

Language Assessment Matters

Issue 14, April 2021

The Newsletter of the Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand

Message from Co-Presidents

Hello ALTAANZ Community,

We are honoured to be serving as ALTAANZ Co-Presidents for 2021! It's been a busy start to the year with a Special General Meeting to elect new Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, roles which became vacant at the end of 2020. We'd like to say a heartfelt thank you to Rosemary Erlam and Noriko Iwashita, our immediate Past Presidents. They have guided ALTAANZ since 2017 so capably, calmly and cooperatively. We really appreciate all their efforts. Thank you also to Denise Angelo for her four years of careful book-keeping as ALTAANZ Treasurer.

We are excited to welcome our new office bearers: Ute Knoch (Vice President), Viola Lan Wei (Secretary), Megan Yucel (Treasurer), Jason Fan (PLTA Editor), John Read (PLTA Editor), Leila Zohali (Student Representative), Xuan Minh Ngo (Student Representative), Julie Luxton (Teacher Representative, New Zealand), Denise Angelo (Teacher Representative, Australia) and Catherine Hudson (Teacher Representative, Australia). We are looking forward to working with this amazing new team, and our continuing ALTAANZ officers - Johanna Motteram (Communications Officer), Maria Treadway (Student Representative, New Zealand) and Stephen Walker (Teacher Representative, Australia). We are also welcoming Liz Kose as PLTA editorial assistant.

This year we are planning to pay close attention to the priorities and ideas you gave us in the ALTAANZ 2020 survey. Key future actions that were suggested for ALTAANZ are to:

1. consider ways to reach and be useful to more members beyond the university sector
2. offer more professional development activities in interest areas
3. develop collaborations and member groups
4. develop/compile resources
5. communicate to the broader world about assessment and testing
6. promote ethical practices in language testing and assessment.

We've seen that COVID times have caused us to reconsider how we do everything, including our work as an organisation. This year we're hoping to tap into the massive opportunity provided by our increased digital connectedness. We learnt a lot from the LTRC/ALTAANZ Online Celebration in November, with many thanks to Ute Knoch and the event team who bravely forged ahead with a 'small' event that ended up attracting a wide and plentiful audience. The event was a very welcome opportunity to get together and think about testing and assessment related matters. It was a poignant shift of modality for our LTRC and ALTAANZ anniversaries – it seems we can certainly learn new tricks!

Thank you again for this opportunity.

Susy and Morena
Co-Presidents

ALTAANZ Executive Committee 2021

Susy Macqueen
Co-President



Morena Botelho de Magalhães
Co-President



Ute Knoch
Vice-President



Megan Yucel
Treasurer



Viola Lan Wei
Secretary



John Read
PLTA Co-Editor



Jason Fan
PLTA Co-Editor



Julie Luxton
Teacher Representative



Stephen Walker
Teacher Representative



Denise Angelo
Teacher Representative



Catherine Hudson
Teacher Representative



Johanna Motteram
Communications Officer



Xuan Minh Ngo
Student Representative



Leila Zohali
Student Representative



Maria Treadaway
Student Representative

Meet our Office Bearers

Susy Macqueen, Co-President

My background is as an EFL teacher and, in the deeper past, a secondary music and English teacher. I remember clearly the moment I discovered that Language Testing was a thing – I was in the English section of Kinokuniya Bookstore in Osaka, Japan, and I came across Tim McNamara's little Oxford book called 'Language Testing'. Although I really went to Melbourne because I like trams, it was a nice coincidence that Tim taught there, and I ended up working at the Language Testing Research Centre. I now teach Applied Linguistics at the Australian National University in Canberra. I'm interested in all aspects of language testing and assessment, but particularly in the murky territory where tests and policy intersect, and the elusive nature of the test construct.

Morena Botelho de Magalhães, Co-President

I was an EFL/ ESOL teacher for many years before joining the University of Auckland's DELNA (Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment) programme, which I now manage. But my interest in assessment comes from an ancient past. I was finishing my undergrad studies in Brazil when I joined a team of raters responsible for marking the writing assessments of large-scale regional and national examinations. Rigorous rater training happened every year and this on-the-job learning experience was invaluable. On resuming my tertiary education in New Zealand, my interest in assessment resurfaced. My PhD thesis combined two of my research interests: diagnostic assessment and doctoral education. I served the ALTAANZ Committee as its Secretary for the past three years and I am very excited to be taking on the role of Co-President.

