map by solving a set of cryptic clues compiled by the Head of Programme (Kathija Adam). Once the 5 maps had been found and spread out on the grass, colleagues helped each other to find answers to a set of 20 curriculum questions, through various means at their disposal. The 5 Home Teams were helped by B.Ed Hons lecturers in their groups to become experts on particular modules. Then, after being interrupted by a loud whistle, these colleagues, now experts in their respective modules, re-grouped with colleagues from other groups to pool their new-found knowledge, thus building a comprehensive picture and understanding of the B.Ed Hon curriculum. An informed and exploratory 'question & answer' session was then held with the presenters of the B.Ed Hons programme. The final creative touch was to express a summary and vote of thanks in a sing-a-long chorus - adapted from an old Gilbert and Sullivan chorus reworded by Bill Holderness.

At the end of the retreat, faculty reported feeling part of a cohesive team, energised, stimulated and more importantly better informed about the various programmes. An excellent place to be for the Curriculum Renewal process ahead.



# Classroom Under A Tree

Dr Kathija Adam, HoP B Ed Honours

The B.Ed Honours team facilitated an experience that had colleagues walking in the shoes of teachers who have to teach under a tree. Given that this teaching environment is most often viewed from a deficit perspective, it was interesting to help colleagues revisualise what might be possible if perspectives are realigned...exactly the kind of creative thinking needed for our curriculum renewal process!

*Santiniketan*, means abode (*niketan*) of peace (*shanti*). It was here that Rabindranath Tagore started the school of his ideals (now a university campus), whose central premise is that a connection with the natural, the outside, and the “real world” is continually fostered in an environment such as “classroom under a tree”. With much more added to broaden and deepen the knowledge base, the learners leave such a classroom only to keep growing continually. Yet, the transition must be smooth; it must be natural. The world to which the learner moves must seem like a natural extension of the classroom where the learning was rooted. Reflecting on the image of the “classroom under a tree” and comprehending the deeper meaning of Tagore’s vision of education the B.Ed Honours brought to the faculty an experience that true learning does not begin or end inside an enclosed classroom.

Against this backdrop the work of the faculty began where they engaged in outdoor activities that enabled them to get to know the B.Ed Honours programme better. Faculty teaching on the programme shared their insights and opened to scrutiny the various aspects of the Honours curriculum map including the individual modules in order to spark engagement, discussion and debate around the current programme. The deliberations yielded rich data, perspectives and questions which the programme team can use as they embark on the journey ahead.

## unite-create

by Marilyn Gibbs

thinking, writing like a symphony  
interconnected in harmony  
instruments tuned  
strings, winds, brass and percussion  
triangles  
creative minds

each unique, special, individual  
focused on the whole, the harmony  
a united joyful song  
full of hope and freshness  
intersecting ideas  
spirits entwined

voices inclusive listening  
aligning our hearts  
like notes on a music score  
beating a new song  
with light of minds, hearts and hands  
boundary less  
a future of hope



Colleagues enjoy some welcome winter sunshine whilst getting to grips with the B Ed Honours programme

Empower our students to teach in all types of schools in South Africa

# Survivor FET: Building Resilience

*The FET Team: Heloise Sathorar, Pat Bean, Christina Jordaan and Carmel Mahomed*

To counteract the notion that the FET curriculum is complicated and that students struggle to get through it, we decided to name our presentation session at the Thatchwood Curriculum Retreat: “Survivor FET – Building Resilience”

Taking into account the current landscape of education in South Africa that is still characterized by an unequal educational offering, aggravated by poor administration, lack of resources and support it becomes vitally important to build resilience into a teacher during teacher training. Against this backdrop it thus becomes important to review our current FET curriculum and to make the required changes to ensure that our students will “Dare to teach”.

Encouraging academics to have fun and linking our analysis of the current FET curriculum to the Survivor TV programme we asked groups to build a structure from playing cards that were marked with module codes. The groups then had to move the structure from one table to another without dropping cards. Inevitably most of the structures collapsed when they were moved. This activity was enjoyed by everyone but there was also a deeper message behind the activity. The symbolism of this was to indicate that we currently have modules that are linked in a programme/curriculum but as times change we need to change the structure to suit the times and our current structure lacked glue to keep it together.

The FET team then gave a brief overview of the current structure by pasting module bricks on the wall. This was followed by a presentation on challenges that were experienced in the programme that the FET lecturers had identified during the CR workshop on 5 June 2012. The session was concluded with café conversations where staff was allowed to contribute their opinions and thoughts on the following questions:

- What are the levels of subject knowledge that High School teachers require and who should be responsible to provide this content to the High School student teachers? (Service Faculties vs Faculty of Education)
- What are the teaching strategies and skills a High school teacher need?
- You’ve heard the general discussion about Teaching Practise. Share your ideas on how a Teaching Practise Model for a 4 year High School Teaching Programme (B.Ed FET) should look.
- What are your thoughts about team teaching and contact time?

