

# Language Assessment Matters

## Issue 17, November 2022

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

### Message from Co-Presidents



Warm greetings to all ALTAANZ members in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere!

The end of another (semi) pandemic year is approaching, and we are getting ready to see some of our members in person for the first time in three years. We can't wait! Over 200 colleagues will meet in Wellington, New Zealand, for the [joint conference of ALANZ, ALAA and ALTAANZ](#). The conference programme, already available online, contains a broad range of topics encompassing the multifaceted areas of applied linguistics, with contributions from many of our members, including Exec Committee members. The ALTAANZ school teacher representatives have organised a colloquium around a much-needed discussion on how 'mainstream' school assessment tools often ignore English language proficiency and the impacts of this. Our student representatives have contributed to an array of student activities during the conference, and John Read, co-editor of SiLA (previously PLTA), is leading a session with editors of various journals. The session will be of particular interest to students and early-career researchers.

The ALTAANZ AGM will also take place during the joint conference at 12.30pm NZDT on Sunday 27 November. The AGM will be hybrid, with online participants joining conference attendees via Zoom. The meeting agenda and the Zoom link for the meeting will be circulated to ALTAANZ members by email. Members are welcome to bring matters of interest to ALTAANZ to the AGM. We would also like to remind members that elections for office bearers are held at the AGM. This year the positions that are up for election are:

- President/s
- Editor/s of SiLA
- New Zealand Student Representative/s
- Australian Student Representative/s
- New Zealand Teacher Representative/s
- Australian Teacher Representative/s

If you are interested in serving on the Executive Committee or would like to nominate someone, please get in touch with ALTAANZ (email: [altaanz@gmail.com](mailto:altaanz@gmail.com)).

In other news, we are thrilled to see the journal of our association, *Studies in Language Assessment* (SiLA), formerly PLTA, thriving. A [special issue on Contextualising language assessment literacy](#) has recently been published and a regular one is currently in production. Co-editors Jason Fan and John Read have been doing outstanding work on several fronts for enhancing the journal.

The Executive Committee has also been liaising with ALTAANZ members as we seek to coordinate initiatives to promote professional development to our community. One particular focus is our engagement with teachers from various sectors, including teachers of languages other than English.

ALTAANZ has also made a submission to the Australian Government on the inclusion of children who are learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect as a “priority equity cohort” in the National School Reform Agreement. You can read about it below. Also in this newsletter, Julie Luxton, our Teacher Representative from Aotearoa NZ, describes recent developments in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Literacy and Numeracy assessments, and the accessibility of these for English Language Learners.

Last but not least, the Committee has also started discussing plans for our standalone conference in 2023. Updates will be announced in the AGM on 27 November, and we hope to see many of you then.

With best wishes for the end of the year,

Morena and Susy

Co-Presidents

#### Role Descriptions for some of our open committee positions below.

Student Representative	Teacher Representative
Postgraduate Officer is required to attend all meetings of the ALTAANZ Committee;	Teacher Representative is required to attend all meetings of the ALTAANZ Committee;
Representing Postgraduate Research Students to the ALTAANZ Committee;	Representing teachers to the ALTAANZ Committee;
Informing Postgraduate Students of events, conferences and services available to them;	Informing teachers of events, conferences and services available to them;
Raising issues of Postgraduate Students to the ALTAANZ Committee;	Raising issues and concerns that teachers have regarding assessment and testing to the ALTAANZ Committee;
Developing ALTAANZ policy for postgraduate issues;	Developing ALTAANZ policy for teaching issues.
Ensuring the ALTAANZ Committee are fully informed of postgraduate issues.	

