

University of Pretoria
Senate Conference

16 and 17 February 2023

TURNING THE TIDE: REIMAGINING CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION
AT UP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Held over the course of two days, the theme of the 2023 UP Senate Conference was “Turning the tide: Reassessing, repositioning, recovery and praxis in curriculum transformation at UP”. “Turning the tide” signals a future-oriented approach (while taking stock of past and present interventions) and a deliberate intention to address shortcomings and new pathways, with the imperative to describe, reflect on, and assess current interventions in curriculum transformation across the University, to strengthen and consolidate opportunities for further work in curriculum change (including extra-curricular work), and to address influences functioning at the level of organisational structure and culture (the hidden curriculum) to reimagine the University’s identity as a transforming and engaged university.

The conference sought to *reassess* by revisiting canonical ideas and concepts, to *reposition* by setting intentional objectives for the creation of a new ecology of knowledge and, in rethinking inclusivity in the knowledge domain, to *recover* ideas and concepts that might be lost, erased, marginalised and minimised. Throughout, there was a focus on *praxis*—action-oriented strategies for intentional curriculum transformation.

Both days of the conference, which had a hybrid format, consisted of keynote presentations followed by a moderated question-and-answer session, presentations and discussion around UP case studies, and breakout group discussions focusing on question sets related to pertinent aspects of curriculum transformation.

Day 1

The opening session of the conference set the tone for the two-day engagement. In this session, the senators engaged around the call for an expanded view of scientific knowledge informed by a long historical perspective and the value of a multi- and transdisciplinary approach. The argument that curriculum transformation is not an imperative in STEM was resoundingly debunked, reminding participants that, while science may be objective, scientists are not. Senators were challenged to consider how curriculum transformation is informed by the historical context of the country (and of the University of Pretoria in particular) and by the need to address the persistent inequalities that result from this history.

The second session of the day placed language at the centre of curriculum transformation. The session considered the need for a *translanguaging* approach. A short film presented the deans' understanding of what curriculum transformation is, the need for it, what has been done in this regard, and what remains to be done against the backdrop of their own educational experiences and the history of the country. The discussion confirmed an urgent need to focus on the role of African languages in our curriculum transformation efforts. A need for better internal networks, enabling UP academics to connect and learn from each other, was also highlighted.

Shifting the focus to praxis, the third session of the day featured four UP case studies. It included the experience of the Engineering Curriculum Group, with reference to the introduction of vertically integrated projects into the engineering curriculum, the Faculty of Humanities' experience of the "Global Classroom", the experience of the Faculty of Health Sciences in the development of the fully online Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health, and a case study from GIBS about the introduction of the Applied Business Project that was introduced in the Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration (PDBA) programme to provide students with integrated course content, while incorporating social responsiveness. The case studies stimulated a discussion about the difference between the form and substance of curriculum transformation, with reference to the use of technology and new teaching methodologies as opposed to the vibrancy of critical thinking and the contestation of different knowledges.

In the final session of the first day, the Senators participated in four breakaway groups, which were organised in terms of specific questions addressing key themes. Group 1 discussed institutional culture and the hidden curriculum. The group argued that a culture of transformation was yet to be cultivated at UP and that insufficient progress was being made in transforming the curriculum. The second group discussed "A reimagined UP" and considered curriculum transformation in the context of preparing students for the "now" and the "next", which included equipping them with entrepreneurial skills and ensuring that what they are taught is globally relevant. Group 3 engaged around "Institutional ecosystem/faculty understanding". The discussion highlighted the need for a shared understanding of curriculum transformation across the institution, while at the same time, the approach to curriculum transformation should be tailored for each faculty. The last group considered the topic of "Impediments/barriers and opportunities". The group identified several important barriers to successful transformation. These included that the professions for which students are being trained are themselves untransformed. The workload of academics and a lack of skills required for curriculum transformation are other barriers.

Day 2

The first session of day 2 of the conference commenced with a perspective from industry that emphasised that industry expects ready-to-contribute graduates, which requires lecturers to respond with speed, providing learning that is conveniently accessible to students. The view from industry was balanced by a focus on the relaunch of the UP curriculum transformation and the need for resourcing of curriculum transformation and for broader participation across the

University. This was followed by a presentation that considered the need for embracing movement between different ways of knowing and seeing, i.e., a transdisciplinary approach bringing together soil science, chemistry, community, and art, for example. In the discussion that followed, it was acknowledged that the current UP curriculum was seen to alienate some students from their cultural backgrounds. It was again emphasised that academics are at the heart of curriculum transformation and that the demographic profile of staff, including in terms of age, mattered. Again, structural aspects of the University (e.g., the discipline structure and the way in which outputs are incentivised) were seen as impediments to transformation. While progress has been and continues to be made, a structured and resourced plan of action for curriculum transformation was needed.

The second session again featured UP case studies. The Faculty of Economic and Management Science presented the transformation of the BCom (Auditing) curriculum to include soft and practical skills, building a portfolio of evidence as students progress. The second case was that of curriculum transformation in the Faculty of Theology and Religion, drawing on the historic Vanneste-Tshibangu debate around the existence of an African theology and the faculty's expansion of its curriculum to include spirituality, Pentecostalism and Rastafarianism. The approach is no longer denominational or doctrinal but acknowledges different religious orientations and expressions. An alumnus from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences shared the findings of a research project in which she participated that explored the need for curriculum transformation in the BSc (Consumer Science—Hospitality Management) class of 2022. The research informed a curriculum transformation project that ultimately aims to overhaul the culinary arts curriculum so that it is inclusive and reflects a South African rainbow cuisine, with learning materials, textbooks, and cookbooks to match. The Faculty of Veterinary Science presented a historical perspective on the transformation of the veterinary science curriculum, including the introduction of ethnoveterinary medicine and African wildlife conservation and management. Finally, the Faculty of Education presented an initiative to introduce Sepedi, isiZulu and Setswana literacy in the BEd (Foundation Phase Teaching) programme by way of a seven-week module. This followed reports by school principals and students themselves that students doing teaching practice were unable to teach in African languages, while the importance of teaching foundation phase learners in their mother language has been proven many times over.

In the discussion that followed, it was remarked that the histories and knowledge of Africa have to be carefully understood to avoid colonial constructs being presented as African. This has to be done while taking into account that cross-cultural influences are inevitable. It was again emphasised that transformation has to start at the early childhood level.

In the final session of day 2 of the conference, senators again participated in four breakaway groups, which were organised in terms of specific questions addressing key themes. The first group discussed “Developing an evidence base” and wrestled with the difficult question of how transformation should be measured and included in lecturers’ KPIs. Group 2 engaged around the topic of “Student learning, success and well-being” and recognised the importance of giving students opportunities to gain industry experience. “The changing nature of self and work” was the topic discussed by group 3, who recognised the tension between the needs of the University in society and the kinds of citizens we want to create, on the one hand, and the

needs of employers on the other. It was agreed that the needs of industry had to be taken into consideration but that the University could also influence industry through the kinds of citizens we deliver as graduates. The last group engaged with the topic of “Research” and emphasised the role of transdisciplinary research in curriculum transformation. The fact that transformation is ongoing, rather than an event, was emphasised, as was the need for a Freireian dialogical engagement with communities. It was proposed that a system of “community associates” — much like the existing system of research associates—could be developed to substantively involve communities in research questions that emanate from the real issues confronting them.

In closing, Prof Kupe remarked on the plurality of meanings “Turning the Tide” could have. It could refer to UP gathering steam and scaling up towards a critical mass in projects, initiatives and strategies around curriculum transformation in the broader academic project. It could also mean turning the tide away from reluctance and a lack of understanding of curriculum transformation.

Themes for further consideration

The conference confirmed an urgent need for more substantive curriculum transformation at UP. Participation in curriculum transformation must be increased, the pace must be accelerated, and it must be resourced at an institutional level. No disciplines are exempt from the need for curriculum transformation. Curriculum transformation should be informed by a long historical view.

Critical reflection, including self-reflection, are pre-requisites for successful curriculum transformation. This includes reflection on *what, how* and *who* we teach but also self-reflection, critically reviewing our own beliefs, viewpoints and capabilities as lecturers. We should also critically review how we organise knowledge, e.g., in discipline silos. Lastly, we need to reflect on the University as an institution, our history, practices and culture—i.e., the hidden curriculum.

Co-creation of the curriculum emerged as an important concept. As transdisciplinarity and integration are important aspects of a transformed curriculum, co-creation means that academics from different disciplines should ideally work together on developing curricula. It also means that ways have to be found for the voices of students to be heard in terms of what and how they wish to be taught. Finally, there has to be dialogical engagement with knowledge outside of the academy, including industry, communities and holders of indigenous knowledge, to ensure that their knowledge is reflected in the curriculum. Thought should be given to how academics can be equipped with the skills needed to facilitate such co-creation.

The importance of language featured strongly. Multilingualism should be integrated into the curriculum (e.g., through service courses in indigenous languages), while translanguaging could be utilised as a strategy to enhance learning in the classroom. Multilingualism should, furthermore, be reflected in the campus environment, e.g., in signage.

Networks within the University must be strengthened, and time and opportunity must be created for sharing experiences of and reflecting on curriculum transformation.

BACKGROUND

Hosted on 17 and 18 February 2022 in a hybrid format, both in person at the University of Pretoria's Future Africa Campus and online, the 2023 UP Senate Conference was the fourth annual conference of its series hosted since 2020. As was the case with the previous three, this conference focused on the impact of a changing higher education environment on the University and, more specifically, on its academic project.

The context of the 2023 Senate Conference is described in the [conference booklet](#), from which the following is extracted.

The Curriculum Transformation Work Stream, initiated in 2016, concluded its work in 2017. The Senate approved the *Reimagining curricula for a just university in a vibrant democracy* framework in May 2017. The framework highlighted four drivers of curriculum transformation:

- responsiveness to social context,
- epistemological diversity,
- renewal of pedagogy and classroom practices, and
- an institutional culture of openness and critical reflection.

In 2021, the relaunch or review of the curriculum transformation project took place, coordinated by the Deputy-Dean of the Faculty of Law and in conjunction with the Vice-Principal: Academic.

While curriculum transformation is an ongoing facet of the academic project at UP, it is clear that much more needs to be done in a dynamic higher education landscape.¹ Curriculum transformation remains central not only to transformation and access but to success in a future-oriented, reimagined university that is intentional as a visible force or site for change in an interconnected world shaped by crisis, disruption, and uncertainty in several domains. The need for deeper transformation of the tertiary sector was brought into stark relief by the “Rhodes Must Fall” and “Fees Must Fall” student movements and was also highlighted by the 2010 and 2015 National Higher Education Summits and the USAf Higher Education Conference in 2021.

In engaging with curriculum transformation in the South African historical context, the notions of decoloniality, pluriversality, and epistemic justice come into play while seeking to break the stigma around curriculum transformation as a reactive rhetoric. A driving question informing curriculum transformation that is informed by a strategic driver at UP is: how does transdisciplinarity manifest if a curriculum transformation approach is followed?

¹ See, for example, Bergmark, U & Westman, S. (2016). Co-creating curriculum in higher education: Promoting democratic values and a multidimensional view on learning. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 21(1): 28–40; Knight, P. (2001). Complexity and curriculum: A process approach to curriculum-making. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6(3): 368–381; Lattuca, LR & Stark, JS. (2009). *Shaping the college curriculum: Academic plans in context* (2nd edition). San Francisco: Jossey Bass; McDonald, R & Van Der Horst, H. (2007). Curriculum alignment, globalization, and action. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 39(1): 1–9.

The theme of the conference is “Turning the tide: Reassessing, repositioning, recovery and praxis in curriculum transformation at UP”. “Turning the tide” signals a future-oriented approach (while taking stock of past and present interventions) and a deliberate intention to address shortcomings and new pathways, with the imperative to:

- (1) describe, reflect on, and assess current interventions in curriculum transformation with global and local insights across the University (within/across faculties) and relevant directorates;
- (2) strengthen and consolidate opportunities for further work in curriculum change (including extra-curricular work); and
- (3) address changes and developments to the “hidden curriculum”² (e.g. influences functioning at the level of organisational structure and culture) that reimagine the identity of a transforming and engaged university.

“Reassessing” relates to revisiting canonical ideas and concepts. “Repositioning” is about setting intentional objectives for the creation of a new ecology of knowledge. “Recovery” means returning to ideas and concepts that might be lost, erased, marginalised, and minimised in rethinking inclusivity in the knowledge domain. “Praxis” denotes action-oriented strategies for intentional curriculum transformation.

The two-day conference programme is included in the conference brochure, which can be found [here](#).

Video recordings of the conference can be accessed [here](#) (day 1) and [here](#) (day 2).

FORMAT OF THE REPORT

The format of the Senate Conference report follows the structure of the programme:

Day 1

- Session 1: Keynote presentations and a moderated question-and-answer session
- Session 2: A keynote presentation, screening of a short film, and a moderated question-and-answer session in a panel discussion
- Session 3: Presentation of four UP case studies, followed by a moderated question-and-answer session
- Session 4: Group discussions (four groups) and feedback from rapporteurs
- Closure and wrap-up of day 1

Day 2

- Session 1: Keynote presentations and a moderated question-and-answer session
- Session 2: Presentation of five UP case studies, followed by a moderated question-and-answer session in a panel discussion
- Session 3: Group discussions (four groups) and feedback from rapporteurs

² Margolis, E (Ed.). (2001). *The hidden curriculum in higher education*. New York: Routledge.

- Closure and wrap-up of day 2 and conference

The presentations of keynote speakers are available in the video recordings for [day 1](#) and [day 2](#) of the conference; the detail is thus not repeated. Instead, an attempt is made to surface the conceptual anchors and highlights and, as far as possible, to point to the specific challenges, opportunities, and practical implications that were alluded to, either in presentations or in the discussions.

A short video containing highlights of the conference can be accessed [here](#).

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DAY 1

16 February 2023

SESSION 1

The session was chaired by **Prof Loretta Feris**, Vice-Principal: Academic, UP

1.1 Prof Loretta Feris

Welcome

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change, that are able to adapt and to adjust to the changing environment in which they find themselves.”
Charles Darwin

Prof Feris welcomed the members to the 2023 Senate Conference, both those who were attending in person and those joining online.