Ute Knoch, Vice-President

I am the Director of the Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC) at the University of Melbourne and was involved in setting up ALTAANZ when I was the founding Co-president of the Association from 2015-2016. Since then, I have served as Vice-President from 2012-2014, and Co-President from 2010-2011. I am interested in various aspects of language assessment, including validity and validation, rater-mediated assessment, assessing languages for academic and professional purposes, and how language assessment and policy-making relate. I am looking forward to contributing to ALTAANZ in the coming years.

Megan Yucel, Treasurer

I work at the University of Queensland's Institute of Continuing & TESOL Education. I have a special interest in English Language Testing and Assessment, and my PhD thesis explored the perceptions of IELTS test candidates. Most recently, I have been involved in a research project investigating stakeholder perceptions of IELTS in Japan. I have worked as a test writer for over a decade, writing items for several large-scale English language tests. I am the co-author of the UQx MOOC, IELTSx, an online IELTS test preparation course. Having served as a Student Representative on the Committee from 2016-2018, I'm pleased to be returning to the ALTAANZ Committee as Treasurer.

Viola Lan Wei, Secretary

I am currently working at DELNA (Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment), the University of Auckland, as an Academic Language Adviser. In my role, I meet with students who are identified as those who need support for their academic English skills. Prior to joining DELNA, I completed my PhD in Applied Linguistics at the University of Auckland under the supervision of Associate Professor Rosemary Erlam. My PhD focused on the assessment of second language learners' implicit and explicit English language knowledge, and how their age and language aptitude influence these two types of language knowledge. I am interested in research on achieving better assessment of second language learners' implicit and explicit knowledge, taking into consideration a range of learners' individual difference factors. The other research area that I have been working on is teacher cognition and teacher education.

John Read, PLTA Co-Editor

A third-generation Kiwi, I retired as an emeritus professor in 2019 after a lengthy academic career at the University of Auckland and before that at Victoria University of Wellington. I have specialised in language testing and assessment, with particular interests in vocabulary assessment and the testing

of English for academic and professional purposes. My authored books are *Assessing Vocabulary* (Cambridge 2000) and *Assessing English Proficiency for University Study* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). I have also edited *Post-admission Language Assessment of University Students* (Springer, 2016) and co-edited *Assessing Academic Literacy in a Multilingual Society: Transition and Transformation* (Multilingual Matters, 2021). From 2002 to 2006 I was co-editor of *Language Testing* and served as President of the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) in 2011 and 2012. Although I was a founding member of ALTAANZ, this is my first opportunity to serve on the executive committee, and I look forward in particular to mentoring my relatively youthful co-editor.

Jason Fan, PLTA Co-Editor

My name is Jason Fan. I am the Deputy Director and Senior Research Fellow at the Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC), University of Melbourne, Australia. Before joining the LTRC in August 2018, I was an Associate Professor at College of Foreign Languages and Literature, Fudan University, China. My research interests include the validation of language assessments, language assessment literacy, and research methods. ALTAANZ is a vibrant community, and I have been its member for several years. Starting from this year, I am the co-editor (with John Read) of *Papers in Language Testing and Assessment* (PLTA). It's exciting to meet colleagues through ALTAANZ and learn from their diverse experiences and expertise.

Julie Luxton, Teacher Representative

I am currently working as a Professional Learning and Development (PLD) Facilitator for Evaluation Associates Ltd, based in Tauranga Moana, Aotearoa New Zealand, having previously worked for the Universities of Waikato and Canterbury in a similar role. I have facilitated PLD in English Language (ESOL), secondary literacy, Te Kotahitanga (culturally responsive practice to raise Māori achievement), National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) English and home-school partnerships. I am passionate about supporting teachers in all learning areas to meet the literacy, language, cultural and learning needs of Aotearoa New Zealand's increasingly diverse student population using a teaching as inquiry approach. Having lived and worked in Fiji and Tonga, where my first child was born, I feel a special connection to the Pacific Islands and recent PLD work has included a focus on raising Pasifika achievement in the regions.

