The importance of inter-country exchanges

Visiting Dar-es-Salaam and Oldenburg

In September, I travelled with Profs Denise Zinn and Lesley Wood to Tanzania to take part in a tri-partite meeting of academics from the University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM), the NMMU and the University of Oldenburg (UOL). Also present were Dr Christa Haendle (UOL) and Dr Kitila Mkumbo (UDSM) and Mr Kilian Koebrich (UOL) who both visited the NMMU recently. Amongst other things we discussed how the South-South agreement between the NMMU and UDSM could play itself out within the field of HIV & AIDS Education and Research. We also discussed how HIV & AIDS education could be integrated by teacher-educators into the university curriculum. Furthermore, we explored what HIV & AIDS materials could be used in teacher training at UDSM, as it has elected to introduce HIV & AIDS into its programmes. We all agreed that a key challenge is to create opportunities for collaboration that will not only benefit individuals, but will also lead to faculty development. Hence, the key focus of the tri-partite alliance is exchange in teaching, curriculum and module development.

Dr Mkumbo ensured that we saw something of Dar-es-Salaam in the evening and also enjoy Indian and African cuisine. Dar-es-Salaam has a perfect stretch of coast with white sand and azure blue seas, lovely markets and the most hectic rush hour traffic! There is a possibility of UDSM hosting a conference at nearby Zanzibar in September 2011! The focus will be HIV and AIDS.

After the meeting in Tanzania, I flew to via Amsterdam to Oldenburg in Germany to spend a week visiting the Education Department at the University of Oldenburg. I was hosted by Prof Wolfgang Nitsch; energetic, enthusiastic, wise and witty. I was treated to a walking tour through the older part of Oldenburg, with Prof Wolfgang as guide. Other activities included observing a Drama and Theatre Education Programme where 15 junior school learners presented a play which they had developed. I also observed Jorg Kowollik working with a group of senior learners. I visited a vocational high school, similar to our FET colleges, where I observed two lessons, utilizing participatory teaching and learning methodologies. The Resource Centre at the University, which houses Teaching Boxes created by students, around subject themes such as air, magnetism, to mention a few, go out on loan when teachers require them. From an HIV perspective I was interested in Teaching Boxes around the themes of sexuality, death and dying, and so on. I also visited the Helene Lange Comprehensive School (they have an exchange partnership with Westville High, Gelvandale Secondary School and Lawson Brown), observed a Science lesson and also met with teacher Christa Beime. We discussed the existing school-school partnership and how it could be strengthened.

A farewell dinner at the Alibaba Restaurant with Prof Nitsch and Petra Schwarzer (a teacher of English in another Vocational School) concluded a busy, but happy time in Oldenburg. I came away realizing the importance of inter-country exchanges in building networks and friendships, and extending the horizons of staff and students through mutual learning. I am very grateful for the opportunity provided to me to spend time at UDSM and at the University of Oldenburg.

Although of German descent, I cannot speak German! Thus a challenging part of the visit was the use of German at most of the meetings. This required Prof Nitsch to act as translator, infusing his own sense of fun into the translation! I also realized that there is only one thing to be afraid of in Oldenburg... Cyclists in the bicycle lane on the pavement!

~ Naydene