**8<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference of the Asian Association for Language Assessments (AALA)  
Classroom-Based Assessment in the New Normal and Beyond: Challenges and Possibilities**

*26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> October 2022 Hosted by Anna University, Chennai, India.*

**Local Conference Convenor Rama Mathew (Formerly) Delhi University, Delhi**

**The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual AALA Conference was held in hybrid mode in Chennai, India at the end of October. I was fortunate enough to have a paper accepted, and to be supported to join the conference in person.**

The conference schedule included three pre-conference workshops, five invited plenary talks (four delivered in-person, one delivered via video link), two plenary panel discussions, 77 parallel papers (55 in-person and 22 delivered via video link), and 23 posters (17 on-site and 6 online). The complexity of delivering all the online elements, alongside the in-person sessions, is not to be under-estimated, and the conference organisers were supported by scores of tech support workers, including camera people to support live feeds from each of the five presentation halls.

This was the first Language Assessment specific conference ever held in India and the parallel papers revealed a large range of local and regional issues around language assessment. The opportunities for sharing and hearing international perspectives were also immense, with live papers presented by researchers from across broader Asia.

Highlights for me were two of the plenary talks: Dr Rukmini Banerji from Pratham ( [www.pratham.org](http://www.pratham.org) ) shared a call to action around India's new education policy (NEP 2020) wherein ambitious goals to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy for a larger proportion of India's children are published. Dr Banerji reported on Pratham's regular in-home volunteer-administered survey of children's educational achievement; an assessment delivery of scale, complexity and design-simplicity that is jaw-dropping. She also shared details of Pratham's actions to support pre-school literacy development in homes where parents may not have functional literacy themselves.

The closing keynote, delivered via video-link by Professor Constant Leung was particularly thought-provoking. Professor Leung encouraged the audience to reconsider the commonly accepted theoretical foundations of standardised language tests. He then explored the notion of Mediation as it is presented in the 2020 CEFR Companion Volume Descriptors, with particular consideration of the 'problem' of different levels of plurilingualism (languages A, B and C) and how plurilingualism might interact with 'Emotional Intelligence' as a contributing element of Mediation. At the end of a demanding two days of face-to-face conference, Professor Leung's contribution was challenging, and a fitting end to the adventure of AALA 2022.

Alongside the intellectual and interpersonal stimulation of the conference, there was the adventure of conference meals in India – the Indian Cricket team may have been disappointed by the sandwiches on offer during their T20 fixtures in World Cup Cricket in Australia this year – but there was not a sandwich to be seen during lunch and dinner at AALA 2022!

Johanna Motteram, British Council



*Amazing Food at AALA 2022 Photo Credit J. Wudthayagorn*

## Aotearoa NZ Update

### NCEA Review Update

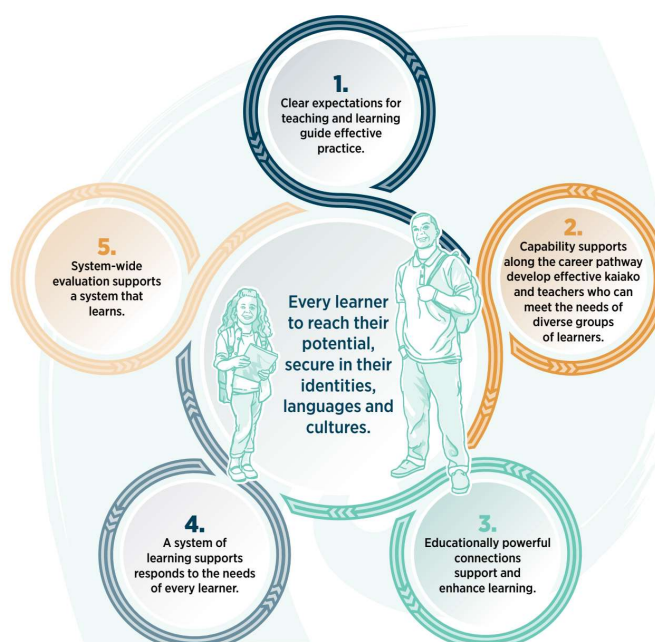
Two pilot external assessment events for new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Literacy and Numeracy co-requisite requirements involving over 200 schools have been completed in Aotearoa NZ. Achievement data and markers' reports have not yet been published, but anecdotal communications with schools indicate that results are low, especially in writing. It will, however, be important to interrogate the data from each school, as many entered whole year level cohorts, rather than learners who met readiness indicators.