The positive feedback from these café conversations indicated that staff is committed to curriculum renewal and willing to bring about change that will empower our students to teach in all types of schools in South Africa. Our new curriculum must build resilience and encourage students to dare to teach!





# A Curriculum Renewal mountain climbing expedition

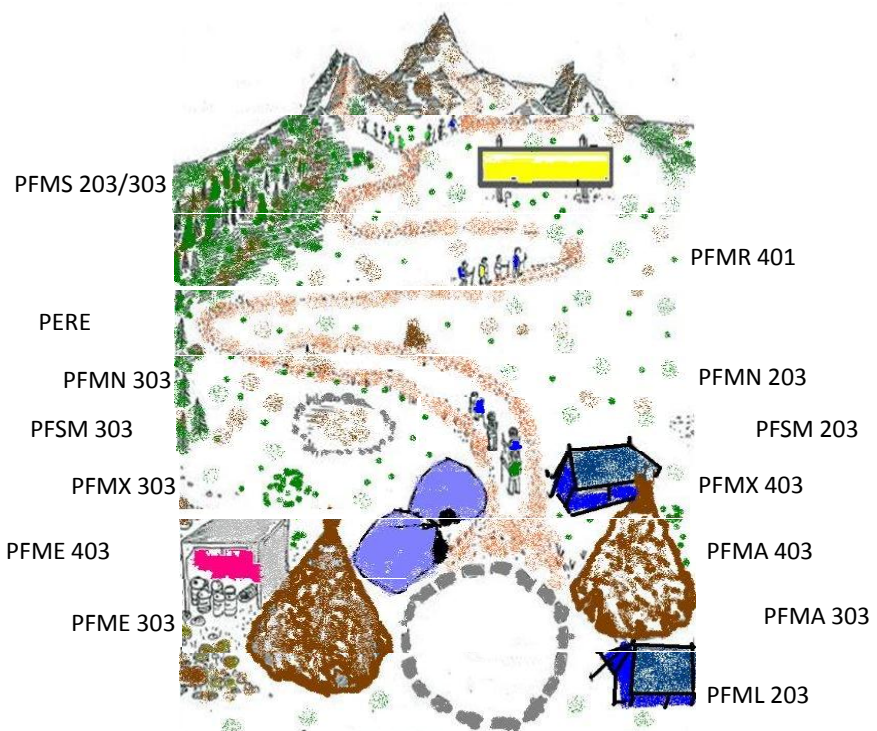
Dr Deirdre Geduld, HoP B Ed FP

Dear colleagues, the challenges facing Education have been described using various metaphors. South Africa has one of the most beautiful geographic landscapes in the world including the Drakensberg Mountains, Outeniqua Mountains and the famous Table Mountain. We will use the metaphor of a mountain to describe how we within Foundation Phase (FP) can overcome these challenges within our context of teacher training.

Training should provide the tools for our students to successfully scale these summits. The campsite at the foot of the mountain symbolizes the collaborative approach we want to establish, listen to different voices that need to influence our programme; the schools, teachers, our student, learners and our respective communities.

The different kinds of shelters (the multicultural home bases) are representative of our students, the different meeting places call for interrogation of what we know and the inquiry required for this long journey called schooling, the challenges we have to face as we move along, however our different method modules will allow us to scaffold and create 'walking stick supports' on the journey, the groups with our education modules will enhance our understanding as we face increasing levels of difficulty within the South African context.

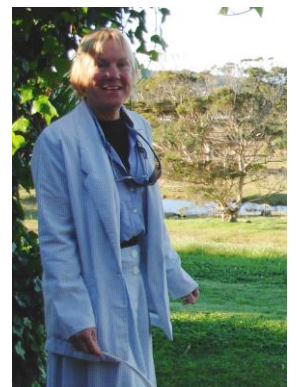
And our curriculum studies will lead us towards the big signpost towards the top to keep us going, the idea that once we've done this journey we are fit enough to 'dare to teach'.