Noting that change is inevitable and disruptive, she referred to Charles Darwin, famous for his revolutionary ideas about evolution, who is known to have said that “It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change, that are able to adapt and to adjust to the changing environment in which they find themselves”.

Drawing on her own field of expertise, namely environmental law, Prof Feris noted that the natural world provided countless examples of adaptation to change. In nature, successful adaptation is achieved by responding to disturbances in a way that resists damage, not change, and recovering quickly.

As a university, Prof Feris argued, UP is in the business of change—adopting new applications, changing the old into the new, and driven by innovation. The University should also change when it comes to developments in teaching and learning, engaging the curriculum, and the practical implications in the classroom. Curriculum renewal, or transformation, is about embracing change. The Senate Conference provides the University with an opportunity to revisit *what* and *how* we teach, to pause and reflect while we consider whether *what* we teach is still relevant in terms of time and space. Prof Feris invited the senators, as academic researchers who are also teachers, to reflect on important issues—of which some are uncomfortable, regarding race, identity, gender, and South Africa’s apartheid and colonial history—when considering the notion of curriculum transformation.

Prof Feris shared her view that curriculum transformation can and should be applied to any discipline. Academics should ask themselves whether the curriculum resonates with the students who are being taught and whether it is relevant in terms of the pluriversal realities in which they find themselves. These issues enable the University to remain resilient and avoid the damage that comes from failing to reflect or ask critical questions.

Recapping the history of deliberate curriculum transformation at the University of Pretoria following the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements in 2015 and 2016, Prof Feris reiterated the driving principles of the *Reimagining curricula for a just university in a vibrant democracy* framework referred to above in the background section of this report.

She proposed that these principles have not been taken on board to the same extent across the University. The Senate Conference was thus an opportunity to collectively pause and reflect on how far the University has come in respect of curriculum transformation, what the current status is, and what remains to be done, including what the next steps would be. With the theme of “Turning the tide: Reassessing, repositioning, recovery and praxis in curriculum transformation at UP”, this is what the conference programme was structured to achieve. It includes keynote speakers, opportunities to engage with lessons learnt from practical case studies across the University, and breakaway sessions to give senators a chance to think through the next steps in smaller groups.

In the interest of time, Prof Feris did not read the biographies of the speakers but referred attendees to the [programme](#), which includes the speaker biographies.

1.2 Prof Tawana Kupe, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, UP

Scene setting: Reimagining curriculum transformation at UP

If we returned many seasons to the origins of knowledge, we would find many different lenses through which to view humanity and many different forms of knowledge, for instance, knowledge on how we could interact with our environment. Such different forms of knowledge could assist us in addressing the current crisis of humanity and of our planet.

After reading what seemed to be a prepared speech on the importance and nature of curriculum transformation, Prof Kupe revealed that the remarks had, in fact, been prepared by the open artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT, thereby demonstrating the changing environment in which the University operates.

Prof Kupe cautioned that if the University is serious about turning the tide when it comes to curriculum transformation, we have to understand that the phrase has become tired to certain ears.

He emphasised that while the science disciplines were sometimes of the opinion that it did not apply to them, all disciplines had to be engaged in curriculum transformation.

Prof Kupe cautioned against an exclusive focus on knowledge in the now and into the future while not taking into account the histories of knowledge and the history of human civilisation. He pointed out that one thing a chatbot is unable to provide is a long reflection on the histories of knowledge and civilisation, including the imperialist kingdoms, apartheid, and colonialism.

Referring to the gold collection at the Javett-UP Art Centre, he reminded senators that the production of the artefacts in the collection demanded sophisticated scientific knowledge. Yet those who produced the artefacts were not called scientists. He challenged senators to consider when and why academic disciplines were created and suggested that organising knowledge in this

manner was done for a specific purpose, namely credentialing. Yet the notion of credentialing has been under threat in recent history, with the focus shifting towards skill sets credentialled by the people who use those skills.

Prof Kupe stated that, at UP, we have pivoted towards interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, as we are beginning to see that we may have lost something as a result of the rigid boundaries between disciplines, that we may have become prisoners to a discipline structure that is not necessarily a scientific construct. Transdisciplinarity, he said, should lead us back to the histories of knowledge.

Making reference to the historical novel *Two thousand seasons* by the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah,³ he reminded the Senators that colonialism and apartheid were recent developments in history. If we returned many seasons to the origins of knowledge, we would find many different lenses through which to view humanity and many different forms of knowledge—for instance, knowledge about how we could interact with our environment. Such different forms of knowledge could assist us in addressing the current crisis of humanity and of our planet.

Prof Kupe concluded by stating that (curriculum) transformation cannot be just a University exercise. In his view, we reflect on where we came from as human beings and consider what shaped us and what ought to shape us for the next 2 000 seasons, using such knowledge to find viable and more sustainable pathways into the future.

1.3 Prof Margaret Blackie, Rhodes University

Curriculum Transformation in STEM

If we lose sight of the human dimension, the statements “science is objective” and “scientists are objective” can be conflated, which is highly problematic.

Prof Blackie joined the conference online from the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning at Rhodes University. She is the lead editor of the book *Enhancing science education*⁴ and a co-editor of *Decolonising knowledge and knowers*⁵ and has also published three papers on chemistry education.

Prof Blackie explained that she became interested in the decolonisation of the curriculum in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines following the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall events and specifically after the statement made by a student at UCT during the time that “science must fall”, to which there was a vociferous response.

Referring to a paper she published in the *Journal of Critical Realism*,⁶ Prof Blackie explained that

³ Armah, AK. (1979). *Two thousand seasons* (African writers series). Heinemann.

⁴ Blackie, MAL, Adendorff, H, Mouton, M (Eds.). (2023). *Enhancing science education: Exploring knowledge practices with legitimation code theory* (1st edition). Routledge.

⁵ Hlatshwayo, MN, Adendorff, H, Blackie, MAL, Fataar, A, & Maluleka, P. (2022). *Decolonising knowledge and knowers struggles for university transformation in South Africa* (1st edition). Routledge.

⁶ Blackie, MAL. (2022). An examination of the practice of chemistry through the lens of critical realism.

one of the ways we can understand the practice of any science (and research into that science) is the interplay between the physical world at the molecular level (which underpins the canon of chemistry) and the community of scientists.

While the reproducibility of science resides in the real mechanisms that exist in the physical world, natural scientists sometimes forget that it is the community of chemists that makes up what is the discipline of chemistry. If we lose sight of this human dimension, the statements “science is objective” and “scientists are objective” can be conflated, which is highly problematic.

An acceptable scientific concept requires both the reliability of the mechanism (e.g., producing a molecule in the laboratory) *and* acceptance by the community.

Our current understanding is the lens through which we view the material world we are investigating. It leads us to bring different questions to bear on an experiment, for example. Different languages and different physical environments will result in different internal metaphors for understanding certain scientific phenomena, which can bring about diverse perspectives.

With regard to teaching and learning, Prof Blackie used the distinction between instructional and regulative discourse. The instructional discourse—the content of what we teach and assess—is always mediated through the regulative discourse—i.e., the social environment.

She stated that, in the sciences, it is sometimes easy to forget that the social environment has an impact on learning. In chemistry, for example, accurate measurements gave rise to the discipline. So, while the practice of chemistry was historically present in all cultures, a chemical molecular understanding was not present. What should be paid attention to in terms of content often depends on the discipline and will be different for chemistry as opposed to botany and geology, for instance.

According to Prof Blackie, a crucial question to be asked when it comes to decolonising STEM curricula is whether the normative life-world of the student is represented—in other words, context and situatedness. For instance, a common example to explain a narrow molecule that rotates quickly is that of an ice skater. This example would work well in Canada but possibly not so well in South Africa. A lecturer can get around this by mentioning an example that works for them and inviting students to provide examples that relate to their context and environment. Some of the examples mentioned by students can then be taken on board. In that way, the lecturer’s life-world is not seen as the normative position from which a subject is taught. Students should be encouraged to draw on their own life-worlds to make sense of what is presented in the classroom.

To end off her address, Prof Blackie touched on the issue of decoloniality in respect of assessment, on which relatively little has been written. Referring to a chapter she contributed to *Decolonising knowledge and knowers* (chapter 7), she noted how the primacy of the individual is viewed as the gold standard in assessment. Yet, in chemistry, it is only the moment of insight that is truly individual, while all other aspects are mediated through other people. She deems it a profound mistake that some universities reverted to closed-book examinations during the Covid-19 pandemic. Assessment that only tests what is in the brain of an individual on any given day does not prepare students to contribute to the real world and does not foster curiosity, insight, or

testing oneself against the community.

According to Prof Blackie, the emergence of artificial intelligence tools is a productive moment to consider what meaningful assessment could look like. In her view, there is always a person in the endeavour, and lecturers should not lose sight of this. STEM lecturers should ask themselves how they should teach if they truly wish to educate students in their discipline.

Prof Blackie invited further discussion on the topic and shared her email address: mags.blackie@RU.ac.za.

1.4 Prof Siona O'Connell, School of the Arts, Critical African Studies Project, Faculty of Humanities

In search of freedom: Imagining new ways of knowing

Through a transformed curriculum, UP will produce knowledge that is spectacular and transformational; it will produce students who are equal and fully grounded and will take its place in our divided country as a beacon of hope that would make Chief Luthuli and those who walked alongside him proud.

Prof O'Connell framed her address using a story that Prof Derek de Jongh, Director of the University's Albert Luthuli Leadership Institute, shared with her and visiting colleagues from the US and Denmark about the origins of the institute. The story goes that early in the 1960s, Chief Albert Luthuli, president of the African National Congress and the leader of thousands of black South Africans in a peaceful campaign for civil rights in South Africa, was invited by the student organisation NUSAS at UP to talk on campus, to which he agreed. The event had barely started in the Aula when a ruckus ensued, and Luthuli, a Nobel Prize winner in his 60s, was struck by a student and fell to the ground. Reportedly, Chief Luthuli got up and said to the student, "No, this fight stops now. I need to know who you are before I tell you who I am."

Using many examples of events that marked the life experience of ordinary black South Africans and people involved in the struggle during the time of Luthuli's reported visit to UP, including uprisings, bombings, forced removals, and inferior education for African, coloured and Indian people, as well as the slew of legislation legitimising racial discrimination under apartheid, Prof O'Connell highlighted the University of Pretoria's failure to recognise and object to the oppression of black South Africans. Instead, UP staff and students continued to participate in rag, rugby matches, old boys' clubs, and spring celebrations.

She noted that UP staff were not part of the underground study groups that engaged with banned literature around the struggle and strategies that could bring freedom. Such engagements would often include learning from other liberation struggles.

Prof O'Connell shared how she approached Dr Ria van der Merwe from the UP Archive for more information on Chief Luthuli's visit to the University in the 1960s. Dr Van der Merwe, however, could not find any record of the visit in the archive. What could be ascertained was that at the time, the student organisation NUSAS was never acknowledged on campus by the SRC, and any requests from them to host speakers were denied.

While the absence of the story in the UP Archive is perplexing, whether it happened or not was not the point. Recollections, and also the lack thereof, point to gaps in our history.

The Luthuli family deemed the story important enough to meet with the UP Vice-Chancellor in 2010, wishing to become involved in leadership. Black universities would vie for the honour bestowed on the University of Pretoria to host the Albert Luthuli Leadership Institute. Nonetheless, Prof O’Connell argued, UP failed to use this opportunity to get entangled in its history and pay the price for its debt to society for its lily-white success.

Prof O’Connell referred to the death of a bystander in 2021 when protests erupted around the intractable problem of funding in higher education amidst economic disparities and political opportunism. She added that the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall events in 2016, during which students called for an end to racism and outsourcing, created an opportunity for urgent and long-overdue conversations on the legacy of colonialism, symbolism, and practices in higher education. This opportunity was squandered by UP, as its response to the 2016 protests was to bunker down and continue with business as usual, thereby turning its back on the Freedom Charter. In Prof O’Connell’s view, the University thereby rebuffed the Luthulis’ gift of an opportunity to make amends.

She challenged the senators to consider what the University was going to do with Luthuli’s gift now. Among other things, she urged them to consider how we teach students about ways of being from a place such as UP, especially in respect of cultivating a social awareness of their duty in an unequal society resulting from a history of vastly disparate funding formulae for white, black, coloured, and Indian universities. Thought should be given to how we attract underrepresented students, e.g., those from Eersterust, who choose to study anywhere but at UP. While decolonisation has been at the forefront of debates about learning and teaching, not enough has been done to ensure that it is implemented. The process must be deeply self-reflexive.

Prof O’Connell referred to the contributions of the late Neville Alexander, who called schools in industrial societies the Achilles heel of the state because of the potential for progressive students and critical teaching to question the status quo.

Stating that traditional modes of scholarly engagement are no longer appropriate, Prof O’Connell referred to Paolo Freire, who stated that change begins with ourselves as a collective rather than individuals. He also stated that there can be no change without dreams and no dream without hope.

She stated that, in transforming our curriculum, UP should:

- be constantly critical and steadfast in the face of the backlash;
- grab the opportunity to show Africa as thoroughly modern by showcasing the African greats of science and philosophy;
- acknowledge our problematic history as a University;
- respond to students who are the first in their families to study and who fear that they do not belong;
- respond to current social issues and take our research into the lecture theatre;
- embrace partnerships that enable us to respond to rapid changes and threats—healthy collaborative relationships are essential within UP and also within our country and the world;

- be cognisant of potential revolutions;
- live at new frontiers that demand that we see and know differently, and ask difficult questions about who we are and on what side of history we sit, not just tinker at the edges of change; and
- build on the great thinkers of the past, recognising that education is the unshakeable foundation of progress.

Proceeding along these lines, Prof O’Connell stated that UP will produce knowledge that is spectacular and transformational; it will produce students who are equal and fully grounded and will take its place in our divided country as a beacon of hope that would make Chief Luthuli and those who walked alongside him proud.

1.5 Moderated question-and-answer session

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn, from the Centre for the Study of Resilience in the Faculty of Education, remarked that while the communities around the University are role-players in our curriculum, they are absent at the Senate Conference. She asked how the University should go about creating partnerships with those who matter to the curriculum we want to transform.