My teaching background is in secondary education (Years 7-13) as a teacher, literacy co-ordinator, academic dean and middle leader in English, English Language, Social Studies and Languages. I have a particular interest in formative and summative assessment and am currently the New Zealand Qualifications Authority National Moderator for English Language, as well as an IELTS examiner. I have been an active member of TESOLANZ for many years and currently have a PLD project management role on the Executive.

Somewhat sedentary in nature, in my spare time I enjoy reading, watching good movies and docos, gardening and a modicum of walking.

Catherine Hudson, Teacher Representative

I am an EAL/D teacher specialist, teacher trainer and researcher. I have been a co-writer of and/consultant on a number of EAL/D proficiency frameworks for schools. My published research covers assessment issues related to the inclusion of Indigenous EAL/D learners in education policy and EAL/D proficiency frameworks. My current research at the Australian National University has a focus on the social and political dimensions of the second language proficiency assessment of young learners, on teacher voices in validation, and on aspects of evaluation processes. I have a particular interest in how advocacy for English language learners might benefit from the cross-fertilisation of expertise between members of the ALTAANZ community who specialise in the second language assessment of young English language learners and those of post-school learners.

Stephen Walker, Teacher Representative

My name's Stephen Walker and I'm one of the teacher representatives on the ALTAANZ executive committee. I work as the Academic Manager responsible for English language assessment development at the University of Queensland. My interests include exploring how constructs of academic English language proficiency can be defined, and then operationalised in valid assessments

which take account of the cognitive processes and contextual demands of academic language use. I am also interested in computer adaptive and multi-stage testing and the role played by statistical approaches such as Rasch and other IRT measurement models when developing assessment items and managing rater effects during rater mediated assessment tasks.

Denise Angelo, Teacher Representative

I am based at the Australian National University in Canberra on Ngannawal country. I am a teacher and teacher trainer, curriculum and assessment designer and policy writer. I work with Indigenous school-aged English language learners and their classroom teachers in whole-class settings. Many Indigenous students speak new contact languages, which adds a language recognition and identification layer to the language teaching and assessment context. I also work with adults and school-aged students of Indigenous languages, traditional and new contact languages, who range from L1 speakers, people who are learning their language and/or adults who are undertaking revitalisation. Recent research publications include language teaching and assessment in schools, recognition of contact languages, and teaching and learning Indigenous languages.

Leila Zohali, Student Representative

My name is Leila Zohali. I am a PhD candidate of Applied Linguistics at the School of Languages and Linguistics, The University of Melbourne. My PhD is being undertaken under the supervision of A/Prof Ute Knoch and A/Prof Neomy Storch. For my PhD research, I am investigating the pedagogical usefulness of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems in writing instruction. I am in the second year of my PhD.

As a Student Representative from Australia, I hope to be able to connect with other research students, help fellow students to have their voice and share experiences. I see ALTAANZ as an important organization in the region that can help students connect with experienced researchers, offer workshops and student networking sessions, and as student representative, I hope to help facilitate such opportunities for other students.

Xuan Minh Ngo, Student Representative

I am a PhD student at the University of Queensland, Australia working under the supervision of Dr Paul Moore and Associate Professor Noriko Iwashita. Before my PhD, I worked as a TESOL lecturer at Vietnam National University, Hanoi, where I was involved in a number of high-stakes language assessment projects. My interest in language testing and assessment probably stems from the fact that I come from an exam-oriented education system, having taken and developed a fair share of English tests myself. In hindsight, I can see a lot of problems in the tests I took and developed, which could partly be attributed to the inadequate level of teacher assessment literacy in Vietnam. Hence, in my PhD, I aim to investigate the experiences that facilitate teachers' development of language assessment literacy, which will hopefully offer both theoretical and practical implications for teacher education in my country and similar contexts.

