

# Meertaligheid skep ruimte vir diversiteit

Die huidige belangrikheid van meertaligheid op die UV se kampusse maak my baie opgewonde, omdat dit samehorigheid bevorder. Meertaligheid skep ruimte vir diversiteit, want taal, kultuur en denke loop hand aan hand. Meertaligheid laat studente nie net meer tuis voel in hul fisieke omgewing nie, maar ook in hul leeromgewing.

Navorsing het getoon dat meertalige mense neig om buigsamer te wees, want hulle het die vermoë om binne meer as een denkstelsel te dink. Ons land en kampus het dit nodig!

Werkgewers gee dikwels voorkeur aan meertalige werknemers, aangesien die werkplek (filmbedryf, sielkundiges, medici, regswêreld), die kliëntebasis en die wêreld nie eentalig is nie. Dit maak dus sin om ons studente deur meertaligheid te bemagtig.

Een van die vreugdes van mense wat bevoorreg is om te kan reis, is dikwels die taal en kultuur van ander lande. Dit maak daarom sin om kulturele diversiteit en die moedertale in ons eie land/streek proaktief te koester.

Die belang van moedertaal moet beslis nie gesien word as 'n ontkenning van die belang van 'n internasionale taal soos Engels nie, maar dit is 'n bewese feit dat ingewikkelde konsepte op die doeltreffendste wyse deur middel van jou moedertaal bemeester word. Jy moet eers oor die vermoë beskik om abstrak te dink voordat jy 'n breinchirurg kan wees, ongeag in watter taal jy ook al jou professie gaan beoefen. Die feit dat jy 'n groot internasionale taal as huistaal praat, impliseer mos nie dat jy outomaties 'n breinchirurg kan word nie.

Jongmense wie se identiteitsbeskouing onder druk is omdat hul identiteit (agtergrond/herkoms) nie geag word nie, ervaar dikwels probleme met eiewaarde, wat ook prestasie op vele vlakke kan beperk.

My pleidooi is dat mense aangemoedig sal word om vanjaar werk te maak van nuwe taalvaardigheid, asook van ons Suid-Afrikaanse of Europese tale wat as kortleerprogramme (KLP) op die Bloemfontein-kampus aangebied word.

'n Moedertaal is presies wat die woord aandui – die taal wat kinders van kleins af by hul ouers/huis aanleer. Klein kinders met baie blootstelling aan meer as een taal beskik oor die vermoë om meer as een taal as moedertaal aan te leer, maar namate persone ouer word, verminder ook hul vermoë om 'n taal sonder formele opleiding aan te leer. Taalkenners verwys

nie om dowe neutte na die 'verwerwing' van 'n moedertaal, maar na die 'leer' of 'aanleer' van 'n tweede of derde taal nie.

Die rol van moedertaalonderrig in die akademiese ontwikkeling van 'n kind se abstrakte denke behoort logieserwys besinning te vra oor eentalige onderrigtaalkeuses, veral op skoolvlak. Navorsing dui daarop dat meertalige kinders dikwels beter as eentaliges presteer, onder meer omdat die verdikking van die korteks met meertaligheid saamhang. Kuldiges het al heelwat oor die akademiese en sosiale voordele van moedertaalonderrig gepubliseer. Belangstellendes kan hierdie voordele maklik aanlyn opsoek sodat ingeligte taalkeuses gemaak kan word, veral met betrekking tot kinders se opvoeding.

*Hierdie opiniestuk is deur prof Angelique van Niekerk, Hoof van die Departement Afrikaans en Nederlands, Duits en Frans*

## **Multilingualism creates scope for diversity**

The current prominence of multilingualism on the UFS campuses makes me very excited, because it promotes cohesion. Multilingualism creates space for diversity, because language, culture, and thought go hand in hand. Multilingualism not only makes students feel more at home in their physical environment, but also in their learning environment.

Research has shown that multilingual people tend to be more flexible, as they have the ability to think within multiple thought systems. Our country and campus need this!

Employers often give preference to multilingual employees, since the workplace (film industry, psychologists, physicians, legal world), customer base, and the world is not monolingual. Therefore, it makes sense to empower our students through multilingualism.

One of the joys of people who have the privilege to travel, is often the language and culture of other countries. It thus makes sense to proactively nurture cultural diversity and the mother tongues of our own country/region.

The importance of native language should definitely not be seen as a denial of the importance of an international language such as English, but it is a proven fact that complex concepts are mastered more effectively through the mother tongue. You should first have the ability to think abstractly before you can be a brain surgeon, no matter which language you will be practising your profession in. Of course, the fact that you have a major international language as home language does not imply that you will automatically become a brain surgeon.

Young people whose identity outlook is under pressure because their identity (background/origin) is not considered, often experience self-esteem problems, which can also limit performance on many levels.

My plea is that people will be encouraged to work on new language skills this year, as well as our South African or European languages presented as short learning programmes (SLP) on the Bloemfontein Campus.

A mother tongue is exactly what the word implies – the language that children learn from their parents/home since childhood. Small children who have lots of exposure to more than one language have the ability to learn more than one mother tongue; but, as people age, their ability to learn a language without formal training is also reduced. It is not for nothing that language experts refer to 'acquiring' a mother tongue, but to 'teaching' or 'learning' a second or third language.

The role of mother-tongue education in the academic development of a child's abstract thinking should logically ask for reflection on choices of monolingual learning languages, especially at school level. Research indicates that multilingual children often perform better than those who are monolingual, inter alia, because the thickening of the cortex is related to multilingualism. Experts have published a great deal about the academic and social benefits of mother-tongue education. Persons who are interested, can easily find these benefits online in order to make informed language choices, especially with regard to the education of children.

*This opinion piece is by Prof Angeliqve van Niekerk, Head of the Department of Afrikaans and Dutch, German and French*