Prof Kupe responded that UP, with its colonial heritage, exists at the apex of society, and few manage to get into it. Even those who get in and feel they are discriminated against are the elite. However, if we want to truly transform our curriculum, we have to recognise that knowledge does not just reside in universities but in the entirety of society. We also have to consider decolonising education at other levels, starting from early childhood education. Currently, high school education, for example, is truncated, with a focus on vocational training rather than knowledge creation. Students often fail to see the connections between what they are studying and the broader societal and historical context. We should ask ourselves what we should do to ensure that we produce students who are truly knowledgeable.

Prof Feris remarked that the conference was structured in such a way that it included diverse knowledges, backgrounds, and speakers, with a session the following day that would not just include academics. Opportunities have to be created for other voices to be heard, not just at the conference but, perhaps, also at a practical level in the classroom.

Prof Chamunorwa remarked on the persistent inequalities from the preparatory phase that result in UP having to accept students who lack social and intellectual capital. He asked whether the curriculum should be tailor-made for inadequacy.

Prof O’Connell responded that students from disadvantaged areas were illiterate in practical terms, and the disparities between private schools and other education are enormous. She stated that, as a university, we do not understand the reality of impoverished students. We should strive to understand the background of all our students, and our teaching should respond to all those experiences.

Prof Sehoole remarked on the limiting impact of a discipline structure. Transdisciplinarity should also be understood as an opportunity to acquire knowledge that lies beyond the disciplines. We should ask how we organise teaching and learning so that it accommodates all modes of learning.

Prof Blackie responded that Universities have to get beyond the fear that we are going to erode the value of our offering by turning to the society in which we live. Students today are grappling with profoundly different issues from the questions we had when we were that age—questions that are not merely an extrapolation of our own experience. They are in a different psychic space. This is especially true when we think about first-year students from poor backgrounds. We have to find ways for students to find their knowledge-building capacity in our classrooms and invest in these. We have to ensure that students emerge from undergraduate programmes with the capacity to go out and create some kind of knowledge product. We can no longer teach as if all our students are middle class.

Prof Kupe also responded that the South African undergraduate structure is very much British and that we have not really thought about what would be appropriate for our environment. He referred to his own educational experience, where teachers in high school were highly qualified and comfortably crossed boundaries. For instance, they might include Otto van Bismarck and Shaka Zulu in one history lesson and allow learners to draw lessons from both the Prussian and Zulu histories, moving beyond race to the phenomenon of creating societies. We should ask ourselves how we can rid ourselves of the colonial heritage insofar as the discipline structures are concerned.

A virtual participant remarked that many universities across the world have reckoned with a troubled past and asked whether UP has documented its part in colonialism and apartheid.

Prof Harris responded to this by saying that the University documents its history in the *Ad Destinatum* but also has a researcher (Dr Bronwyn Strydom) involved in a project led by Prof Salim Badat to compile a new history of South African universities.

Prof Steyn raised the issue of universities preparing students for professions as engineers, doctors, teachers, and chartered accountants, where the professions themselves have not been transformed. Therefore, it would therefore seem that the University's role is not only to transform its own curriculum but also to contribute to changing society's expectations of the professions. Our discussions should not end with transforming our own modules.

Prof Feris responded that change was also a factor of scale and time—over time, the University will produce a new generation of professionals who will change the professions from within. Noting that it has been almost 30 years since 1994, Prof O'Connell added that it was the University's duty to produce students and research aligned with how we imagine society can be. She added that change never comes from the centre, but, as a university, we can chip away at the establishment from the edges to achieve social justice.

Prof Kupe ended the discussion with the view that it would not be helpful for UP to tinker with change at the top of the educational system. The system is integrated and articulated, and, therefore, change has to start with early childhood education. This is necessary to address the issue of too few learners passing matric with marks that allow them to enter STEM programmes at university. Referring to the book by Chris Brink, *The soul of a university: Why excellence is not enough*,⁷ Prof Kupe expressed the view that philosophy and mathematics were essential subjects

⁷ Brink, C. (2018). *The soul of a university: Why excellence is not enough*. Bristol University Press.

for students who wished to succeed at university.

SESSION 2

The case for curriculum transformation (1)

This session was chaired by the Registrar, **Prof Caroline Nicholson**. The session consisted of an online speaker, a film clip, and a panel discussion.

2.1 Prof Mbulungeni Madiba, Stellenbosch University

The role of African languages in curriculum transformation in higher education

Intellectual and scientific dependency in South Africa and Africa are inseparable from linguistic dependency. Unless African languages are developed and intellectualised, breaking free from this intellectual dependency will remain a pipedream.

Prof Madiba (Dean of Education), who joined the conference online from Stellenbosch, started his address about how African languages can be used for curriculum transformation by sharing a slide showing the diversity of African languages spoken in the areas where South African public universities are located.

He briefly enumerated the policy frameworks governing language in South African tertiary education.

According to a 2014 South African Human Rights Commission report, there is insufficient use of African languages in higher education. The dilemma, as framed by Prof Madiba, is that across higher education in South Africa, there is a high preference for English. Yet, at the same time, English is unattainable for many students.

Curiously, not much focus was placed on the need for African languages in higher education during the #FeesMustFall protests in 2015/6.

Prof Madiba argued that many studies have shown a strong connection between mother language-based education and educational achievements. It was also found that the use of European languages rather than students' mother tongues had profound cultural consequences.

He stated that intellectual and scientific dependency in South Africa and Africa are inseparable from linguistic dependency. African languages are underdeveloped and not intellectualised. Unless this is addressed, breaking free from the aforesaid intellectual dependency will remain a pipedream.

Prof Madiba advocates a translanguaging approach. This approach was first used by Cen Williams in Welsh schools in the 1980s and can be understood as one language being used to reinforce the other to increase understanding and augment the learner's ability in both languages. This approach is underpinned by an understanding that language is action and practice and not simply a system of structures. A translanguaging pedagogy promotes languaging, per se.

A translanguaging approach emphasises the agency of multilingual learners.

Prof Madiba proceeded to share his experience of the UCT Multilingualism Education Project, starting with an overview of the history of UCT, where English is the primary medium.

The project consisted of various layers and included aspects such as multilingual signage. The curriculum, Prof Madiba argued, is not only what we teach; it is everything inside *and* outside of the classroom.

At the curriculum level, the project included the introduction of Xhosa and Afrikaans service courses for students in health sciences, as well as the introduction of a pilot course in isiXhosa for psychology, ethics, philosophy, and human nutrition, among others.

A strategy was also implemented to promote awareness of multilingualism for communication, and students in residence were offered a non-formal course in conversational isiXhosa. Other students and staff (academic as well those in the professional services) were also provided with access to isiXhosa courses. Prof Madiba shared a graph indicating the numbers of staff and students who participated in the courses up to 2016.

UCT furthermore collaborated with the University of Birmingham (UK) in a project around African languages as mediums of instruction as part of the Multilingual Concept Literacy Project (UBUESA). Prof Madiba focused on the introduction of translanguaging as an approach in tutorial classes for first-year students in economics. Similar tutorials were held for students in maths.

He shared the example of a discussion around the meaning of the word “deficit” that took place in one of the tutorials using a translanguaging approach that drew on the different languages of students in the group as resources. In this manner, space was opened up for indigenous languages—in this case, isiXhosa.

Prof Madiba briefly shared the model for using translanguaging to integrate African languages into the curriculum. In conclusion, he remarked that the UCT case study resolved the tension between students’ life-world and an institution where there is a unitary language, thus excluding the language resources students bring into the teaching environment. Translanguaging enables the curriculum to be transformed by way of the integration of African languages into the academic discourse. It allows student voices to be heard and enables them to engage critically with what is being taught. Overall, translanguaging promotes a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject by the students.

2.2 Film screening and panel discussion: *Turning the tide*

Prof O’Connell, who directed the film, provided introductory comments with respect to the film. In 2022, the organising committee of the Senate Conference asked her to make a short film capturing comments from the deans on curriculum transformation. Rich conversations were had, most of which ended up on the cutting floor. Nonetheless, the full interviews will be kept in the UP Archive.

The film was shown. About 17 minutes long, it consisted of statements from the deans about their

understanding of what curriculum transformation is, the need for it, what has been done in this regard, and what remains to be done. The deans also shared a little of their own educational experiences in an unequal past. The clips from the interviews were interspersed with snapshots of the educational experiences of different racial groups in South Africa under apartheid.

Prof Nicholson then turned to the panel, asking each member to make a provocative statement that would stimulate thought and further discussion. It was noted that Mr Njabulo Sibeko, representing the Student Representative Council, was unable to attend.

2.2.1 Prof Siona O’Connell, Faculty of Humanities

Prof O’Connell referred to a research project in the School of the Arts around the sustainability of food gardens that she was involved with in the Cederberg. While there was scope for various faculties to become involved, it proved difficult to connect with the right people. This has shown the need for a system of networks to allow researchers to tap into the vast experience available at the University. We have a wonderful wealth of experience, but it cannot be easily tapped into in an agile way.

2.2.2 Prof Mbulungeni Madiba, Stellenbosch University

Prof Madiba commented that, from the perspective of multilingualism, there is a very strong connection in the history of the country between language and colonialism, language and racism, and language and ethnicity. If we wish to transform the curriculum, we have to deal with the issue of language.

2.2.3 Dr Ntombenhle Gama, Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Dr Gama said that context was important in terms of how we contextualise the curriculum and how we respond to student needs. We have to ask whether our students will be able to meet the demands placed on them when they graduate. We also have to consider what happens to students who are not admitted to the honours programme. Would they be able to do something with the knowledge they acquired at the second- or third-year level? In her department, an attempt was made to introduce an assignment asking students to identify a problem in the world that they could solve by applying their knowledge to it. This was challenging because biochemists, for example, did not have the resources to teach business skills. It was then decided, as an alternative, to ask the students to prepare a research proposal—say, for the NRF, something the lecturers are more familiar with. The essential question students are asking is, “If I can’t find a job after leaving here, what does this degree mean for me?”

2.2.4 Prof Sumaiya Adam, Faculty of Health Sciences

Prof Adam started by acknowledging that change is difficult. Transformation of the MBChB curriculum has been ongoing for the past couple of years. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that

resilience is very important. Noting that change is ongoing, she expressed concern about maintaining and sustaining change. For instance, how do we maintain the attitude that teaching medicine is about more than just disease and diagnosis, that each student is a person with values and ideals? Seeing that many people thought they should go back to the old ways of teaching after the Covid-19 pandemic, what structures are there to ensure that we remain reflective, constantly rejuvenating and keeping up with changes in the world so that we avoid the same pitfalls?

2.2.5 Prof Chika Sehoole, Faculty of Education

Prof Sehoole pleaded for the role of African languages in curriculum transformation to be taken seriously and asked how committed the University was to ensuring that this happened. To achieve this goal, we need people who speak these languages. He referred to an experience he had with a taxi driver who spoke ten of South Africa's official languages but not English, which meant that the doors of learning were closed to him. Prof Sehoole challenged the perception that someone who speaks English is intelligent, while a taxi driver who could speak ten languages but not English was regarded as illiterate.

2.3 Moderated question-and-answer session

Prof Ebersöhn referred to international examples of translanguaging she encountered during her research, for example, work with refugees in Europe. There are existing models that UP can draw on. While it is not always possible for the person facilitating learning to translanguague, the students in the room could represent several different languages. A concept such as resilience, for example, could be discussed from the perspective of the different languages. Such practices should be included in the pedagogy.

Prof Feris remarked that people are not only judged by their ability to speak English but also by *how* they speak English.

Prof Madiba agreed that accent also played a role in preventing some students from wanting to speak in class for fear of being ridiculed. At UCT, a video was produced around accents in order to break those stigmas. Such interventions are important to ensure that everyone gets to participate in meaning-making.

Prof Kupe referred to the Vice-Chancellors' Language Colloquium that was held at UP in December 2022. A question put to the panel was how the issue of multilingualism at universities is seen from a societal perspective. We tend to be very focused on South Africa when considering such questions, but one could learn from what the experience of other African countries has been with the dominance of colonial languages. An underlying question that has to be considered is how success is defined.

Prof Madiba remarked that parents are often given a choice: Do you want your child to study in English or in their home language? This is the wrong question. What parents should be asked is: Do you want your child to develop cognitively? In order to achieve this, the children will be taught English well from grade 1 but will also draw on their own linguistic repertoires. We currently find that ten-year-olds are not able to read with comprehension—no parent would want that. It has

been found that multilingual students learn English better, which means it isn't a case of "either/or"—all linguistic repertoires have to be included. On the African continent, there is no country where indigenous languages are taught beyond grade 12. SA is in a position to be a good example to the rest of Africa.

In closing, Prof Nicholson gave each of the panel members the opportunity to make a final comment.

Dr Gama referred to the remark made by Prof Kupe about perceptions of success. As academics, we have to continuously ask ourselves what success looks like for our students. Once we have our students' perspective in this regard, we can transform our curriculum so that it supports their definition of success, which indicates our success in teaching them.

Prof O'Connell supported the idea that there should not be a binary relationship between English and African languages. Referring to Prof Sehoole's example of the multilingual taxi driver, she said it would be a humbling experience for those of us speaking English as a mother tongue to find ourselves in a situation where we could not communicate in our language.

Prof Adam spoke from her experience in the Faculty of Health Sciences. While it was deemed unfeasible to teach the curriculum in multiple languages, multilingualism is incorporated into community service modules. The faculty wants day-one doctors to be able to converse basically in an indigenous language. For this reason, language courses were introduced that are also assessed. What remains is to measure the difference this has made in the doctors' clinical practice.

Prof Sehoole shared an example of geography scripts being marked at a marking centre. A question in the paper was, "What are the causes of fire in informal settlements?" A learner wrote "bawula", and it was marked wrong. On appeal, however, it was resolved that the student did indeed provide the correct answer, although they did not know the English equivalent of "bawula". This example shows how a monolingual approach excludes and disadvantages students.

SESSION 3

Shifting the focus to praxis, this session featured **four UP case studies**. It was chaired by **Prof Loretta Feris**, Vice-Principal: Academic.

Each panel member (individual or team) provided a ten-minute presentation on a UP case study of curriculum transformation.