PLTA: Call for submissions

Papers in Language Testing and Assessment (PLTA) is an international peer-reviewed journal, published by ALTAANZ. The new editors this year are Jason Fan, University of Melbourne and John Read, University of Auckland. PLTA publishes original research articles and discussion papers on language testing and assessment, as well as book reviews and test reviews. We welcome submissions from both new and experienced researchers, including teachers and research students. Reviews are normally commissioned by the editorial team, but we would welcome expressions of interest in writing a review. For further information, please visit <http://www.altaanz.org/papers-in-language-testing-and-assessment-plta.html>

Interview

Current NZ student representative Maria Treadaway sits down with former representative Tran Thi Ngoc Diep (pictured), who has recently completed her PhD thesis in the area of language assessment.



Diep is a researcher from Vietnam who received her PhD last year from Victoria University. She was the NZ student representative for ALTAANZ in 2018 - 2019. This interview with Diep is a recount of her challenging yet rewarding PhD journey.

Maria: So Diep, I understand you've completed your thesis?

Diep: Yes, I've deposited my thesis in the library. It all happened before Christmas, so 2020 ended on a high note for me.

Maria: Congratulations Diep. That must have felt incredible. Can you tell us about your thesis?

Diep: The title of my thesis is *Argument-based validation of a high-stakes listening test in Vietnam*. My supervisors are Assoc. Prof. Peter Gu and Prof. Averil Coxhead.

Maria: Were you full-time or part-time?

Diep: I was a full-time PhD student at Victoria University of Wellington from 2016 to 2020.

Maria: Do you think being full-time affected your progress?

Diep: Yes definitely. Studying full-time worked for me since it allowed me to focus and keep my research on track.

Maria: And what is the topic of your PhD?

Diep: As I mentioned earlier, my PhD is an argument-based validation of a high-stakes listening test in Vietnam. The fundamental changes in English education and assessment in Vietnam over the past decade have inspired an extensive amount of research from both local and international researchers. Our localized tests of English proficiency have attracted a great deal of public attention but still remained under-researched.

Maria: What sparked your interest in this topic?

Diep: As an insider who had experience with both the development and administration of local tests, I saw a pressing need for validation studies. I was lucky to be granted access to confidential test data of a university in Vietnam. It was my personal choice to focus on one of their Listening tests because I have always found L2 Listening intriguing and challenging. Carrying out this research was an opportunity for me to contribute to the growing but still limited literature of L2 Listening as well as the assessment of this elusive skill.

Maria: I like that description "the elusive skill" What do you mean by that?

Diep: Well, I had to journey into the listeners' minds. The biggest part of my research was the study in which I used think-aloud method to investigate test-takers' cognitive processes while they listened to the input and answered test items at the same time. It was a tedious process but hugely enjoyable.

Maria: Were there any challenges you faced? How did you overcome these challenges?

Diep: Yes. My biggest challenge was data collection. My original plan was to validate authentic tests developed by different universities in Vietnam but confidential test data was not that easy to gain access to. Of all the universities I contacted, only one said yes to me and for that I was deeply thankful.

Maria: So what made the difference with this university? How did you gain their confidence?

Diep: Well, in order to gain their trust, I was straightforward and honest about my purposes, proposed a clear research plan, and fulfilled all Human Ethics requirements from that university as well as Victoria University. That was a long process and I was holding my breath literally until the moment I touched the data.

Maria: Thanks for sharing what it takes to secure participants! Do you have any general advice and top tips for PhD students embarking on their journey?

Diep: Now that I look back, I think I have 2 top tips for new PhD students. First, make time for exercise. Most of the PhD students I've met (including myself) had at least one health issue. I only started to exercise when I became a PhD student and that made a difference. Walking, dancing, badminton, yoga ... anything you feel like. Don't wait until you have time, make time for it. Your body and mind will thank you later. Second, don't wait for the motivation fairy. I know there are

PhD students who are amazing writers and always motivated to write. I'm just not one of them. I didn't mind working with participants or analyzing data but when it came to writing, I tended to procrastinate. The strategy that got me through my PhD was the "500 words a day" strategy which I learnt from another PhD student. In times when I needed to write, I made sure I produced (at least) 500 words a day. I was actually not putting quantity over quality but pushing myself towards a realistic target. That way, I had a sense of achievement every day. I ended up deleting a fair amount of what I had written but at least I wrote it down.

Maria: That's a great strategy! I'm going to try that myself too. And what about your immediate future plans?

