

PREFACE

This guest issue is dedicated to the papers presented at the 2012 Umalusi¹ Conference. The conference was hosted between 10 and 12 May 2012 under the theme *Standards in Education and Training: The challenge*. The conference had a mix of delegates and speakers from as far as Australia, Bangladesh, SADC countries, the United Kingdom, and United States of America. Approximately 250 delegates were in attendance.

The notion of standards in education is at the forefront of debates not only in South Africa but the world over. For Umalusi the necessity of maintaining high education standards is not in dispute, but many issues converge around how to measure and assess such standards, given the diversity and inequality inherent in the education and training system in South Africa. Underpinning this key issue was that of language competence as a predictor of academic success, affecting all aspects of education and training as well as language policy. Linked to this are the on-going debates and concerns about unevenness in Grade 12 learner performance in Home Language examination. What makes the variation in performance a concern are two things. Firstly, the curriculum for all eleven official languages is the 'same' as it was conceptualized in English and 'versioned' into the other languages. Therefore it is reasonable for one to expect a greater degree of uniformity in terms of standards across the languages. Secondly, the standards of the examinations ought to be the same since the examinations in the different languages are based on a common set of assessment guidelines which require that all Home Language examinations to the same in terms of design and cognitive challenge.

That the editors received many worthy papers that competed for a limited available space in this guest issue is an indication that a primary facet of this is the centrality of language competence in learning, with a large number of learners learning and being assessed in a language other than their mother-tongue. After a rigorous peer review process, a total of seven articles were accepted for publication in this guest issue. In the first article Albert

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Weideman makes an attempt to reconceptualise the notions of validity and validation in testing. He does so by presenting a new framework for thinking about validity making a call for test designers to look at these technical concepts beyond Messick's lens. He does so by introducing an idea of responsible test design. I have attempted to articulate both the possible conditions for test design based on a framework that he and his research team have been working on, and how they may be applied to the South African context.

In response to the call by the education authorities to make South African indigenous languages compulsory for university study in South Africa, Noleen Turner's article discusses the feasibility of such a project, with specific reference to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). On the basis of an examination of the current realities in relation to the UKZN's language policy and negative attitudes of potential learners of the languages in question in high schools and universities, the article argues that unless a determined language policy that favours African languages is introduced in South African schools, the call to expand the use of the languages up to tertiary level may remain an illusory initiative.

Mbulungeni Madiba investigates the position of African languages as academic languages and proposes a complementary language-use framework for using indigenous African languages to support the development of academic language in multilingual schools and universities. In this way, he argues, nationalistic and insular conceptions of language can be countered by acknowledging the multilingual spaces where they operate.

From the perspective of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), Heidi Bolton discusses case studies where the explication of evaluation criteria was central in all the teaching-and-learning practices linked to high levels of learner competence. By analysing the relationship between instructional and regulative discourse in the classroom, she is able to show how their interaction enables clarification of qualities to be assessed, for learners.

By focusing on the way in which language plays a role in successful problem solving in Mathematical literacy, Vale, Murray and Brown highlights the processing problems faced by learners who use English as a first additional language. Based on their analysis of learner responses they conclude that all assessment items in Mathematical Literacy need to be carefully constructed with regard to the language demands if students' abilities and subject knowledge are to be fairly assessed.

The article by Sarah Murray concludes this number of the journal by focusing on the challenges of designing a common curriculum for the official languages of South Africa. By outlining how the different language syllabuses and curricula evolved over the last forty years, the article illustrates a number of challenges such as how to ensure authenticity in the teaching of the languages as well as who to ensure that the languages are taught and assessed at the same level of linguistic and intellectual challenge. In its conclusion, the article argues for a different approach in curriculum development.

This number of the journal shows the range and complexity of issues surrounding the development of curricula and assessment strategies, thereby contributing to the scholarly debate that is so necessary for quality education.

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M Madiba

B Lepota