3.1 Dr Lelanie Smith and Mr Thabang Ngwenya, Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and IT (EBIT)

Vertically integrated projects: Rethinking the Engineering Curriculum Group (EBIT)

The metaphor used by the Engineering Curriculum Group was that of an ecosystem. Questions asked included:

- The EBIT ecosystem: Bursting with life or strangled by weeds?
- Is this space creating life for us?

- What is a curriculum?
- From a student perspective, what would the ideal curriculum experience be?

The focus was on students and how they experience their trajectory through the learning experience. The idea of an integrated and unified education approach became very important. Students are taken through a developmental journey towards “becoming” (something else).

This approach caused the academics to question their identity as they had been trained as knowledge creators and were showing up in the classroom wanting to transfer that knowledge. Now, there was a shift towards creating a transformational process for students from high school to becoming something else—i.e., a shift from expert knowledge creators to transformers of people.

The group worked with transformational coaches to develop a narrative and process to engage with the academic staff. To start off with, the focus was not so much on the programme but on who fits into the programme—lecturers and students. Academic staff found it stressful to view themselves as facilitating a learning process rather than transferring knowledge.

Although they find themselves in the same ecosystem, students are from a different generation than their lecturers. Through the Joint Community-Based Project (JCP)⁸ module in the EBIT faculty, role-players have been placed in the townships. These are individuals who are already in university and help others bridge the gap between high school and university. They provide mentorship while prospective students are still in high school. In this way, high school learners are already made part of the journey towards becoming graduates.

It is important for students to be seen as humans and also for them to see their lecturers as humans and not be afraid to engage with them.

Some research was conducted on assessment, and it was found that the lecturers’ expectations of what should be achieved through assessment were very different from students’ views on the matter.

At the programme level, a co-curricular structure has been developed that puts people and the community first. Nothing has been rolled out yet, but the structure has been developed, and staff members can propose projects that students can fit into from their second year up to the postgraduate level, thereby developing into professionals connected to the community.

The project will now proceed to phase 2 with the help of the transformation coaches. With 800 second-year students currently involved, the question is how to keep the scale sustainable.

The notion of vertically integrated projects is currently only being implemented in EBIT, but a

⁸ The JCP module is a community engagement module integrated into all undergraduate academic programmes offered by the Faculty of EBIT. It intends for the student to develop, through reflection, an understanding of their own experience in a team-based workspace, as well as a broader understanding of the application of their discipline knowledge and its potential impact in their communities, thus also enhancing their sense of civic responsibility. All JCP projects have to be locally contextualised in the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

future goal would be to expand it to other faculties.

3.2 Ms Heather Thuynsma and Ms Yanga Malotana, Faculty of Humanities

Comparative regional politics: The global classroom

Ms Thuynsma remarked on the importance of STEAM, i.e., adding the arts to STEM. She introduced the case study by painting a picture of learning at a university 30 years ago, when she first started studying, that included lecture halls, chalkboards, an overhead projector, and libraries with printed books, a card catalogue, and microfiche. This was contrasted with Ms Malotana's experiences in 2018, two years after #FeesMustFall. This raises the question of how a lecturer teaches students 30 years her junior who are facing an entirely different system of work and opportunities.

It is this thinking that gave rise to the idea of the "Global Classroom". For the first time, Political Science students in four different institutions on four continents were learning together in spite of logistic challenges arising from having to navigate different time zones and languages. With a focus on students, the module was embedded with skills for presenting, writing, research analysis, and lateral thinking.

Making use of dynamic links and multidisciplinary methodologies, the module furthermore developed cross-cultural respect, self-awareness, and confidence in the participating students.

Ms Yanga reported on the value she gained from the module as a student, remarking that it provided her with real-life experience and critical thinking skills and boosted the confidence of the UP cohort, who took the lead in group assignments. This enabled students to approach subsequent opportunities for collaboration with peers from other universities confidently.

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the global classroom concept lost its novelty, and multinational, multilingual, multidisciplinary engagements became the norm. However, the global classroom still exists, and the focus is now on evolving the concept to make it even better by integrating what happens in the real world into the classroom. For instance, the pandemic showed that there is a need to teach students how to embrace uncertainty. The global classroom is a platform for debating difficult questions, such as whether democracy really is the answer.

The approach whereby it is acceptable to stumble and make mistakes demands a change in attitude, not only on the part of students but also on the part of the lecturers. Ultimately, it is hoped that the module will continue to foster resilience, curiosity, and imagination in the participating students.

3.3 Prof Liz Wolfaardt, Faculty of Health Sciences

The online PG Diploma in Public Health

Prof Wolfaardt joined online from Cape Town, where she is involved in a community engagement project.

The development of the fully online Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health was part of reimagining the curriculum at UP. It was a team effort consisting of the Centre for Online Education Services (COES) and their administrative team, as well as the academic team, consisting of School of Health Systems and Public Health (SHSPH) academic staff, a contracted course coordinator, and a course consultant.

The fact that it coincided with the pandemic was greatly fortuitous for the success of the online programme. Much about the pandemic was also included in the curriculum.

Prof Wolfaardt rejected the notion of renewal when it comes to offering a completely online programme. She prefers to call it a palace revolution that required one to put aside everything one knew about teaching. For some of the academics involved in the process, it was a very traumatic experience, while for others, it was an epiphany of the art of the possible. It was found that difficult subjects like epidemiology and statistics could be done well online.

The academics had to change much of their thinking, as paradigms of the past no longer applied—for instance, in respect of selection criteria. Nine modules were offered with a fixed start and end, and they accepted a new cohort every eight weeks. There are about 1 000 students at any given time, and students have to complete 351 activities—179 participation activities and 172 module mark activities. Initially, there were concerns that it would be difficult to get students to engage in an online environment, so the programme was structured to reward participation. It turned out, however, that this was not a problem; students were, in fact, over-participating.

For the first six modules alone, 21 000 discussions were recorded with more than 50 tutors from the graduate pool. The rule is, “You have 24 hours”, meaning that, as programme coordinator, module coordinator, or tutor, one has 24 hours to respond to any student enquiry.

Seeing that the programme had largely been developed under pandemic conditions, the academics involved never had the opportunity to sit together as a group for critical reflection. In October 2022, this was achieved for the first time, providing an opportunity to thrash out a number of critical aspects.

Given that students entering the programme come from many different fields, the programme is “naturally blessed” with epistemological diversity. Assignments are structured in such a way that students can use what is around them—for instance, in the kitchen or bathroom cabinet. Students are asked to go out and take a picture of what they view as public health and to discuss it. They are also introduced to digital environments—for instance, having to complete an assessment that takes the form of a digital escape room game.

Next will be the development of a fully online Master of Public Health programme.

Prof Wolfaardt closed her presentation by remarking that transformative learning is a process of perspective transformation. This has three dimensions: psychological (understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems—what is learning, what learning counts?), and behavioural (changes in lifestyle, or more applicable in this case, changes in professional practice).

3.4 Prof Louise Whittaker, Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS)

GIBS project with students in the Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration (PDBA)

Prof Whittaker spoke on a project introduced in the Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration (PDBA), which feeds into the MBA, to provide students with functional knowledge and skills, as well as effective management of self (and others).

Renewal of pedagogy is an ongoing interest at GIBS. The curriculum challenge with the PDBA is that, although it has a functional approach, it is fairly siloed. There was a need to provide students with integrated course content while incorporating social responsiveness.

One of the ways in which this was achieved was the introduction of the Applied Business Project, a large-scale challenge completed by the students in syndicates. The project is started at the beginning of the diploma programme and is aimed at giving students decision-making skills and allowing them to integrate their knowledge by tackling a societal project from a business perspective. The project counts for 20 credits, while other modules in the programme only count for ten.

The SDGs must be used as a framework for the project. SDG 3 is excluded (due to the complexities of ethical clearance related to health research), as is any project involving children. Each group chooses a goal and a specific opportunity for finding a solution that they will focus on. Impact is the most important factor.

There is a research component to the project. Students have to conduct research on the issue their project will address, which also includes interviews. At the end, they must show that they have applied theory and tools from at least six of the other subjects in the programme (there are ten in total). Students must thus explicitly integrate the knowledge they gained across a divided and functional curriculum.

The project creates awareness of the SDGs and encourages students to find viable solutions for societal problems. Projects that have emerged from the programme have won awards.

As an example of one of the projects, Prof Whittaker showcased the interactive mobile application that was developed to promote awareness of water-saving and encourage urban households to use less water.

3.5 Moderated question-and-answer session

Prof Modiri highlighted the risk of responding to the call for curriculum transformation through a technical exercise that consists of introducing technology and new jargon. What curriculum transformation should be about is bringing into the classroom the vibrancy of critical thinking and the contestation of different knowledges. It creates discomfort with lecturers when they consider what it would mean to deliver informed and well-educated students. There has to be a distinction between form and substance when it comes to the curriculum. The substance relates to questions such as “Whose knowledge is this, whose history?” and “Where does our discipline come from?” A transformed curriculum will end the notion of white saviourism in international development. Curriculum transformation is not just about introducing props and fun classroom vibes but about

the extent to which the discipline is rethought, reimagined, and brought into crisis.

Dr Smith remarked that space has to be created for having conversations about what an authentic shift in the curriculum would entail. Academics often argue that they do not have time for such discussions because they have “real problems” to deal with. It is very difficult to ask people to imagine a transformed curriculum while they are having to put out fires. So, while the intention with curriculum transformation initiatives is pure and authentic, transformation is what we aspire to, and the challenge is how to create the time and space for people to think about it.

Prof Whittaker responded that she was deeply sympathetic to Prof Modiri’s statement but acknowledged that transformation was complicated—all the more so in a multidisciplinary school such as GIBS. Therefore, they decided to start from where they were. In the business school, for instance, even bringing the SDGs into the classroom is a first step. It was an attempt to sensitise the students, who are businesspeople, to other things that are important in the world. The research part of the Applied Business Project is important because it includes interviewing people who are grappling with the issues being investigated. These are not people the students would have typically dealt with in their day-to-day business lives.

Ms Thuynsma said that technology is only a vehicle. We have to teach students the basics of being human—not just hard skills but also soft ones, such as what it means to be compassionate and to debate with respect. We have to engage the imaginations of people younger than ourselves, and we have to embrace real-world challenges.

Prof Feris stated that curriculum transformation cannot merely be an add-on; it is an integral part of what we teach and how we teach. We saw in 2016 what happens if we fail to acknowledge the need for curriculum transformation. Having said that, not everyone has the capacity to self-reflect and transform their curriculum. This is why we need to build capacity in curriculum transformation.

Prof Sehoole referred to an observation made by Prof Jonathan Jansen about the way in which universities responded to the 2015 and 2016 protests. Prof Jansen remarked that, despite the high levels of militancy around curriculum transformation, the curriculum remains largely the same. He argued that one explanation for this is that, due to the way they are structured, universities are very resistant to alien thoughts or proposals. Things that make a university uncomfortable are not responded to positively. Prof Sehoole asked the senators to consider to what extent the structure of the University (faculty boards, the APC, the Senate, etc.) enables or blocks what we are talking about in terms of curriculum transformation.

Prof Feris remarked that the University relies on hierarchy and bureaucracy for its functioning, but these characteristics can also block transformation.

Prof Chamunorwa said that everything came down to culture. Whether the curriculum gets transformed or not will depend on turnover until we have a sufficient number of academics who have embraced the letter and spirit of transformation. Otherwise, a commitment to curriculum transformation will only be lip service. Lecturers have to ask themselves whether they are serving their own interests or those of their students. They have to ask themselves who they are talking to and whether the examples they provide are relevant to the students. That attitude cannot necessarily be taught.

Responding to a question regarding the transformation coaches she referred to in her talk, Dr Smith shared more about the process their group followed. The group wanted to transform their students, to add value to their lives, but did not know how to go about it. Furthermore, other pressures on them (such as research expectations) made transformation seem unattainable, and they became resistant and despondent. It was important to find a way to bypass that resistance. The transformation coaches were a group of eight people from different universities and faculties. They rolled out work sessions where a specific model of transformation was followed that consisted of six stages, the first of which was “waking up”. The model was designed so as to ensure that those participating remained curious and interested in the transformation process, letting go of individual agendas and embracing change. She stated that transformational coaching is about managing the change process so that it does not shut down or get stuck.

Prof Whittaker added that a lot of thought is being given to how lecturers should transform and what could be done to facilitate engagement with the students. The aim was to encourage students to participate in a learning process that was different from mere knowledge transfer.

Ms Malotana applauded the fact that the matter of curriculum transformation was discussed at this level but called for more student participation. Acknowledging the growing generational gap, she stated that lecturers have to understand how students consume information. Drawing on her experience in political science, she said that what is sometimes disparagingly referred to as “lecture room theatrics” can be used as a tool to respond to how long students can pay attention in class.

SESSION 4

This session, consisting of four group discussions, was chaired by **Prof Reddy**, Dean of Humanities.

4.1 Group discussions

Senators had been given an opportunity beforehand to choose one of four breakaway groups in which to participate. Senators participating in the conference online also contributed to the group discussions, which were organised in terms of specific questions addressing key themes. A facilitator and a rapporteur were appointed for each group.

GROUP 1

Facilitator: **Prof Dirk Human** (Theology and Religion) Rapporteur: **Prof Joel Modiri** (Law)

Topic:

Institutional culture and hidden curriculum

- What insights are evident from staff and students in the recent institutional culture survey regarding curriculum transformation (and the hidden curriculum)?
- What kind of institutional ecosystem do we want to design for the UP community (staff,

students, graduates, alumni) in engaging curriculum transformation that also addresses systemic racism and other forms of institutionalised or systematic discrimination in higher education and, by extension, society?

Prof Modiri reported that the group looked at the question of institutional culture in relation to curriculum transformation. The outcomes of the institutional culture survey were not encouraging. What they indicate is that in spite of much talk and work around the topic, not much has changed on the ground. Looking at the student and staff inputs that came out of the Institutional Culture Survey—also with regard to the hidden curriculum—it could be argued that while UP has a *language* of transformation, we do not yet have a *culture* of transformation.

UP is structured according to a logical hierarchy and is characterised by competitiveness and goal orientation. This does not support creativity and innovation.