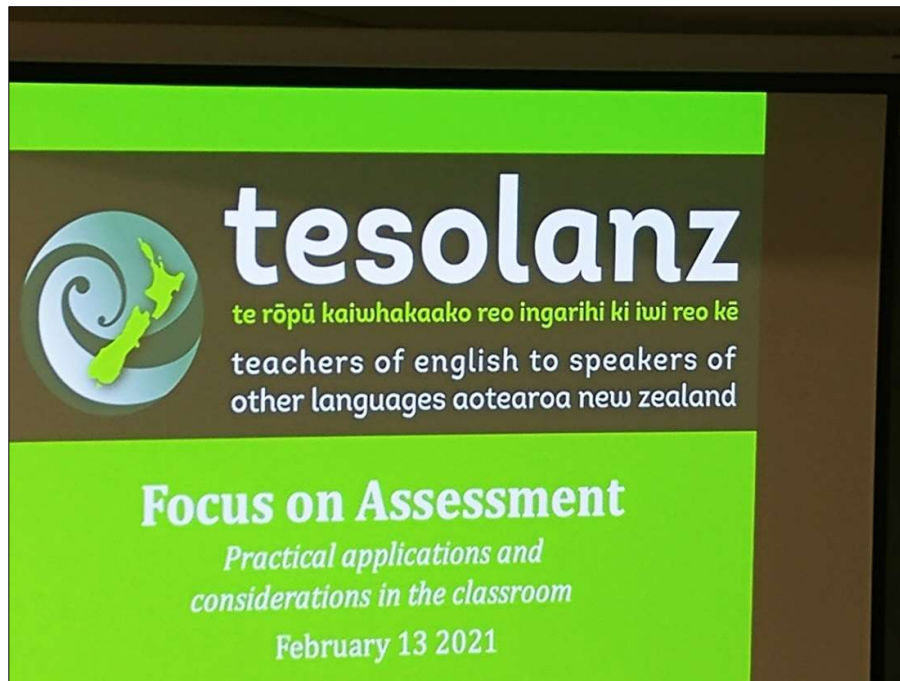
Diep: I am now working to publish parts of my PhD thesis. I will start applying for jobs as well and hopefully can get back to working soon. It will also be fun to spend more time with my family and explore so much more of NZ's beautiful nature.

Maria: I wish you the best with your publishing and job hunt. And enjoy your time with whānau and exploring Aotearoa. Thanks so much for sharing your insights with us.

Language Assessment Matters is the newsletter of ALTAANZ, the Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand.

Do you have a Language Testing or Assessment related item you would like to have included in the newsletter? If so, please send your submission to altaanz@gmail.com with "newsletter" in the subject line. Possible contributions could include a report on work in progress, a PhD or Master's thesis report, a conference review or report, discussion of a current issue in language testing or assessment, a description of an assessment task which has worked well for your learners or an assessment-related anecdote that you think our membership would find interesting.

Julie Luxton reports on the TESOLANZ Assessment Symposium



On February 2021 TESOLANZ, in partnership with the University of Auckland's Faculty of Education and Social Work, ran a symposium in Auckland – Focus on Assessment: Practical applications and considerations in the classroom. This face-to-face event had been postponed because of 2020 Covid restrictions, although an interim online session, offering one workshop for each sector, had been run on 10 October 2020.

