

## PREFACE

We very nearly managed to publish the first number of this year in the first half of the year, which augurs well for timely publications this year!

As is customary, our first number is a bumper edition, with seven articles, four of which focus on language learning at school level and the last three on language issues in higher education.

The first article by **Liswaniso and Pretorius** focuses on the perennial problem of reading comprehension development at primary school level, this time in Namibia. Tracking the success of an intervention programme, the authors show how continued support for teachers improves not only learners' reading comprehension, but also the teachers' abilities to teach reading comprehension effectively. This points to a shift in thinking; away from the lament that learners cannot read, to the realization that unless teachers are supported to change their teaching, learners are definitely not going to magically start reading better.

**Schekle** similarly focuses on reading development, but in this case the focus is on the development of literary awareness and knowledge. The author describes the use of classroom book clubs, where learners have the opportunity to discuss and analyse books, developing what the author calls *book talk*, as they discuss characters, plots and themes. Learners had the agency to pick their own topics and to explore what they found interesting in a variety of books. The possibility that this strategy offers to schools that may not have many resources is one of the important contributions of this article.

In their report of work done over a decade, **Lessing and De Witt** describe the role and importance of the executive function of the brain in early literacy activities. In collaboration with experts in the field of early childhood development, the researchers point to particular everyday activities that stimulate and support brain development to enhance early literacy and consequently, reading achievement. When one thinks of the problems with reading comprehension development as illustrated by the first two articles in this number, it makes sense that stimulation of the executive function of the brain in early childhood may actually be the starting point to address reading comprehension problems at primary school level.

Moving from reading to writing in English as a first additional language, **Mailula and Ngoepe** report on a study that they did with Grade 11 learners' essays. Most teachers of English will probably recognize the problems that they present: learners not planning properly, their inability or unwillingness to revise their own writing and teachers' perception that there is not enough time to teach writing as a process. The contribution of this article can be found in the focus on grammatical elements and the authors' insistence that just indicating the errors and not providing feedback fast enough, makes it difficult for learners to self-correct and to develop their knowledge of the structure of English.

The focus on writing forms a bridge to the next article, which focuses on the development of academic literacy at higher education level. **De Waal and Weder** also focus on the development of grammatical elements in academic writing. In their quantitative study, they compare an experimental group to a control group by applying process-oriented, guided-inquiry learning (POGIL) to develop the effective use of particular grammatical points to the experimental group. The study is situated in an extended degree programme for B Com students. The positive results of this intervention hints at the potential for this type of approach to improve academic writing. The way in which it could be adapted for remote and online learning (trialed during the COVID-19 pandemic), bodes well for its continued use in hybrid teaching modes.

**Livingston, Dippenaar, Anker, Simon and Mashiya** continue the theme of academic literacy development in the context of teaching language across the curriculum and developing disciplinary language in a Bachelor of Education programme. The contribution of this particular article is that it focuses on the training of academics who teach non-language subjects. This is a field that desperately needs more research, and this study shows the direction of such research. The fact that the authors take the multilingual abilities of students into account, makes this article particularly relevant for higher education globally.

Continuing the theme of multilingual students in an English academic context, **Mhlongo, Du Plessis and Weideman** investigate the monolingual bias that is often evident in motivational questionnaires. By critically investigating and analysing a number of well-known questionnaires, they show their limitations and by revising some of the problematic items and developing new ones, they show possibilities for situating English in a multilingual context when constructing a language motivation questionnaire. Building on the important work of Dörnyei (who sadly, passed away recently), and with reference specifically to his *L2 motivation self system* theory, they show where more critical awareness can improve the relevance of his insights to the unique motivation of multilingual learners to learn English, specifically in the South African environment.

We hope you enjoy this number and that you will continue to send your work to our journal.

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