

Article in Port Elizabeth Herald

Friday, February 17, 2012



EDUCATION GURU IN BAY TO PASS ON EXPERTISE

In her first year as a newly-qualified grade four teacher in the United States some 30 years ago, Dr Sharon Silverman had the difficult task of failing a boy.

His was a learning difficulty rather than a behavioural problem – and Silverman was determined to find out everything she could about learning disabilities, ultimately becoming a leading expert and author of several books on teaching and learning strategies. “I became aware of a body of knowledge that was extensive in terms of what works and what doesn’t.”

Chicago-based Silverman, now a higher education consultant who has established a number of top learning centres for students at US universities, is visiting Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University this month (February) to share learning strategies with students and lecturers that have been proven to promote successful teaching and learning, and ultimately contribute to student retention and success.

“I’m passionate about connecting theory and practice,” said Silverman, who with Dr. Martha Casazza runs consulting firm TRPP Associates – the acronym standing for ‘Theory, Research, Practice, Principles’, which Silverman believes are the four critical elements needed to maximise learning environments.

Last night (Monday), she presented a workshop titled ‘Emotional intelligence and leadership’ for accounting students, covering the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills.

She also ran several sessions for first year students on NMMU’s Missionvale campus during orientation week, as well as a number of general sessions for staff.

But Silverman is no stranger to NMMU. In the late 1990s, then a Fulbright Scholar, she ran faculty development programmes at the then University of Port Elizabeth to help lecturers meet the needs of students attending university following the end of apartheid.

She also helped to establish an international virtual learning community, called ‘Sharing Cultures’, where first year students from NMMU and Chicago’s Columbia College completed joint assignments in a virtual learning space – a project which won a Fulbright Alumni Initiatives Award. In 2002, she won a Rotary University Scholar Grant, which enabled her to continue her work in South Africa.

Silverman and her partner, David Zimmeroff, will also be assisting at two study sessions for students in the School of Accounting’s Thuthuka bursary programme.

RED HOT LEADERS IN PHOTO Chicago-based educational consultant Dr Sharon Silverman (front, right) got Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University accounting students fired up about leadership during an ‘Emotional intelligence and leadership’ workshop on campus yesterday (Monday), which was also attended by NMMU School of Accounting director Prof Frans Prinsloo (middle) and School of Accounting academic trainee Sitembele James (front). Photograph: Kim Weatherall-Thomas