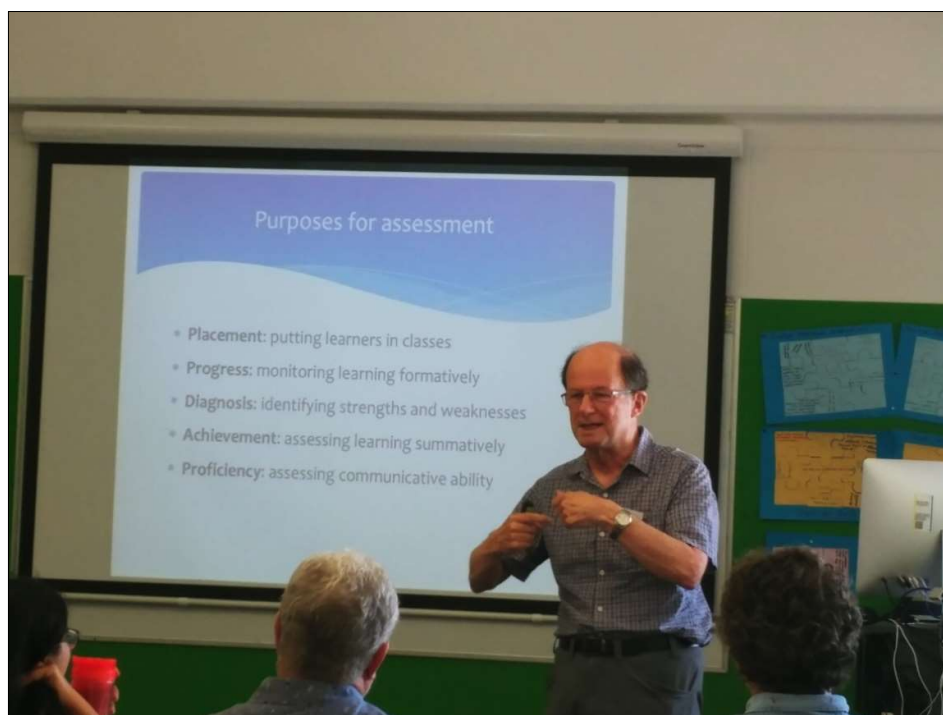
131 teachers attended the Saturday symposium - an indication of teacher/assessor need for professional learning and development (PLD) in all three targeted sectors - primary, secondary and tertiary. Symposium workshop foci were informed by a survey of TESOLANZ members gauging their priority assessment PLD needs. Organising committee members invited experts in each sector to facilitate practical workshops on specific topics, and there were calls for papers broadly related to multi-level assessment practices.

The symposium started with plenary sessions on Principles underlying good assessment practices (facilitated by Rosemary Erlam, University of Auckland) and Initial and diagnostic assessment (Jannie van Hees, Language Minds) for the compulsory sector and Validity in classroom-based formative assessment for tertiary teachers (Peter Gu, Victoria University of Wellington).

The primary stream included workshops facilitated by practising teachers on Fair assessment of English language learners in the mainstream and formative assessment, as well as a Ministry of Education (MOE) workshop on the new English Language Learning Progressions Pathway. There was also a teacher panel discussion on ESOL verification for ESOL funding chaired by a MOE verifier. The secondary stream included workshops on formative assessment practices in writing, creating reading assessment tasks and moderating oral interactions.

For tertiary, there were workshops on Improving the validity of pre-entry Academic English reading tests (Martin Walsh, English Language Academy, Auckland), Justification of validity and reliability (John Read, University of Auckland), Rethinking second language listening tests (Mark Dawson-Smith, Waikato Institute of Technology), Formative assessment practices in tertiary ESL courses (Hanna Brookie, English Teaching College, Palmerston North) and Diagnostic language assessment (Viola Lan Wei et al., University of Auckland).

Papers included Assessing adult L2 literacy learners with emergent literacy from former refugee communities (Jenny Field, Waikato Institute of Technology), A fair go: Accommodations for more equitable assessment practices (Simon Crosby, Ormiston Senior College), Integrating PTE academic test preparation in the classroom (Richard Swanson, Pearson Education), Writing world-class multiple-choice questions (Clementine Annabell & Stephen Harlow, University of Waikato), Student-centred assessment design (Margaret Connolly, Waikato Institute of Education) and NZCEL-Reflecting on Level 4 listening skills and strategies (Celine Kearney, Waikato Institute of Technology).



John Read presenting at TESOLANZ photos thanks to Morena Botelho de Magalhães

Further information and about these workshops and papers, as well as presenters, can be found in the [Assessment Symposium Handbook](#) on the 'What's On' February calendar page of the TESOLANZ website.

TESOLANZ would like to acknowledge the symposium sponsors - the University of Auckland, IELTS, Pearson PTE Academic, Modern English Teacher and Chasing Time English.