Problems staff highlighted in the survey included perceptions around freedom of speech, a submissive culture, barriers to robust debate, a lack of agility, and the effect of Covid-19 on working conditions.

The group called for a paradigm change that embraced out-of-the-box thinking and opened up spaces for engagement, not only between managers but including lecturers and students.

The group acknowledged the tension between the demands of the day-to-day lives of professional academics and the need for long, meaningful, and critical engagements around issues such as curriculum transformation.

The group emphasised the role of leadership in achieving transformation. Prof Modiri remarked that some stakeholders preferred a university that could be characterised as “orderly”. In fact, according to some, an orderly university is the best we can hope for.

A question that arose is how the University and its academics, as agents of our communities, should engage with the outside world.

In the discussion, the group called for spatial and symbolic transformation and for transformation at the systemic level to continue. Cultivating a culture of critical reflection was essential to dismantling outdated practices.

Prof Modiri closed his report by stating that, over the past seven years since 2016, little has changed as far as curriculum transformation is concerned. He added that it is unlikely that truly radical change could come from within as there are some things that we, as managers, cannot do.

Lastly, he stated that more progress would be made if the University was more honest about tensions inherent in our mission, e.g., in relation to the SDGs and university rankings, which are linked to the Global North.

GROUP 2

Topic:
A reimagined university

- What does curriculum transformation mean in relation to a reimagined and transformed university?
- What are the trends helping shape curriculum transformation, and what impact might that change have across faculties and disciplines? What shifts and changes are we witnessing?

Prof Mthombeni reported that, from the group discussion, it could be surmised that curriculum transformation meant ensuring that we adequately prepare students for the “now” and for the “next”. Graduates have to be equipped for a context of dynamic career changes over their lifetime. Given the context of business and society in South Africa, students not only have to be prepared for professional success but also have to be entrepreneurially minded. What they are taught has to be globally relevant. Furthermore, there has to be a balance between the professional and technical skills they are taught.

The group spent some time discussing diversity and inclusion. Pragmatism was encouraged in the sense that not every academic was expected to know how to deal with diversity and inclusion, but all academics were expected to model respect and being a good human being. Following a memetic approach, this would instil in students the desire to become good and respectful people.

The concept of access was briefly debated, with the group asking whether there was space for micro-credentialing at the University and whether that should be pursued.

The group also touched on the issue of mental health. The view was expressed that mental health support should not be a separate task but should be integrated into what we do as academics.

With regard to the trends and shifts we are witnessing in terms of the curriculum, the following was mentioned in the group:

- We should not get too tied up in technological advancements but should focus on the substance of curriculum transformation.
- We should celebrate cross-faculty connections and connect more within and across faculties since the more we connect, the more we will be able to achieve.
- Some faculties are transforming, but others are not, and the gap between the two groups is widening.
- We should not get carried away with the notion of transdisciplinarity. While students should be exposed to it, they also need to spend a lot of time in their own discipline as this gives students a good foundation.
- The question was asked whether more should be done around service learning, i.e., whether more work-integrated learning should be incorporated into the curriculum.

GROUP 3

Topic:

Institutional ecosystem/faculty understanding

- Is there a “one-size-fits-all” model with respect to curriculum transformation? If not, what are the elements with respect to differentiation across disciplines and faculties that matter? If so, how, why, and what? Are there limitations to curriculum transformation in respect of the field of study?
- Is decoloniality synonymous with curriculum transformation? What are their synergies/divergences? What may be their respective strengths and weaknesses for the academic and transformation project? Why does it matter to all faculties and the institution?
- What are the elements of curriculum transformation aligned to the future of the University and its citizens (e.g., current trends, applications, and relevance for the business of higher education at UP)?

Prof Senkubuge reported that, following an ecosystem understanding of the institution, the group was of the opinion that there has to be a tailored approach to curriculum transformation for each faculty.

In the discussion, the group pondered whether there was a shared understanding throughout the University of what curriculum transformation is, not only among lecturers but also among students.

Technology was viewed as a tool for curriculum transformation.

An integrated approach to curriculum transformation was preferred. Social science disciplines often work in communities where there is no choice but to adapt.

Beyond curriculum transformation, we are trying to create a just space.

The question was asked whether UP had a guiding philosophy that academics could draw on to understand what curriculum transformation is, but it was also cautioned that this was perhaps a bureaucratic approach. The consensus was that, rather than a guiding philosophy, it would be ideal to have a coach that would guide, but not dictate, the curriculum transformation process.

It was acknowledged that change is fluid and that context is important. The most important stakeholders, our students, should not be left out of the process of transformation, which is broader than just curriculum transformation.

The group recognised that there were limitations to curriculum transformation—for instance, because of the defined period spanned by a certain curriculum, be it four or five years.

The group ended its discussion by pondering the notion of decoloniality. Several striking analogies were provided. The colleagues from historical and heritage studies advocated for students to be introduced to history, not just the history of the higher education fraternity but our broader history and experiences as a country.

There was agreement that the curriculum should not be overly complicated, that “less is more” in a curriculum, and that what mattered was the fundamental learning.

A slightly controversial suggestion was made that all students should perhaps be required to do the same initial semester before choosing what they wanted to do next. The reason for this suggestion was that some students had difficulty becoming integrated at UP.

The group ran out of time while it was having a heated discussion about decoloniality.

GROUP 4

Facilitator: **Prof Pineteh Angu** (Humanities)

Rapporteur: **Prof JP Chamunorwa** (Veterinary Science)

Topic:

Impediments/barriers and opportunities

- What are the stumbling blocks that impede curriculum transformation within disciplines, including interventions in respect of the “hidden curriculum”?
- What changes are the citizens of the University bringing into curriculum transformation (including the hidden curriculum)? What do they look like? What else needs to be done?

Prof Chamunorwa reported that the group had a stimulating discussion and ran out of time. There was a focus on the catchphrases “disruption” and “adaptability”.

The group identified several important barriers to successful transformation. One of these is professional bodies that are not transformed. Students who are led through a transformed curriculum are discouraged when they get to the workplace to find that only money talks.

Another barrier is the workload of academics who face a heavy teaching load and research demands. Curriculum transformation is becoming a stronger focus for academics, but they do not necessarily have the skills to implement it in a meaningful manner.

The question is what it means to be a university in Africa: Should we follow a Western curriculum, or should academics constantly review the content of what they teach? Other questions asked included “How committed is the University to the curriculum transformation agenda?” and “What are the practicalities involved?”

Transformation requires teamwork, but academia is very individualistic, especially with respect to what is rewarded in the form of subsidy by the DHET.

The group agreed that some aspects of curriculum transformation that are not currently being implemented would not require resources but are not happening due to a lack of political will. We need to engage in honest introspection and build consensus so that curriculum transformation can

be approached from the same perspective. One example is multilingualism: What stops us from implementing this?

A question raised was whether UP truly believes in the transformation agenda. Judging from its behaviour, UP is not ready to transform. A strong drive from the top is needed. UP does not reflect the society in which it operates, and this becomes an issue in how it deals with transformation.

There must be co-creation of the curriculum, which demands equal representation so that priorities can be set that reflect those of the broader community.

With regard to the changes UP citizens are bringing into curriculum transformation, the discussion highlighted how students from diverse backgrounds are causing lecturers to innovate in terms of how they undertake assessment, for example. Students have to be engaged in a way that recognises their backgrounds. There has to be a focus on co-creation of the curriculum and more awareness of the hidden curriculum. Academics bring passion and an understanding of the different contexts their students come from.

The group ended the session with a discussion of the hidden curriculum.

4.2 Prof Loretta Feris

Closure and wrapping up of day 1

Prof Feris thanked the speakers and participants in the discussion for their contributions. The first day of the conference enabled an understanding of where the University stands in respect of curriculum transformation. Overall, the picture that was painted is not rosy. She said that a number of the issues raised would be further addressed during the discussions on day 2 of the conference.

DAY 2

17 February 2023

SESSION 1

This session was chaired by **Prof C Koornhof**, Executive Director: Finance and Business Initiatives.

1.1 Prof C Koornhof

Welcome

Prof Koornhof welcomed the members and briefly introduced the structure of the day, which had been designed to take the conversation of the previous day forward. Once again, the programme would start off with three keynote speakers, followed by a presentation of UP case studies. In the third session of the day, the senators would again have the opportunity to consider specific questions around curriculum transformation.

She briefly recapped the proceedings of day 1, which started with keynote addresses that drilled down into the University's history and included a call by the Vice-Chancellor to take a longer historical view, going back to where knowledge originated. He also called for an integrated, transdisciplinary perspective. The programme also included a video containing insightful views from the University's deans. While the deans come from very diverse disciplines, they share a commitment to UP and a passion for turning the tide.

Prof Koornhof added that time would be provided at the end of each session for participants to ask questions. Senators participating virtually would also have the opportunity to submit questions via the chat function.

1.2 Mr Buyani Zwane, CEO: Breakthrough Development & part-time lecturer, GIBS

Industry perspectives for learning and preparing for the world of work

If we fail to engage our students, they will end up being certificated but will not have learned anything, thus becoming a burden to industry.

Mr Zwane said that "tide turning" was about opportunities and grabbing them as and when they arise. Referring to the value Albert Einstein placed on imagination, he said the notion of reimagining the curriculum was fitting.

Speaking from the perspective of industry, Mr Zwane said he wanted senators to consider how they could be bold in grabbing opportunities, much like one would grab a lion by the mane. For his concept of leadership, he drew on Mark Batterson's book *In a pit with a lion on a snowy day*,⁹ which calls for doing things differently.

Mr Zwane highlighted the importance of context. As a university, we want to be responsive to the social context. He again quoted Einstein, who is believed to have said: "The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." We cannot talk in 2023 in the same terms we used in 2020, pre-Covid. We have to ask ourselves how we imagine the future. He reminded the senators that there were only seven years left to achieve the targets set in the 2030 National Development Plan.

Highlighting the importance of paradigms, he quoted a tweet by Stephen R Covey: "If you want small changes, work on your behavior; if you want quantum-leap changes, work on your paradigms." How we see the world determines what we do, and that, in turn, determines the results we get. We need to visualise graduates as impact makers, people who can grab the lion by the mane and give it direction to contribute to the economy.

Mr Zwane proceeded to introduce the members to what he calls the Leadership Code, which consists of four actions, namely:

1. Shape the future

We cannot remain trapped in a space where we believe we understand it all and do not have to do anything more. We have to invest in and refresh ourselves. We thus have to ask what we can do with our ideas and the members of faculty so that they shape the future.

⁹ Batterson, M. (2016). *In a pit with a lion on a snowy day* (1st revised edition). Multnomah.

2. Make things happen

Part of curriculum transformation has to ensure making learning practical—otherwise, we will deliver unemployable graduates.

3. Engage today's talent

Talent is everywhere but is not tapped into enough. We have to give students more territory and more terrains in which they can make a significant impact. Millennials and Generation Z ask, “What impact am I making?” We have to equip them for that.

4. Build the next generation

As we reimagine the curriculum to make it better than we found it, we have to think of Generation Alpha before they get to our campuses. When they get to campus, they want a welcoming environment, which means that diversity, equity, and inclusion will be vital.

Mr Zwane touched on the question of the future of work and what is shaping it. Behaviour is informed by technology, and we want our curriculum to reach students easily and in a palatable format. We have to consider what technology brings to our world.

He referred to the pandemic, during which essential frontline workers defined what happened. How do we ensure that those in our space feel at home and can give the best of themselves? In seven years' time, 60 to 70% of the workforce will be Millennials. We have to make the workspace acceptable to them. This will include mobility, including “wherever, whenever” learning.

Access to learning and teaching in a global space means we have to think beyond South Africa and Africa. We have to position South Africa and Africa in everyone's minds as the fountain of knowledge and wisdom, not just the home of humanity (as in Maropeng).

Mr Zwane talked, furthermore, about what industry expects. He said industry expects contribution-ready talent—talent that is also relevant, that understands the issues that are being grappled with. They also need graduates to be innovative, able to help them push boundaries, and responsive—which also means they will help the organisation to be responsive. Also, industry expects graduates to be grounded, to have principles and values, the things that helped prior generations (mostly the Baby Boomers) shape what we have today.

Using the mnemonic of the talent “SCENE”, Mr Zwane said that what will be required of universities in offering learning is:

Speed: We have to be responsive, providing learning that is accessible and available right where it is required.

Convenience: The learning material has to be available, and learning has to be convenient.

Engage: If we fail to engage our students, they will end up being certificated but will not have learned anything, thus becoming a burden to industry.

Nurture: Talent has to be nurtured so that it shapes the world. Generation Z and Generation Alpha will be so into technology (hence the term “screenagers”) that they will not have much human interaction. Therefore, they will have a greater need for a nurturing space on campus.

Empower: We have to deliberate how we create a fully empowering environment for our students.

1.3 Prof Charles Maimela, Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Law, UP

Curriculum transformation is not a future event: Initiatives, goals, failures, and achievements at UP

*UP must employ a critical pedagogy to achieve social justice and liberation, keeping in mind our history as South Africa and Africa.
Transformation is not a future event but a present activity.*

As coordinator of the relaunch of the UP curriculum transformation project, Prof Maimela provided feedback on the work done since 2021.

He explained that the project started with consultation between the coordinator, the Vice-Principal: Academic, and the deans and deputy deans as to the journey UP wished to travel, following which a schedule was developed.

Recordings were made of the experiences in each faculty (except GIBS, seeing that GIBS has no undergraduate students) since the approval of the policy framework for curriculum transformation five years earlier. This was an inclusive process that also included the Director: Transformation and Prof Ahmed Bawa, who was then the CEO of Universities South Africa (USAf). The aim was to get a proper perspective of where UP was five years after the policy framework had been developed.

Focusing on the four drivers of curriculum transformation that appear in the framework, the deans spoke about advancements in curriculum transformation but also about the shortcomings. A number of published articles resulted from the project, which was conducted over a period of six to eight months with no additional budget.