Specialist teachers of English Language have been disheartened by the results of their English language learners (ELLs) in the first pilot assessment. They have expressed concern about the inaccessibility of the reading texts in terms of vocabulary levels, idiomatic language and cultural contexts, as well as the level of accuracy required to achieve the writing standard. Some teachers have renewed the call for an alternative pathway to NCEA Literacy for ELLs. This could take the form of a portfolio approach, as is currently an option for those learning Te Reo Māori as a second language. Disaggregation of national achievement data for ELLs is needed to provide evidence to support this call.

Further information about new NCEA Literacy and Numeracy requirements can be accessed at <https://ncea.education.govt.nz/literacy-and-numeracy/literacy/learning>.

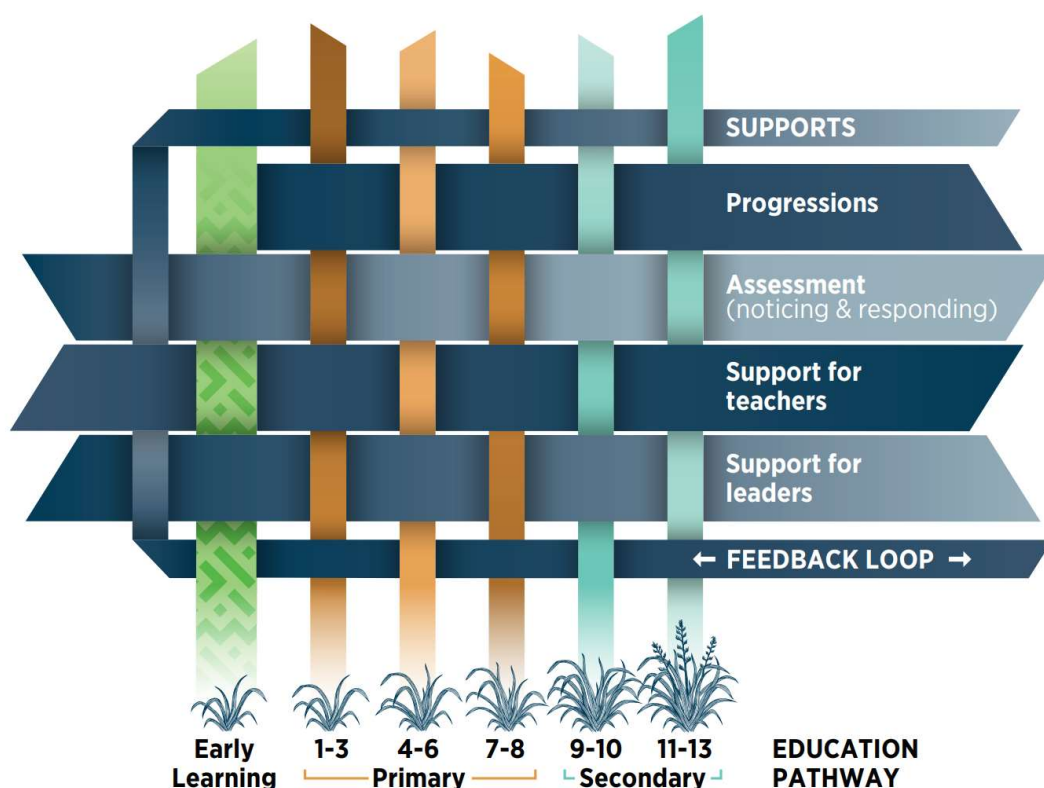
### Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy

Concerns about a long-term slide in literacy and maths achievement levels and educational inequities in Aotearoa NZ have led to the launch of the [Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy](#) by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in March. This is designed to 'shape the early learning and schooling system to deliver equity and excellence in literacy & communication and maths teaching and learning' (p. 6, reproduced below). The strategy includes five focus areas...