ALTAANZ SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN SENATE INQUIRY ON NATIONHOOD, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY

In October 2019, ALTAANZ made a submission to the Australian Senate Inquiry on 'Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy'. We felt it was important to have a voice in this inquiry because of the prominence of citizenship testing and English language testing in Australian political discussions about citizenship. The ALTAANZ submission is available [here](#) (No. 122). The Senate Committee has now delivered the [final report](#). The ALTAANZ submission was referred to in the 'Social Cohesion' section of the final report. The points which referred directly to the ALTAANZ submission are below (although our submission covered many language-related topics other than 'social cohesion').

4.71 The Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand emphasised the importance of linguistic diversity in fostering social cohesion, arguing that 'the fact that Standard Australian English is an additional language...is unrelated to a person's ability to contribute positively to a nation as a citizen or to form strong bonds in the community'.⁶⁶

4.72 A number of participants suggested the government could ensure a focus on languages by reviving the national policy on language, such as the policy developed in 1987 by Professor Joseph Lo Bianco.⁶⁷

ALTAANZ members will find many sections in [Chapter 4](#) interesting (e.g. 'Languages', 'English Language Capability').

ALTAANZ Advocacy

We are concerned with any policy area in which language testing and assessment are explicitly or implicitly implicated. Please do get in touch with the ALTAANZ Committee if you feel there is an issue that warrants advocacy work.

Our first ALTAANZ Advocacy Discussion Article

In the ALTAANZ survey, you indicated that promoting ethical uses of tests is important to you. As members bring issues to our attention, we will circulate a viewpoint to start discussions. The following article by Kyle Smith, a PhD candidate at the Queensland University of Technology, focuses on the LANTITE.

If you have a point or counterpoint in relation to this view, please contact the Newsletter editor via our email altaanz@gmail.com

Literacy testing, ethics and advocacy

Kyle Smith



"[Ms Smith] is a single mother of three, with one child suffering from autism. She headed back to university as a mature age student after she stopped working to raise her children for several years. After five years of intensive study, including studying over summer each year to fast track her degree, she has completed a Diploma in Education Support and a Bachelor of Arts. She is now two units away from graduating with her Master of Teaching. Ms Smith has one more hurdle: the LANTITE. Failing both components of the test twice, she believes her mature age is a disadvantage while the test conditions cause her severe anxiety.

'Getting the results for the second time has completely flattened me in every aspect. My whole demeanour, my confidence, my everything. It made me feel like a failure, like a dummy, despite I've almost finished my second degree,' Ms Smith said." (Zuccarelli, 2020)

Introduction

One of ALTAANZ's goals is to "advocate on behalf of test-takers, students and other stakeholders whose life chances may be affected by assessment-related decisions" (Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand, n.d.). Based on the quote above, Ms Smith (no relation) is one such test-taker. Over the last two years, I have worked closely with dozens of students preparing for [The Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education students \(LANTITE\)](#) who have similar stories to Ms Smith's. These students want to be teachers and, based on their coursework and practicum experiences, there is every indication that they will be successful in their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) course (i.e., Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching). However, they are not allowed to complete their courses or graduate until they have passed the two components of the test, Literacy and Numeracy. As the quote suggests, students face a raise of challenges with the tests that have nothing to do with the 'literacy' or 'numeracy' constructs supposedly being measured.

In this article, I will first explain what LANTITE is, focusing on the Literacy Test. I will then describe an ethical issue relating to a lack of evidence regarding the technical quality of the test and, finally, my own efforts to obtain such evidence via Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

What is LANTITE?

LANTITE was introduced in 2016 as part of a series of changes to the regulation of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (i.e., Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching courses) in Australia. Its aim is to determine whether ITE graduates “possess levels of personal literacy and numeracy broadly equivalent to the top 30 per cent of the population” (Education Services Australia, 2015, p. 14). The imposition of this standard and exclusion from the teaching profession of anyone who does not meet it was expected to ‘build the public’s confidence’ in teacher quality (Australian Government, 2015; Mockler, 2020). There is reason to think, however, that it may be having the opposite effect (Zaglas, 2020).

The design, trialling and administration of LANTITE has been contracted out to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). The total value of these contracts is over AUD\$2.5 million. ACER also charge test takers \$98 for each attempt at either the Literacy or Numeracy test. Assuming that 20,000 ITE students take both of these each year, LANTITE generates close to \$4 million in additional annual revenue for ACER (Knott, 2016).