Prof Maimela proceeded to share his analysis as coordinator of the project of relaunching curriculum transformation. The following are a number of remarks extracted from his analysis:

- Academics are at the centre of curriculum transformation. It matters what they think and do. Education is deeply personal and emotional. A psychosocial theory was followed that speaks to personal and interpersonal issues affecting staff and students.
- Due to the University's history, we have a curriculum that is not responsive to the changing needs of the country and students.
- UP's drive towards curriculum transformation must be based on social justice. Racism still dominates in our society—including at UP and other higher learning institutions. The Human Rights Commission deals with 10 000 cases of racism annually. The status quo persists in terms of racism because there is a lack of confrontation in our classrooms; we ignore certain issues to avoid discomfort. People without memory have no future. Just as education was used as an instrument of oppression, we can help to address racism through our pedagogy and the content of our curriculum.
- In teaching, universities must welcome "The beautiful risk of education", as it is called by Gert Biesta.¹⁰ The responsibility of academics is not to make learning smooth and enjoyable.
- There is a distinction between a client and a student (hence the renaming of the UP Client Service Centre to the UP Student Service Centre).
- Learning must be robust; it must interrupt and disrupt common sense or established views

¹⁰ Biesta, GJJ. (2013). *Beautiful risk of education* (1st edition). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315635866>

of the world. UP must employ a critical pedagogy to achieve social justice and liberation, keeping in mind our history as South Africa and Africa.

- Curriculum transformation must speak to the pluralisation of knowledge; different kinds of knowledge must come to the fore.
- The “banking system” of education referred to by Paulo Freire,¹¹ in terms of which lecturers “deposit” knowledge into their students and “withdraw” it during assessment, does not work. Teaching and learning is not filling up a bucket with water; it is about lighting a fire. Fire stimulates and speaks to the urgency of curriculum transformation.
- Education must not be neutral and technical—it is political. The history of South Africa is a case in point.
- Hindrances to curriculum transformation include a factory model of education, where the focus is on objectives met and outcomes achieved. At UP, the focus is on an explicit curriculum, credits, modules, and assessment frameworks, with less focus on the hidden curriculum, which is shaped by the dominant culture of the University. The current system is based on output and has missed the curriculum transformation component, which speaks to input—to knowledge engagement.
- There is no system in place to measure the level of curriculum transformation. For instance, the recent HEQC quality audit of the University had a very technical focus, with the curriculum only appearing in standard 14.
- The University must take curriculum transformation seriously because it wishes to be responsive to national needs and economic and developmental goals.
- The focus must shift to a knowledge epistemology, recognising knowledge as a creator of identity and culture.

Prof Maimela ended his presentation by calling for broader participation in curriculum transformation, including in workshops and lectures on the topic. Faculties must submit their curriculum transformation plans to the Vice-Principal: Academic. He said it was essential for the University to allocate funding to curriculum transformation. Furthermore, a shared understanding of curriculum transformation and a balanced approach to it are essential.

Prof Maimela referred to articles published on curriculum transformation in the faculties, as well as ones written from the perspectives of the SRC and the Transformation Office.

He closed with the statement that transformation is not a future event but a present activity.

1.4 Ms Rutendo Ngara, African indigenous knowledge systems practitioner and transdisciplinary researcher, electrical and biomedical engineer

Integrating knowledge outside of the academy

We should shift our thinking from segregation to congregation, from analysis to synthesis. A dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community. Once that happens, we may have a transformed curriculum for the future.

Ms Ngara spoke about “Cognitive justice at the margins of the academy: The jagged road to curriculum transformation” with the sub-theme of “Integrating knowledge outside of the

¹¹ Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary edition). Continuum.

academy”.

Ms Ngara presented her address as a moment of co-imagination and co-reflection around the question of what the future would be of a post-imagined, transformed curriculum. She warned that her presentation would be chaotic, speaking to the image of a jagged road.

She then proceeded to use two metaphors drawn from nature—that of the weaver bird and that of the river Niger in West Africa.

She invited the senators to follow the way of the weaver bird, weaving a tapestry with industriousness, and the female bird taking apart that which is not woven well. She referred to examples of weavers consolidating their nests and sharing resources when they are limited, with an extreme example being the common nests built by weavers in the Kalahari Desert. The weaver bird weaves strands of sustainability.

She used Tonga baskets as an example of how we have learned from the weaver and pointed out that these baskets are not merely art and craft but that the patterns woven into them relate to fractals of the universe.

She then invited the senators to follow the way of the river. Rivers are significant features of the African continent, with the Nile being the longest, the Congo the deepest, and the Zambezi boasting the largest waterfall, namely the Victoria Falls. The source of the Niger is a mere 200 km from the Atlantic Ocean, causing one to expect it to flow that distance into the sea. Instead, however, it flows inland into the Sahara. Instead of flowing from there into the Mediterranean Sea, it again makes an unexpected turn, crossing multiple countries before emptying into the Gulf of Guinea. At times, the Niger does not move from high to low potential, which causes it to lose efficiency. At the same time, however, this creates the Niger Delta, making it the place with the highest biodiversity in Africa, if not the world. Forty different traditional groups are sustained by the water from the river and the ecological system it feeds. Thus, this inefficient river is, in fact, very effective at creating diversity.

Moving beyond the metaphor, Ms Ngara invited those present to also move beyond the walls of the academy. She remarked that indigenous knowledge is rooted in all communities, governing interaction between the social and spiritual and consisting of tacit knowledge transferred through observation, initiation, and demonstration, among other things. Yet such knowledge has been marginalised in our curricula. She compared the resulting epistemicide with the ecocide that resulted from the discovery of oil in the area of the Niger Delta.

Ms Ngara proceeded to show how Western theoretical constructs have African equivalents—for example, the base-2 number system used for coding exists in the divination beads of the Yoruba. In fact, the divination beads also incorporate base-4 up to base-16 systems, meaning they are used according to a highly sophisticated mathematical construct.

Ms Ngara juxtaposed the cosmology of the dominant worldview according to Western science and propagated by the likes of Darwin with the indigenous African cosmology. In her view, Western cosmology is characterised by a mechanistic and deterministic materialism, reductionism, objectivity, and dualism. Furthermore, knowledge has been constricted into disciplinary silos that have limited the scientific view.

According to ancient indigenous African cosmology, there is a subjective realm of being and an objective realm known as Neter (nature or natural). This emanates into the Ntu—a causative dynamic life force responsible for all life. Ntu is the root of the humanising principle of Ubuntu and for Muntu (a person) and Bantu (all persons who are rational beings). Ubuntu also includes trees—in the African cosmology, trees are people who allow us to move between realms. Emanating from the Neter, Ntu is also visible in the inanimate. A related word, Hantu, refers to cyclical movement and a linking of time and space in a single continuum. The notion of spacetime that characterises quantum physics, therefore, already existed in African cosmology. Another derivative of Ntu is Kuntu—the unseeable, the world of the imagination.

The permutations of Neter from Ntu to Ubuntu can thus be used as an example of decolonising, rehumanising, and Africanising intelligence.

A further example Ms Ngara shared is the principle of Sankofa, a concept from Ghana often understood as looking back into the past in order to create the future. Beyond the anthropocentric view, it represents the universal concept of feedback, with the symbol of a bird turning back with an egg in its beak. Representing the feedback cycles that govern everything in the world, Sankofa thus teaches about what Western science calls systems theory. Another symbol used to represent Sankofa looks like a heart consisting of two symmetrical curved lines, showing the connection between positive and negative feedback.

Answering the question of whether the Western scientific view and indigenous African concepts such as Ubuntu and Sankofa can be linked, Ms Ngara showed how the different permutations of “Ntu” and other African indigenous knowledge constructs can be linked to Western knowledge constructs such as relativity theory, particle-wave duality, the indivisibility of nature, the participatory universe, S-matrix theory, chaos theory, binary code, probability, uncertainty theory, and quantum theory.

She called for a shift in thinking from segregation to congregation, from analysis to synthesis. Returning to the metaphor of the weaver, Ms Ngara called for transformation by enlargement. Returning to the metaphor of the river, she called for embracing movement between different ways of knowing and seeing, i.e., a transdisciplinary approach bringing together soil science, chemistry, community, and art, for example.

Making reference to the work of Prof Odora Hoppers, Ms Ngara said that when we are able to have this conversation, we can move beyond social justice to cognitive justice, to where all knowledge can co-exist without duress. She argued for integrating knowledge that is currently outside the academy, for bringing indigenous knowledge systems from the periphery to the core, and for realising that all is connected, as also argued by David Bohm. This would, however, require us to go beyond the walls asking the questions, “Who?”, “What?”, “Where?” and “How?”. When we do that, we can bring the academy back into the universe in a moment of co-integration and co-creation that calls to mind the Bennu or phoenix.

Ms Ngara closed with an indigenous saying: “A dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community”. Once that happens, we may have a transformed curriculum for the future.

1.5 Moderated question-and-answer session

Prof De Jongh highlighted the problem that while there is agreement that the factory model of education is the opposite of what we aim to achieve through curriculum transformation, it is the factory model that is incentivised.

Prof Sehoole reflected on the inputs made by the three speakers. He supported the view that academics are at the heart of curriculum transformation. Academics should ask themselves how committed they are to curriculum transformation and how open they are to learning to do things in a different way.

Prof Schellack remarked that in addition to the diversity among students, their uniformity also presents a challenge to curriculum transformation. Students are uniform in the sense that they are comfortable with technology, and lecturers have to play catchup. The generation gap lecturers are experiencing now is the widest it has ever been. Students are also entitled in their expectations of lecturers' ability to engage with them digitally.

Prof Maimela again called for curriculum transformation to be resourced. He added that the history and perspective of the lecturer in the endeavour of curriculum transformation cannot be eliminated, but an inclusive approach is called for when teaching students. With regard to the content of what is taught, he said the origins of what is taught must be interrogated, and knowledge that was on the periphery has to be given space in the curriculum so that students can reflect on it.

He added that the curriculum currently detaches students from the reality they come from, even making them ashamed to return home. The issue of language is related to this. Language is a powerful connector. Our curriculum must be transformed to allow for a plurality of voices, as championed by Prof Odora Hoppers and the Vice-Principal: Academic. He argued for small steps—for instance, starting with a multidisciplinary approach before embracing transdisciplinarity. Curriculum transformation is about collaboration.

Prof Maimela furthermore stated that it is important that UP invests in transforming its demographic profile. There should be a balance between young and old academics. Succession planning must be done in such a manner that the institution remains stable.

He emphasised that, while important, technology *is not* curriculum transformation—it *assists* it. Curriculum transformation is about what we teach and to whom we teach it. He called for a return to the basics, arguing that our students are struggling to read and write.

Mr Zwane distinguished between responsible and irresponsible entitlement.

He argued for an integrative learning process that not only gives graduates knowledge but also teaches them the application thereof.

He said, furthermore, that as educators who shape students' thinking, we should deal with them as holistic people. We need not just to focus on their minds but to love them and equip them for excellence.

Mr Zwane reminded the senators that there are four generations at the University, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and now Generation Z. As lecturers, we have to create a nurturing environment that yields people who are employable. Students have to be affirmed (e.g., affirmation of where they come from) and taught how to define their destiny and work in a disciplined manner to arrive at it. Technology is an enabler.

Ms Ngara called for humility. She referred to the combative principle of tai chi chuan that is practised in the martial art of tai chi. According to this principle, two people come together in what seems to be combat, but they have to each understand their own centre of gravity, their grounding and rooting, and also those of the other person. The aim is to take the other person off-centre. When both people push against each other, no one budes. The aim is to become softer and more flexible, taking the other person off-centre by surrendering.

Prof Ebersöhn shared an experience of taking students in educational psychology out to rural schools rather than the usual ones in Pretoria to see how they could be useful. The students were innovative, but when they were back at the University, it was difficult to integrate their experiences into what is typically seen as educational psychology—for instance, a discussion with a learner about having a snake as her clan figure. There is tension between the established disciplinary boundaries and creating innovative learning experiences for students.

Ms Ngara shared an example of a project of Prof Hoppers to bring indigenous knowledge holders into the academy. In the sixth year of the project, the academics went, instead, into the environment of the indigenous knowledge holders. The experience completely disarmed the professors. One elder took them into a cave in Mamelodi and afterwards told the professors that that is how it feels to the indigenous knowledge holders when they are brought into the academic context and asked to make PowerPoint presentations.

She stated that humility makes one more receptive. It is about knowing that we do not know everything.

An online participant supported the expression of intentionality through setting a budget but argued that this should not be done only in respect of curriculum transformation but for transformation as a whole.

Prof Maimela closed the discussion by addressing the question of whether there have been changes at UP since 2016 that are moving the University towards real and meaningful transformation. He said that there is a commitment to curriculum transformation on the side of the UP management, but a structured plan of action is needed. Such a plan has to ensure that all staff and students play a role in the process. UP was making strides which have to be continued and accelerated.

SESSION 2

The case for curriculum transformation (2)

Focusing on five case studies from UP, this session was chaired by **Prof Vasu Reddy**, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities.

Each of the five panel members (individuals or teams) made a ten-minute presentation on their

case study.

2.1 Prof Madeleine Stiglingh and Mr Randy Seda, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Transformation of the CA2025 curriculum

Prof Stiglingh and Mr Seda presented their case study as a conversation between them.

Prof Stiglingh introduced herself as responsible for the students in the accounting sciences at UP. Mr Seda is a master's in accounting science student who has completed all his previous qualifications in accounting science at UP.

Mr Seda said it was a privilege for him to be a UP graduate. UP has a 99,6% pass rate in the SAICA entrance exams. UP was, therefore, top of mind when it came to the accounting sciences. Referring to the recent developments around ChatGPT and Microsoft, which raises the question of whether Google will remain top of mind as a search engine, he asked how UP planned to remain top of mind in the CA domain.

Prof Stiglingh responded that UP has proactively redesigned the BCom (Accounting Sciences) programme. The redesigned programme continues to have a strong technical core but also incorporates the professional skills Mr Zwane spoke about earlier. In future, students will graduate from the programme with soft as well as technical skills. Assessments have also been more intentionally developed, mapping all marks to practical skills. A second goal would be to develop a dashboard that maps each student's skills at a granular level so that targeted interventions can be implemented. A third goal would be to develop the functionality for a portfolio of evidence for work-integrated learning that students would upload themselves. The UP Department of Informatics will help with this.

Mr Seda remarked that in the past, students in accounting sciences learned topics from different perspectives but in silos, which made it difficult to see the bigger picture. The bigger picture only became visible once graduates entered the workplace. He asked how the new programme would help address this.