## (a little of) My experience of the CR process

Suz Phillips, George Campus FET Administrator

I would like to borrow the image, with her permission, that I have just heard Denise use at the opening of the Inspiring Educators Conference. Denise spoke of the "rubble" in Education, and I feel that the CR workshops were the bulldozers confronting the rubble. There was such power encapsulated in the presence of so many Educational experts working together. There was such enterprise in the determination of all Faculty members to confront the existing situations, assess the degree of success, and suggest alternatives for renewal. Those who gave inputs were the project engineers who best understood the stresses of the materials with which they were working, the potential and limitations. I myself felt akin to a broken brick, sitting there freezing in my chair. My personal experience of Education over the last 5 years has been negative. What I saw at the CR workshops was a new era, industry, building, teamwork, respect, expertise, cement... and a warm fire. Education is such a challenging fluid dynamic that perhaps it requires the consciousness of engineering for success!





## My Curriculum Renewal experience

Annaline Vermaak

When I heard about the two day workshop I thought... how, at the end of a term full of lecturing and stress can they want this? I had so much to do, tidy up, collate marks, mark 130 Teaching Practice journals... I, respectfully, thought that some people had lost the plot!

The day of the curriculum renewal workshop arrived! It was very cold and rainy outside. My heart and mind was heavy when I took to the road at 7h45. I arrived at the venue and stumbled my way into the room with my stiletto boots - wet, slippery walkways cannot be used as a reason to abandon high heels!

We were served the most delicious muffins and coffee close to a warm and cosy fire; already my heart and mind were warming up. What made me even happier was the camaraderie between fellow colleagues. There was a collegiality that I have never experienced at any other Faculty of Education workshop before. The day just flew past with all the interesting and adventurous activities - gone were the cold and heavy feelings! I learnt so much, and I gained much insight and knowledge into other teaching programmes and also into the thoughts and ideas of my fellow colleagues.

This workshop was a real eye-opener and I realised that we all share a vision that we are working together to attain. I realised that we will succeed with Curriculum Renewal because of this vision; in fact the absence of a clear vision would threaten the success of change and renewal. Jim Taylor said, "No one is less ready for tomorrow than the person who holds the most rigid beliefs about what tomorrow will contain." The Roman philosopher Seneca said, "To the person who does not know where he wants to go there is no favourable wind."

Once we agreed where we all wanted to go with CR it was just about finding the correct route. I also kept in mind that in "The Flight of the Buffalo" James Belasco and Ralph Stayer said, "Vision is the beginning point for leading the journey. Vision focuses, inspires and touches the heart, for without vision people perish." We were right on track at the workshop, we have our vision.



The following morning my car companion and I lost our way. We were talking so much about the workshop, that we had arrived in Colleen Glen before we realized that we had missed the turn off by a long way! To me this mirrored the necessity of changing our decisions, aims and actions towards changing our curriculum. We might sometimes take a wrong turn, miss the turn off, enjoy the scenery and struggle initially on the road to change...but we will get there. We have to be prepared to start with baby steps, almost like Walt Disney who set off with a tiny mouse.

The second day flew past; it was exhilarating to see people who were passionate, focused and fired up to make change happen. While driving back home I had to agree with the Beatles - it is a long and winding road, it is a hard day's night, but everything has "come together right now".

*Curriculum renewal is an exciting process, full of hope and promise. It is also a journey that never seems to end, with much frustration and compromise along the way. If I think back to the 5 June pre-workshop, I see that we have begun well. My hope is that the curriculum we offer at the end of the process ignites in our students an excitement, dedication, enthusiasm for teaching and learning even as we equip them to go and teach.*

**Pam Roach**, FET Administrator

*... the depth of the curriculum conversations (descriptions, critique, clarifications, analyses, etc) and the way we all felt empowered by the knowledge gained about our own curriculum that we have taught for years in our own silos was phenomenal!!!!!!!!!!*

**Shervani Pillay**

*... There was so much to reflect on and witness that spoke to a very positive and productive experience! I was able to get to some of each of the FET, IP and FP huddles. Each were engaged in insightful and 'heartful' discussions. I heard many times that participants were surprised about how much of the programme they were teaching in that they were not aware of, that it was interesting to see what their colleagues were teaching, how these modules and experiences fit (or did not make sense in fitting) within the whole, as well as the discovery that their fellow colleagues often experienced the same or similar passions and frustrations in their little corner of the curriculum...*

**Dalene Swanson**

The Abakhwezeli team brainstormed what the operating principles of our curriculum renewal processes could or should be. Here are some of the idea's presented in a word cloud.



Others are indicated below:

- Moving beyond structures
- Breaking bread together
- Listen to one another
- Ability to share ideas without fear
- All for one / One for all
- Being able to suspend fixed ideas
- Process = generative & provides capacity & empowerment
- Courageous conversation → 'working through difficulty'
- Common goal → everyone buys into the process
- Process provides capacity & empowerment

## The will to try something new.