In August [Literacy & Communication and Maths Action Plans](#), which outline strategic actions for each of the focus areas, were published. In relation to ELLs, these actions include ‘developing resources, guidance, and tools to support literacy & communication learning for culturally and linguistically diverse ākonga’ (p.12), ‘guidance on linguistically explicit pedagogies’, ‘principles of additional language learning... integrated into guidance and resources’, supporting kaiako to recognise and utilise diverse linguistic backgrounds of ākonga’, specific consideration of ākonga learning English as an additional language in ‘assessment resources, guidance and tools’ (p.16), as well as the needs of ELLs and their whānau in the context of building powerful education connections.

Central to this is a ‘Common Practice Model’ (CPM) which will outline principles and evidence-informed pedagogical approaches to underpin literacy & communication and maths. This will involve redesigned literacy learning progressions with examples to help teachers understand the ‘progress pathway, key learning steps and threshold concepts’ (p.10, reproduced below).



This CPM will be developed collaboratively by a team nominated by range of educational organisations in 2022, with wider sector consultation to take place in 2023. It will be important that English language specialists are engaged in the development of the CPM if the needs of ELLs are to be genuinely taken into consideration.

### Evaluation of Support for English Language Learners

An evaluation report on the nature and efficacy of the MOE's funding and support for ELLs in Aotearoa NZ primary, intermediate and secondary schools was recently published. This includes a literature and evidence review and analysis of teacher questionnaire data. The report found that MOE funding mechanisms for ELLs were working well for schools. However, the amount of time for which ELLs were funded was considered insufficient, especially for those born in NZ. Lack of funding for learners transitioning into English-medium schools from Te Reo Māori immersion settings was also of concern. The majority of English Language specialist teachers were confident that they were accurately assessing the language needs of ELLs. However, schools reported a paucity of staff with ESOL qualifications and lack of access to professional learning for specialist teachers. The need for further interrogation of NCEA data for ELLs in relation to retention, ethnicity, time in school and subject-specific achievement was noted.

Based on the evaluation's findings, recommendations included increasing funding support for longer periods, reviewing Professional Learning and Development needs and updating MOE ESOL resources.

To read the report, go to [\*Evaluation of the nature and efficacy of support for English Language Learners\*](#).

Julie Luxton

Teacher Representative – Aotearoa NZ

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Ministry of Education (2022). *Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy*. Retrieved from [https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/Ministry/Changes-in-education/ELS-0778-Maths-and-Literacy-Strategies-Doc\\_web.pdf](https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/Ministry/Changes-in-education/ELS-0778-Maths-and-Literacy-Strategies-Doc_web.pdf)

Ministry of Education (2022). *Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy Action Plans*. Retrieved from <https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/our-work/Literacy-and-Communication-and-Maths-Strategy/Literacy-Communication-and-Maths-Action-Plans.pdf>

Scott, C., Alkema, A., Piesse, N. (2022). *Evaluation of the Nature and Efficacy of Support for English Language Learners*. Retrieved from

<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/evaluation-of-the-nature-and-efficacy-of-support-for-english-language-learners-literature-and-evidence-review>



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### **NETWORKING OPPORTUNITY**

*The ALTAANZ Committee and the Studies in Language Assessment (SiLA) team are working on a few new initiatives for the journal. To achieve our editors' vision, we need to rebuild our website. We are planning to do this over a couple of weeks in the next few months.*

*If you have basic computing skills, can follow instructions, and would like to contribute to the biggest change to the ALTAANZ website since it was built, please let us know. We will provide full training, on- call support while you are making changes, and a letter of recognition for your effort.*

*Training will take around an hour, and a minimum commitment of around 5 hours (at your convenience) would be appreciated.*

*Please contact us via [altaanz@gmail.com](mailto:altaanz@gmail.com) to let us know you would like to help and which of the following weeks you could be available for:*