Prof Stiglingh explained that achieving integrated learning was the aim of the new Business Acumen module, which was managed by four different departments. The module was co-designed and co-created by lecturers from the different departments sitting together. The Department of Informatics and the Department of Philosophy were also involved, as was the Unit for Academic Literacy. The integrated nature of the business cycle informs all the modules in the programme, not just the Business Acumen module.

Mr Seda shared his own experience as a student who started his studies on the Mamelodi Campus. He asked what would be done to ensure that all students are brought along on the journey, given that students encounter different challenges.

Prof Stiglingh agreed that it is important to meet students where they are. In order to do this, it is necessary to really understand them. She referred to an assessment the students wrote the

previous day that would help in this regard. She acknowledged that curriculum transformation was a journey. It was important, also, to find a way of measuring success in this regard.

Mr Seda expressed confidence that the redesign of the Accounting Sciences programme would put UP on a trajectory to remain top of mind when it came to studying to become a CA.

2.2 Prof Jaco Beyers, Faculty of Theology and Religion(T&R)

Curriculum transformation in T&R

Prof Beyers offered a perspective from the Faculty of Theology and Religion for which he drew on a world-changing debate about the existence of an African theology in the 1950s.

Tharcisse Tshibangu was a student at the then newly established University of Lovanium, Kinshasa, when Alfred Vanneste was the newly appointed Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the university. Tshibangu advocated for a “theology of African colour”. This was based on the assumption that African culture had a unique and original system of thought. For Tshibangu, it was logical to talk about a unique African form of theology just as there exist many other different forms of theology. This African theology suggested by Tshibangu should be expressed in non-Aristotelian categories and include an existential and holistic worldview. This reflected a plurality of theologies.

On the other side, Vanneste defended a position denying the existence of something called African theology. For Vanneste, there existed only a universal Catholic theology. He argued that theologians from Africa should much rather seek the universal (theological) truth. African theologians, Vanneste suggested, should construct a theology relevant to their context but based on Western philosophy, the values of which have been perfected based on ancient Greco-Roman models.

It became a very public and widely published debate, and the result of Vanneste’s response was a theology that left local communities unmoved.

Prof Beyers brought the Tshibangu-Vanneste debate to bear on curriculum transformation, asking whether there is such a thing as universal knowledge (as opposed to contextual knowledge).

In answering the question, he argued that Tshibangu’s view is today accepted as a logical paradigm, that theology does indeed need an African colour and that it is not universal but needs to be expressed in a local context.

The faculty has realised the need to expand its curriculum to include Spirituality, Pentecostalism and Rastafarianism. The approach is no longer denominational or doctrinal but acknowledges different religious orientations and expressions.

The expansion of the curriculum is not complete, and discussions are underway around the inclusion of yet more religions.

2.3 Ms Tiwi Mhere, alumnus from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Transforming the culinary curriculum: The future of the training kitchen

Ms Mhere introduced herself, stating that her name, Runyararo Tiwirai Mhere, means “peace, calmness, and joyful noise”.

Miss Mhere shared the findings of a research project in which she participated that explored the need for curriculum transformation in the BSc (Consumer Science—Hospitality Management) class of 2022. The researchers who conducted the study were Dr Hennie Fischer (UP), Dr Gerrie du Rand (UP), Mr Leon Roets (Unisa), and Dr Antonia Makina (Unisa).

Ms Mhere’s class, the class of 2022, was multiracial and multicultural, consisting of more than 70% Generation Z students. Student perceptions of the curriculum were that the menus were too old-fashioned and did not leave enough room for creativity and that the textbooks were American, making it difficult to contextualise the information locally.

At the same time, students agreed that the curriculum taught them the necessary skills and techniques that were required by the industry.

Students valued the practical exercises, which demanded that they spend countless hours in the training kitchen, where not only temperatures but also emotions tended to be high. The practical sessions showed students the value of practical application, e.g., the chocolate practical, which turned out to be much more difficult in practice than it seemed in the textbook.

Suggestions made by the students to improve the curriculum included the following:

- Including more South African and African cuisine in the teaching
- Bringing together current food trends and indigenous ingredients, with students possibly planting these foods themselves, thereby reducing the carbon footprint of the programme
- Bringing in African culinary giants such as Zandile (Queen) Finxa and brands to teach students; hosting demonstrations by local chefs and industry specialists but also by local “aunties” on how to make local food such as *kotas* and *skopo*

An event hosted by the Vice-Chancellor was a practical exercise in combining African ingredients and Western cuisine (“Euro meets Afro”)—a humbling yet exciting experience that showed that African ingredients could be superior.

As part of the transformation process, students interacted with students from other culinary institutions, which helped the UP students build networks and make friends within the industry.

Curriculum transformation ideals for the immediate future include increasing student interactions with industry, introducing more African cuisine items into the cooking programme, and including more suggestions from students for celebrating their cultural heritage and indigenous ingredients.

In the medium term, it is hoped that we will find funding to enable students to visit local restaurants that specialise in different African cuisines, e.g., Ethiopian, Senegalese, and Moroccan.

A medium-to-long-term outcome of the curriculum transformation project has been the decision to merge the two existing consumer science degrees into one and include African-based teaching materials in the curriculum. The decision to merge the two programmes has already been

approved by the Senate.

For the long term, the objective is to overhaul the culinary arts curriculum so that it is inclusive and reflects a South African rainbow cuisine, with learning materials, textbooks, and cookbooks to match.

Ms Mhere closed by inviting those present to visit the Kitchen Confidential Facebook page for past and present culinary science students at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4498436110>.

2.4 Prof Dietmar Holm, Faculty of Veterinary Science

Transformation of the veterinary science curriculum

Prof Holm shared the curriculum transformation journey taken by the faculty since 2016.

He framed his presentation by introducing two historical figures who played a significant part in the establishment of veterinary science in South Africa, namely Jotello Soga and Arnold Theiler. The faculty celebrates both these figures.

The curriculum established by Arnold Theiler when he started the school in 1920 was built in response to the problems local farmers experienced.

There has been a continuous process of curriculum renewal in the faculty. 2016 saw the first graduates of a new programme that had been introduced four years earlier. Yet, the Policy Framework for Curriculum Transformation that was approved in 2016 has sparked robust debate about curriculum transformation in the faculty. Among other things, there was a focus on the student experience and a student-focused education, the question of culture and the problem of differentiated success rates and the reason for such differentiation.

Changes made included the following:

- Cutting back on an overloaded curriculum resulting from the original curriculum being added to over time. A shift was made from “knowledge is power” to “powerful knowledge”. The credits in the programme were reduced by about 16%.
- Following a student-centred teaching philosophy. A Veterinary Professional Life programme was introduced that speaks to cultural context and achieves better vertical integration of themes such as resilience and well-being, financial, and communication skills.
- Increasing local context and creating a stronger focus on skills, which is also an international trend. A One Health undergraduate curriculum was developed for UP, which includes ethnoveterinary medicine. A curriculum on African wildlife conservation and management was also included.

In the future, the faculty would like to see a completely flexible curriculum that offers more electives and allows for transdisciplinarity. The faculty would also like to be in a position to offer students more international experiences. The incorporation of African languages remains a problem—previous attempts have not been successful.

2.5 Dr Susan Thuketana, Dr Makwelete Malaji, and Ms Matshedisho Lekgetho, Faculty of

Education

Transforming South Africa's foundation phase home language pedagogy: A case of the BEd Foundation Phase Teaching, Literacy Practices: Sepedi, isiZulu, and Setswana Curriculum Initiative

Dr Thuketana opened the presentation. She stated that universities are about change and that change is uncomfortable. UP needs to be intentional in its transformation agenda if it wants to serve its communities as agents of change. SA is known as a country with progressive policies, but we struggle in the implementation process. The University, for example, is struggling to implement the language policy it developed in terms of the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (2020). Among the repercussions of this is that teachers graduate without the skill to teach foundation phase learners in their mother tongue.

Academics in the BEd (Foundation Phase) programme reviewed the teaching programme and found that it was misaligned.

Dr Malaji proceeded to share how academics from the Department of Early Childhood Education realised that they were not doing justice to their students or the community they served. Reports received from students and school principals on teaching practice by the students indicated that the students were unable to teach in African languages. This is contrary to policy.

In 2021, the lecturers in the department introduced a seven-week module on Sepedi, Setswana and isiZulu. This is still inadequate, and Senate approval is pending for the introduction of a module on teaching in African languages to be offered from the second semester of 2024.

Ms Lekgetho explained the specialised approach to foundation phase teaching, i.e., teaching children aged four to six years. The approach to teaching and learning for this age group is play-based. Students who are studying to be foundation phase teachers cannot be lumped together with other students.

She added that students are encouraged to look for English or Afrikaans medium schools for teaching practice. Students are even told this during the orientation programme. This is an injustice to schools that teach in other languages and the children who attend those schools.

She added that signage at UP is only in certain languages and does not speak to all staff and students. She expressed the hope that this would be attended to and that more time would be dedicated to discussing the issue of language.

2.6 Moderated question-and-answer session

Prof Modiri stated that one thing we miss when talking about curriculum transformation and decolonisation is a more serious historicising of Africa. To what extent are we working with the colonial library? We have to ask what of that which we understand about Africa is informed by colonial perspectives. We now know that what is called ancient Greek philosophy came from North Africa. Western philosophy is already saturated with a prior African history. The Bologna knowledge was preserved by Islamic scholars. We have to be careful not to rely on colonial ideas when speaking about Africa. He cited the example of themes like witchcraft being introduced when trying to include "African" perspectives into the study of theology. Concepts do not cease to

be Western merely because they are used in Sepedi or isiZulu.

Prof Schellack referred to a study conducted in the field of health sciences that found that words for some concepts, such as “microbial resistance”, did not exist in some of the indigenous languages. That made these concepts difficult to teach in other languages.

Mr Brian Madiba, a student in the BEd (Foundation Phase) programme, shared his experience of finding it difficult to teach in his mother tongue or complete a task given to him by his mentor teacher that he had to do in an African language. That was also the experience of some of his classmates.

Prof Muthivhi, Head of the Department of Early Childhood Education, said that transformation and decolonisation have become buzzwords, but actually carrying them out is very difficult. Perceptions, ideologies, and structures that impede transformation within ourselves should be reflected on. No one disputes that young people should be taught in the language they speak. However, there are many obstacles to implementing this.

Agreeing with Prof Muthivi, Prof Kupe responded to the comment made by Prof Modiri that the histories and knowledge of Africa have to be carefully understood so that things that are, in fact, not African are not presented as such. He again emphasised that transformation has to start at the early childhood level. We have to consider what that actually means. He furthermore reminded the senators that no language is pure, that all languages are influenced by other languages. We have to incorporate cross-cultural influences into how we think about transformation.

SESSION 3

This session, consisting of four group discussions, was chaired by **Prof Wynand Steyn**, Dean of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (EBIT).

3.1 Group discussions

As was the case on the first day of the conference, senators had chosen to participate in one of four breakaway groups, each of which was given a topic for discussion and questions to consider. A facilitator and a rapporteur were appointed for each group.

GROUP 1

Facilitator: **Prof Tiaan de Jager** (Health Sciences) Rapporteur: **Prof Shakila Dada** (Humanities)

Topic:

Developing an evidence base

- What demonstrable case studies exist at UP to show evidence of real, meaningful curriculum transformation initiatives, including the hidden curriculum?
- What are curriculum transformation indicators, and how should they be measured in terms of targets within faculties?

- How does curriculum transformation manifest in the remit of Educational Innovation (EI) at the University? What concrete suggestions could assist in facilitating and promoting curriculum transformation at EI?

Prof Dada reported that the group had a lively discussion around the difficult question of how change and transformation should be measured.

There was consensus within the group that there are many case studies that speak to work done around curriculum transformation at UP and make us think we are going in the right direction. The question was posed, however, of whether this was enough or whether the existing cases represented only superficial transformation. When do we start engaging with the deeper issues that constitute curriculum transformation?

One of the case studies reflected on in the group was that of One Health, which impacted students by exposing them to transdisciplinarity.

There was some discussion on how the colonial library was used in teaching and learning and how we should enable students to reflect from different perspectives. The importance of lecturers reflecting on how and what they teach was highlighted, as was the importance of creating the necessary space for them to do so. Where does this fit into our teaching? Do we also get our students to reflect critically on what they are learning—for instance, at the postgraduate level?

With regard to indicators for measuring curriculum transformation, the question was asked whether how we want our graduates to look is measurable at all. Where would one get the required feedback from? One suggestion was to ask the Alumni Office to get graduates to return to UP and tell us how what they learned helped them in effecting change in the workplace or having an impact on the community. We can feed that back into how we teach.

There was some discussion about visibility. One example that was mentioned was an app developed by GIBS for their students that could be very helpful in the chartered accountancy field if it was made visible to those students. The question was thus raised of how opportunities could be created for sharing what we are doing in terms of curriculum transformation across faculties and departments so that we can scale it up instead of constantly having to reinvent the wheel.

The group finally considered how curriculum transformation could reflect in lecturers' KPIs and how it could be measured, seeing that it is not easily quantifiable. One suggestion was to look at a collection of narratives as evidence of what has been achieved in terms of employability, leadership, and empowerment of our students. Other countries may have developed mechanisms for measuring impactful research and teaching that might have resonance with what we aim to do.

GROUP 2

Facilitator: **Prof Chika Sehoole** (Education)

Rapporteur: **Prof Ntebogeng Mokgalaka-Fleischmann** (Mamelodi Campus)

Topic:

Student learning, success, and well-being

- What are ideal curricula approaches for student learning beyond the lecture hall?
- What will or should the future of our teaching and learning look like aligned to curriculum transformation (and the hidden curriculum)? Some of the interrelated questions that flow from here address pedagogic imperatives that require some self-reflection: Why is it important to consider the renewal of teaching practices? How can we best locate educational practices in time and place? What are the necessary conditions for students' effective participation and learning? What is the kind of gradateness ("graduate attributes" as well) that needs to be developed? What makes for good education? What learnings accrue across faculties/disciplines?
- What evidence exists of curriculum transformation in respect of transdisciplinary initiatives, and how could this be intensified?

Prof Mokgalaka-Fleischmann reported that the group had a vibrant discussion with good input from the members.