The Literacy Test consists of 65 questions delivered online within 120 minutes. It can be taken in a test centre (e.g., [Cliftons Venues](#)) or remotely, via the ProctorU platform. There are two broad types of test item: multiple choice questions, and items which require students to type a single word. These items are intended to test students’ knowledge in Reading Comprehension and Technical Skills of Writing, which comprises Syntax and grammar, Spelling, Word Usage and Text organisation. More information about the test construct is available [here](#). Sample test report forms are available [here](#).

Once students are enrolled in an ITE course, they are allowed to attempt LANTITE three times. If they fail on their third attempt, they require the Dean of their faculty to approve a fourth and to notify ACER of this. Before students are allowed a fifth attempt, their request is reviewed by an independent panel. If students are unable to pass, they may have the option of accepting an ‘early exit’ degree, or enrolling at a different higher education provider after a two-year hiatus. This arbitrary restriction on the number of attempts significantly increases the ‘stakes’ relating to each attempt, hence Ms Smith’s comment above about her “severe anxiety” ahead of her third attempt (Zuccarelli, 2020).

Ethics, technical reports and FOI

Ms Smith’s story suggests that LANTITE is having a negative impact on test-takers’ ‘life chances.’ For this reason, ACER and DESE both have an ethical obligation to “provide evidence that the technical quality, including reliability and validity, of the test meets its intended purpose” (Cizek and Rosenberg, 2011, p. 236, quoting the *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education*, JCTP, 1998). Despite LANTITE being mandated and funded (in part) by the Federal Government, no such evidence (in the form of technical reports, for example) has yet been released by ACER or DESE.

The only document currently available which offers any insight into the technical quality of LANTITE is a report on its implementation. It was produced for DESE in May 2020 by consultancy firm, Dandolo Partners (at a cost to the public of [\\$510,211.79](#)). No announcement was made about the report and its existence was unknown until September 2020, when a journalist mentioned that they had obtained it under the *Freedom Of*

Information (FOI) Act 1982 (Cth) (Baker, 2020). To get a copy of it, I had to submit my own FOI request. The report highlights a range of serious problems relating to the implementation of the LANTITE, but notes that questions as to whether it is the “right assessment tool” and “set at the right difficulty level” were ‘out of scope’ of the review (Dandolo Partners, 2020, p. 1).

However, the Dandolo report does refer to “performance and participation data” that had been provided to the consultants for the purpose of the review (2020, p. 36). This suggests that technical reports exist which could help evaluate the test’s validity, reliability and fairness. Since October 2020, I have been trying to obtain these reports through FOI requests to DESE. A DESE lawyer wrote to me in January 2021 informing me that two technical reports and one administration report (177 pages worth in total) had been identified, but that access was refused on the grounds that:

1. The reports had been provided by ACER “with a mutual understanding of confidence.”
2. They would reveal to ACER’s competitors commercially valuable “information about ACER’s psychometric processes and procedures as well as its approach to conducting the LANTITE that would not otherwise be available to them.”
3. They contain material which could be used to identify specific test takers, higher education providers or test centres (personal communication, January 29, 2021).

I requested an internal review of this decision. Quoting the *FOI Act*, I argued that disclosure of the reports is in the public interest because it will “inform debate on a matter of public importance” and “promote effective oversight of public expenditure” (s 11B(3)). Further, I pointed out that material could be redacted to minimise the risk of identifying individuals or organisations. On March 12, I was informed of the result, which was to again refuse access to the documents.

On March 22, I submitted a request for an FOI review by the [Australian Information Commissioner](#), arguing again that disclosure of the reports is in the public interest. I anticipate that this review will take several months.

Conclusion

After five years of LANTITE, DESE, acting in part on advice from ACER, are still refusing to release technical reports. In doing so, I believe they are falling short of their ethical obligations to individual test takers such as Ms Smith, and stifling debate on a matter of significant public importance. Although I am optimistic that the reports will be eventually released, it should not be this difficult for the public to gain access to them. In a case such as this, there is a clear role for ALTAANZ members to play in putting pressure on powerful organisations to improve their testing practices.

kyle.smith@hdr.qut.edu.au