*Week commencing 28 November 2022*

*Week commencing 12 December 2022*

*Week commencing 16 January 2023*



### 2022 Duolingo English Test Doctoral Dissertation Awards

Three doctoral students affiliated with the University of Melbourne received the **2022 Duolingo English Test Doctoral Dissertation Award**



Winner: Rena Gao

Affiliation: The University of Melbourne

Supervisors: Professor Carsten Roever, Professor Trevor Cohn

Dissertation title: Development of Interactional Competence: Prediction and Quantification of L2 English Listener Responses through Semi-Supervised Learning via ESL Dialogue



Winner: Shengkai Yin

Affiliations: Shanghai Jiao Tong University/ The University of Melbourne

Supervisors: Professor Yan Jin, Dr. Jason Fan and Associate Professor Ute Knoch

Dissertation title: Assessing critical thinking in EAP speaking: Design and validation of a rating scale



Winner: Yan (Niles) Zhao

Affiliation: The University of Melbourne

Supervisors: Dr. Jason Fan and Dr. Kellie Frost

Dissertation title: Investigating the impact of a tertiary admissions English test: An agency perspective



## English Language Tests for Australian Visas

The Australian Government has invited Expressions of Interest for the selection of English language tests for Australian visas. The selection process was open to all providers of English language tests. Tests are assessed against a range of criteria and sub-criteria including the tests' suitability for the domains of migration/study and their evidence of the robustness of score equivalence tables. For selection criteria and evidence requested, see Department of Home Affairs, [Request for Expression of Interest for Selection of English Language Tests for Australian Visas](#), pp. 16-26.

## Recognition of EAL/D learners in the Australian Government's review of the National Schools Reform Agreement

The Australian [National School Reform Agreement](#) is an agreement between the different state/territory jurisdictions in Australia to 'lift student outcomes'. In the current review of the agreement, it is proposed, for the first time, that English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) learners are included as a "priority equity cohort". A barrier for this initiative is that there is no national data set on EAL/D learners, that is, EAL/D learners cannot be disaggregated. A further complication is that jurisdictions have historically not identified EAL/D learners of all backgrounds. ALTAANZ has made a submission to the review proposing a practical way forward for [recognising and including the full cohort of EAL/D Learners](#). The ALTAANZ submission outlines a staged process for collecting an initial set of ELL data. It would be drawn from the jurisdictions' different identification and assessment tools for heterogeneous ELL populations, but it would avoid stalling support for this equity group. School-based language assessment experts would then interrogate this data for inclusiveness of all ELL cohorts and alignment of processes and proficiency levels, and recommend next steps.

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## PLTA renamed SiLA

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*Papers in Language Testing and Assessment* (PLTA), an international peer-reviewed journal published by ALTAANZ, was recently renamed *Studies in Language Assessment* (SiLA), as part of the initiatives taken by the editorial team to enhance the profile and status of the journal. The first publication under the new title is the special issue on *Contextualizing Language Assessment Literacy*, guest-edited by Dina Tsagari (Oslo Metropolitan University) and Karin Vogt (University of Education, Heidelberg), which appeared in September. Published in fully open access format, SiLA is available from the ALTAANZ website and the website of the Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC), University of Melbourne. The journal is included in the Web of Science Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI).



## Upcoming events in Language Testing and Assessment

### **ALANZ ALAA ALTAANZ Conference**

Wellington, NZ, November 25-27, 2022

[Applied Linguistics in the Asia-Pacific region](#)

### **Language Testing Forum**

Bristol, UK, November 25-27, 2022

<https://ukalta.org/ltf-2022/>

### **New Directions in Language Assessment East Asia**

Denpasar, Indonesia, December 9-10, 2022

<https://www.britishcouncilfoundation.id/en/new-directions-2022>

### **LTRC 2023 “Language Assessment for a Global, Digital, and More Equitable Era”**

New York, USA June 5-9 2023

<https://www.iltaonline.com/page/LTRC-2023>

### **Asian Association for Language Assessment AALA 2023**

To be hosted by Eiken in Tokyo, Japan end August / start September 2023

### **ALTAANZ Conference 2023**

TBA