Regarding the first question around ideal curriculum approaches beyond the classroom, the group premised its input on the recognition of the fact that learning does not take place only in the classroom and that there is formal and informal learning. Also, the hidden curriculum should take centre stage when transforming the curriculum to ensure that meaningful learning takes place. Furthermore, soft skills have to be developed to ensure that students engage with learning materials meaningfully.

Industry experience is important to ensure that students become well-rounded individuals and successful citizens. The group acknowledged the contribution of experiential knowledge. Students should be allowed enough time to spend in industry.

The context of where students live (e.g., residences) was recognised as important, as learning takes place in that environment. Although it is not a conventional learning environment, students learn about diversity, culture, inclusion, leadership, and conflict management in the residences.

We must ensure that the curriculum is interactive and collaborative to prepare the students for the industries they will work in—for example, in the medical sector, where different professions work together with one objective, namely ensuring the health of the patient.

The use of language for communication—but also to build confidence—was also raised. The concept of plurality was referenced, with a call to interrogate our sources of knowledge and consult holders of indigenous knowledge when developing the curriculum. Apart from the scholarship of teaching and learning, there are other sources of knowledge that can add value to the curriculum.

With regard to the second question about the future of teaching and learning, Prof Mokgalaka-Fleischmann said the group identified certain pedagogical imperatives. Citizenship pedagogy was noted as very important—students have to be active citizens in their programmes from very early on. Service learning must be encouraged in the curriculum, and it must be connected to the future roles of our graduates. We should therefore ask students what roles they see themselves playing

in their future careers.

The notion of indigenous knowledge featured strongly in the discussion. Apart from the knowledge in the disciplines, there are also other knowledge systems.

We have to prepare students for the world of work, acknowledging that times are changing; therefore, we also have to change and adapt accordingly. She shared the example of dentistry, where researchers are recognising that they have to collaborate with other disciplines, such as engineering and IT, to co-design technological solutions that are normally outsourced to international companies.

GROUP 3

Facilitator: **Prof Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu**
(Economic and Management Sciences)

Rapporteur: **Prof Salome Human-Vogel**
(Education)

Topic:

The changing nature of self and work

- How do we think and put into practice curriculum transformation to enable citizens of the University to achieve goals in a hybrid workforce?
- What are the attributes of a changing self (change in beliefs, values, attitudes, and mindsets) in respect of being a scholar and academic in a dynamic environment? (Reflect on the following: Deep and lasting transformation requires internal change first, which then spreads outwards.)

Prof Human-Vogel reported that in the discussion on the changing nature of self and work, the group touched on some of the themes that have already been mentioned in the feedback. The discussion highlighted that there are certain tensions when we think of the changing nature of the self and work. On the one hand, there is the consideration that we are preparing our students for the future of work, a future that is evolving. Another consideration is our relationship with industry and the needs of industry. How do we prepare our students to function in that future?

The point was made that the University cannot be at the mercy of the employers; we have to also ask ourselves what the meaning of a university is in society. The group recognised the tension between the needs of the University in society and the kind of citizens we want to create, on the one hand, and the needs of employers on the other. It was agreed that there had to be a reciprocal influence, that in teaching students, we have to take into consideration the needs of industry but that we can also influence industry through the kinds of students we deliver as citizens.

The group talked about two vehicles in the interface between work and university. One of these is transdisciplinarity. Rather than emphasising how transdisciplinarity is essential for curriculum transformation, the group thought about how transdisciplinarity provides different contexts and spaces to define ourselves and get to know ourselves. By defining ourselves differently, we can

transform our teaching. Another vehicle is self-reflection.

The group also acknowledged the need to foster self-confidence in our students in terms of who they are, what is important to them, and where they are going to function in society.

The group reflected on the multiple roles required of academics due to the changing role of universities from knowledge creation to professional development. As lecturers, we have to have open minds and open ourselves to change. We have to change before we can expect change from our students. We have to ask what kinds of citizens we want to be and what kinds of citizens we want our students to be.

This raised the question of what it means for the University to call itself a research-intensive institution and whether this was the correct term to describe UP's identity. The point was made that how we are perceived by society can create inequalities in and of itself. We have to be critical of how we want to be perceived by society.

GROUP 4

Facilitator: **Prof Innocent Pikirayi** (Humanities)

Rapporteur: **Prof Gerald Ouma** (Department of Institutional Planning)

Topic: Research

- What will or should the future of our research look like aligned to curriculum transformation (and the hidden curriculum)? Some of the interrelated questions that flow from here address research questions: What are the commonalities and differences in terms of debates, problems, and questions being raised and addressed? Who are the academic, student, and public actors involved in the discussions and decisions? What models are being put into practice? How does the curriculum transformation materialise or manifest in actual experiences? And finally, what can we learn from those experiences that could help us advance towards an ecology of knowledge within the Global South?
- What evidence exists of curriculum transformation in respect of transdisciplinary initiatives, and how could this be intensified?

Prof Ouma reported that the group looked at the future of research and the alignment thereof with curriculum transformation. The group emphasised the role of transdisciplinary research in curriculum transformation.

A research project that brings together the Faculty of Education, the Forestry and Agriculture Biotechnology Institute, SANParks, and communities was mentioned as a good example of a transdisciplinary research project. The involvement of communities, in particular, was highlighted. It was argued that there are quite a number of such projects at the University and that there is a need to mark and showcase them so that awareness is created across the institution.

The fact that transformation is ongoing, rather than an event, was emphasised, as was the need to

negotiate with communities. Related to that is the question of how we bring in communities. The notion of a Freireian dialogical engagement was preferred to a one-way engagement by researchers extracting information from the community. A way has to be found to substantively involve communities in research questions that emanate from the real issues confronting communities. How do we formally get communities on board? We have a system of research associates—could one perhaps develop something like “community associates” so that we recognise the contribution of communities to the research that we do?

The need for the University to invest in the development of expertise in the art of co-creation was highlighted. There seems to be an assumption that academics and students have the wherewithal to do transdisciplinary research, co-create knowledge, and work with communities, but we deliberately have to invest in empowering them to become involved in such exercises.

With regard to the second question related to evidence of curriculum transformation in respect of transdisciplinary initiatives, it was argued that there are pockets of expertise that need to be mapped so that they can be showcased and the whole University community can become aware of them.

The group called for investment in building capacity and expertise around participatory research methodologies.

The need was expressed to communicate the outcomes of our research beyond the traditional high-impact journals so that the knowledge created is accessible to communities, including those that do not speak English. Policy briefs were also mentioned as a way to translate impactful findings from research to influence policy change impacting societal problems.

Another question would be whether we could find ways of acknowledging and incentivising making knowledge available to the communities we work with beyond journal articles and book chapters.

In closing, Prof Ouma said that the group emphasised the need to create opportunities for faculties and departments to share knowledge around transdisciplinary activities.

VOTE OF THANKS

Following a rich, vibrant, and engaged conference, **Prof Feris** delivered the vote of thanks. She expressed thanks to:

- Prof Kupe, who is the Chair of the Senate and also participated in the programme as a keynote speaker;
- the speakers and chairpersons of the sessions, as well as the facilitators and rapporteurs of the group sessions;
- the panellists, including the student participants;
- the scribes and the report writer;
- the Faculty of Humanities for sponsoring the film directed by Prof O’Connell;
- the events team from Future Africa, as well as the team from the Department of Institutional Advancement;
- LCP, for running a very successful and seamless production and for sponsoring the breakout sessions; and

- Prof Reddy, as the lead planner of the conference, and the other members of the organising committee, namely:
 - Dr Lelanie Smith,
 - Prof David Maimela,
 - Prof Siona O' Connell,
 - Prof Corne Postma,
 - Members of the DIA team,
 - Ms Maliga Govender, and
 - Ms Mogofane Ramonyai.

Prof Tawana Kupe

Closure and wrap-up of day 2 and the conference

Prof Kupe also thanked the participants.

He stated that the conference, which started as an experiment, has been sustained over the four years it has been running.

He referred to the recently published book *Corrupted* by Jonathan Jansen.¹² In the book, UP is portrayed as running like clockwork; the “ship” is tightly steered. It seems to imply that UP is known for being well-run but not for its intellectual debates.

The University Senate deals with the academic business of the University—correctly so. The Senate Conference emerged from thinking about *how* to counterbalance the role of the Senate appropriately in managing the academic business with engaging intellectual ideas. The Senate Conference has lived up to this expectation every year. There is robust engagement with intellectual ideas, as well as the development of new ideas about what we ought to do.

To summarise the conference, Prof Kupe returned to its title, “Turning the tide”. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, the title could have a plurality of possible meanings. It could refer to UP gathering steam and scaling up towards a critical mass in projects, initiatives, and strategies around curriculum transformation in the broader academic project. It could also mean turning the tide away from reluctance and a lack of understanding of curriculum transformation.

A question that could be asked is whether we are turning the tide in respect of transdisciplinarity at UP. As Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Kupe has chaired sessions with the deans and directors of institutes and platforms to ask what is being done at UP in respect of transdisciplinarity. In Prof Kupe’s estimation, the discussions have yielded a rich set of reflections about transdisciplinary initiatives. He indicated that the Vice-Principal: Academic and the Vice-Principal: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies will now take forward what came out of the discussions to develop programmes that can be implemented.

Prof Kupe referred to the question of indicators and what constitutes success. He stated that we need to see a different landscape in the aftermath of turning the tide.

¹²Jansen, J. (2023). *Corrupted*. Wits University Press.

During the pandemic, “reimagining” became our guiding word. Now, it is part of the discourse within the institution. This word must be linked to the attempts at transdisciplinarity and the other matters mentioned during the conference to ensure that it has substance and meaning.

Prof Kupe said we cannot keep talking about reimagining; the conversation must now turn to scaling up, reaching a critical mass, and mainstreaming in the direction we want to be going, as well as *how* we, as the Senate, lead the institution into this new landscape.

In some areas, Prof Kupe stated, we are not yet where we ought to be. We are yet to recognise other forms of knowledge that were traditionally outside the academy. He reminded the senators that in our transdisciplinary endeavour, the University strives to have an impact locally, on the continent, and ultimately, in the world. The evidence of “turning the tide” is whether those transformations occur. Amidst the regression and disruption in South Africa, we should use the knowledge we create to turn the tide in our society as well.

Prof Kupe pronounced the conference a worthwhile intellectual exercise and requested that senators start thinking about a theme for the following year’s conference. One suggestion is that a number of indicators be added in respect of how UP is faring with regard to key transformation objectives. He cautioned, however, that the Senate Conference should not be saddled with “accounting”.

In closing, Prof Kupe acknowledged Prof Reddy for the role he has played in heading the Senate Conference Organising Committee. Prof Reddy will be leaving the University to take up a new role at the University of the Free State.

CENTRAL THEMES EMERGING FROM THE CONFERENCE FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

The following salient points, which should guide future engagement and action around curriculum transformation at UP, emanated from the discussions held over the two days of the conference.

The conference assessed progress in respect of curriculum transformation and provided an opportunity to get a sense of what was still to be achieved. Overall, the conference confirmed an urgent need for more substantive curriculum transformation at UP. As an institution, we should embrace change to avoid damage. Participation in curriculum transformation must be increased to the point where it is a collective effort. The pace of curriculum transformation must be accelerated, and while some of what needs to be done does not require additional resources, curriculum transformation must be resourced at the institutional level.

The findings of the Institutional Culture Survey need to be brought into dialogical engagement with the topic of curriculum transformation. They intersect and are not discrete issues. This speaks to the notion of the “hidden curriculum”, which was a central theme of the conference.

There was recognition of the fact that curriculum transformation should not be limited to the University. As the system is articulated, transformation should start at the foundation phase and include all phases of schooling thereafter.

The senators and speakers also recognised the role of a transformed curriculum in enabling the

University to fulfil its vision of making a difference. What was articulated was that, as a transformed University, we will contribute towards transforming our communities and society as a whole.

No disciplines are exempt from the need for curriculum transformation. At the molecular level, science may be perceived to be objective, but scientists are not.

Curriculum transformation should be informed by a long historical view, going back to the origins of knowledge and of various civilisations. Not only should the curriculum be expanded to include forms of knowledge that have traditionally been outside the academy, toppling the dominance of the colonial library, but we should also critically review how we organise knowledge, e.g., in discipline silos.

Using new technologies in the classroom does not, in and of itself, constitute curriculum transformation, but it can support curriculum transformation.

Critical reflection, which is likely to be uncomfortable, is a prerequisite for successful curriculum transformation. This includes reflection on *what*, *how* and *who* we teach but also self-reflection, critically reviewing our own beliefs, viewpoints, and capabilities as lecturers. Lastly, we need to reflect on the University as an institution—our history, practices and culture, i.e., the hidden curriculum.

Students should be central in the transformation of the curriculum. In other words, the context we are located in has value and should be used as a resource in teaching and learning. The curriculum should speak to the life-world of students, align with their definition of success, and empower them to engage with and critically reflect on the learning material. It should expose them to real-world issues in a practical manner.

Co-creation of the curriculum emerged from the discussion as an important concept, especially in the case studies that were presented and some of the group discussions. As transdisciplinarity and integration are important aspects of a transformed curriculum, co-creation means that academics from different disciplines should, ideally, work together on developing curricula. It also means that ways have to be found for the voices of students to be heard in terms of what and how they wish to be taught. Finally, there has to be dialogical engagement with knowledge outside of the academy, including industry, communities, and holders of indigenous knowledge, to ensure that their knowledge is reflected in the curriculum. Thought should be given to how academics can be equipped with the skills needed to facilitate such co-creation.

The importance of language featured strongly throughout the discussion, with various examples of the exclusionary effect induced by an English-only learning environment. The need to include the diverse languages of students in the learning experience was noted. Multilingualism should be integrated into the curriculum, e.g., through service courses in indigenous languages, while translanguaging could be utilised as a strategy to enhance learning in the classroom. Multilingualism should, furthermore, be reflected in the campus environment, e.g., in signage.

Networks within the University must be strengthened and spaces created for sharing experiences of curriculum transformation. There must be more opportunities for discussions around curriculum transformation, and ways must be found to enable and facilitate lecturing staff, in

particular, with time and opportunities to think about curriculum transformation.