

# Language Assessment Matters

## Issue 13, May 2020

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

Dear ALTAANZ members,

We would like to open this Newsletter by saying that we sincerely hope that all our members and their loved ones have remained safe, first of all during the unprecedented bushfire season in Australia last summer, and of course currently during the COVID-19 outbreak around the world.

The consequences of the pandemic will be many and varied, but one particularly relevant consequence for our community is the cancellation of our conference ALTAANZ 2020. The ALTAANZ executive and conference organising committees were particularly excited about ALTAANZ 2020 as we had grand plans to celebrate the Association's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Melbourne in November.

We are still in discussions about how best to celebrate our anniversary and when will be the right time to bring the ALTAANZ community together for our stand-alone conference. Please rest assured that we are keen to mark the anniversary, and to continue working with our partners and sponsors to support and grow our community.

In the meantime, we couldn't help but share a sneak peak of the next ALTAANZ stand-alone conference later in this Newsletter. Majorly premature, of course, but we just wanted to share our excitement with you regardless!

Also in this newsletter:

- Announcing *Papers in Language Testing and Assessment's* forthcoming Special Issue
- Introducing three new ALTAANZ Executive Committee members
- Celebrating two ALTAANZ student members completing their PhD
- Celebrating Cathie Elder, ILTA Distinguished Achievement Award 2020 winner
- Reports on two ALTAANZ colloquia held at the Applied Linguistics in Perth in November 2019
- Preview of the next ALTAANZ stand-alone conference

Johanna Motteram & Annemiek Huisman  
ALTAANZ Communication Officers (External and Internal)

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](mailto: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.

## ALTAANZ Announcements

### Online Get Together for PhD and Master's Students – June 5<sup>th</sup>

Your student representatives, Phoebe and Maria (see below for their introductions), cordially invite all PhD and Master's students involved in language testing and assessment research to join us for an afternoon online get together. Our aim is to make connections and build the ALTAANZ student community by inviting you to share an aspect of your research or discuss any challenges in an informal and supportive setting.

The session will be held on June 5<sup>th</sup> at 12–1pm AEST on Zoom. Please keep an eye out on the [ALTAANZ Facebook page](#) nearer the time. If anyone has any specific questions they'd like to see addressed in the session, we'll ask you to post them there, and we'll also post the Zoom link there a couple of days before the date.

We are looking forward to meeting you! If you have any questions prior to the event, feel free to contact us on [altaanzstudents@gmail.com](mailto:altaanzstudents@gmail.com). Also, feel free to forward this notice to anyone you think might be interested.

In the meantime, stay safe! Phoebe and Maria

### Are you interested in serving on the ALTAANZ Committee?

This is an advance notice to inform you that at the ALTAANZ AGM in November (details to be confirmed), we will hold elections for the following positions:

- ALTAANZ Co-presidents
- Papers in Language Testing and Assessment (PLTA) Editors
- ALTAANZ teacher and student representatives

There are two positions available for each of these roles. Our preference is to have a representative from Australia and New Zealand in each role.

If you are interested in finding out more about the demands of any of these roles, or to speak with an incumbent, please don't hesitate to contact us via [altaanz@gmail.com](mailto:altaanz@gmail.com)

## Papers in Language Testing and Assessment: Announcing the forthcoming Special Issue

Announcing the forthcoming special issue of Papers in Language Testing and Assessment: 'Cross-disciplinary links between Conversational Analysis (CA) and the assessment of interactional competence', guest-edited by Soo Jung Youn (Northern Arizona University) and Rue Burch (Kobe University). This special issue will include 5 full-length research papers exploring cross-disciplinary links between Conversation Analysis (CA) and language assessment, with a focus on advancing theoretical and methodological issues regarding the assessment of second language (L2) interactional competence.

### Editorial

- Where Conversation Analysis meets language testing and assessment: Toward expanding epistemologies and validity evidence. Youn & Burch

### Articles

- Testing interactional competence: Patterned yet dynamic aspects of L2 interaction. Huth
- Assessing Interactional Competence: The role of intersubjectivity in a paired-speaking assessment task. Burch & Kley
- Resolving interactional troubles in paired oral proficiency assessment in an EFL context. Hirçin-Coban & Sert
- Pragmatic variables in designing role-plays for the context validity of assessing interactional competence. Youn
- How do raters understand rubrics for assessing L2 interactional competence? A comparative study of CA- and non-CA-formulated performance descriptors. Sandlund & Greer

### Book review

- The discourse of the IELTS speaking: Interactional design and practice, Paul Seedhouse and Fumiyo Nakatsuhara. Reviewed by Shi Chen

## Introducing new ALTAANZ committee members

In 2020, we have welcomed three new members to the ALTAANZ Executive Committee. Please read on to find out more about these 3 enthusiastic individuals.

### STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Phuc Diem Le and Maria Treadaway are elected Post Graduate Student Representatives to the ALTAANZ committee. They are both PhD Candidates, Phuc at The University of Queensland and Maria at the University of Auckland. Below, they share a little about their backgrounds and their studies.

#### Phuc Diem Le, Post Graduate Student Representative (Australia)



I was born and raised in a small town in Northern Vietnam. I studied for the bachelor's degree in English Teaching Methodology at the University of Languages and International Studies,

National University, Hanoi (ULIS) and the master's degree in Education at the University of Adelaide, Australia. I used to work as an English teacher and lecturer at ULIS before starting my PhD. I commenced my PhD study

at the University of Queensland (UQ), Australia, under the supervision of Associate Professor Noriko Iwashita and Dr Barbara Hanna in April 2017. My doctoral study, entitled "Assessment Literacy and Rating Behaviour: The Case of a Speaking Test in Vietnam", aims to investigate the impact of knowledge and beliefs about language testing and assessment, also known as language assessment literacy on the operational rating of teacher-raters in a speaking assessment. I aim to complete my candidature by October 2020. I am very excited about the idea that I can finish my study and start a new stage of my life soon.

#### Maria Treadaway, Post Graduate Student Representative (New Zealand)



I come from New Zealand, but have lived in England, Germany and Australia in another life as an opera singer. I returned to New Zealand in 2000 and decided to train

as an English language teacher. I knew I had always had an interest in language and I soon realised that I loved teaching as well. I subsequently completed a Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA) and trained to be a CELTA teacher trainer. While teaching academic English at the University of Auckland, I completed a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics. During my Master's, I very much enjoyed the assessment paper I took with Professor John Read, who later became my dissertation supervisor. My Master's thesis was entitled "Investigating the effect of the rate of speech on pilot comprehension in non-routine situations". Having completed my Master's, I decided to embark upon doctoral

study. My study combines three of my interests: English language, assessment and aviation. The overall project involves the development and validation of diagnostic English language tests designed to measure the ability of ab initio cadet pilots to engage successfully with practical flight training conducted in English. I am currently setting standards for the tests I have developed using indigenous assessment criteria and an EBEL standard setting procedure. Wish me luck! In April, I will have been studying for 2 years and aim to complete my thesis by October 2021. After that, I think I'll take a long sailing holiday...

While Phuc and Maria are in office, they plan to maintain the excellent initiatives of the previous two student representatives, Diep and Ivy. A key initiative will be the continuation of compiling a PhD database. For those completing their PhD studies, we will create a database of abstracts related to language testing and assessment. If you have completed your studies and wish to be included in the database, please email your abstract to [altaanzstudents@gmail.com](mailto:altaanzstudents@gmail.com).

Interviews with current PhD students and recent graduates will continue to be featured in the ALTAANZ newsletter (see below). The aim of these interviews will be to share the highs and lows of PhD study in order to provide inspiration and guidance for what can be a daunting journey, as well as celebrate the achievements and successes of our student community.

Finally, we would love to host Q&A webinars and [Facebook](#) discussions for PhD students on different aspects of post-graduate study like publishing, data analysis, and conferences. Please let us know what topics you would like covered. We are *your* representatives, so if you have any ideas for how we can support you, please get in touch with your suggestions and let's make them happen! Feel free to contact us on:

Phuc Diem Le: [phucdiem.le@uq.net.au](mailto:phucdiem.le@uq.net.au)/[phucdle0308@gmail.com](mailto:phucdle0308@gmail.com)

Maria Treadaway: [m.treadaway@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:m.treadaway@auckland.ac.nz)

## COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER (INTERNAL)

**Annemiek Huisman, The University of Melbourne**

Name looks familiar? That's because Annemiek has been responsible for ALTAANZ's internal communications for over 5 years in her role as Administration Officer, so you would have seen her name down the bottom of plenty of emails. She has also been the editorial assistant for ALTAANZ's journal *Papers in Language Testing and Assessment* (PLTA) since 2015. As of 2020, she will assist Johanna Motteram in her Communications Officer role, helping with the ALTAANZ Newsletter and website maintenance. Annemiek has completed her Master's in Applied Linguistics at the University of Amsterdam, and has been working at the Language Testing Research Centre at The University of Melbourne since 2014. In her spare time Annemiek likes to stay active by doing fun runs and completing hikes. When travelling she always tries to include a few mountain tops, and highlights include the Routeburn Track, Gunung Rinjani and Mt. Kinabalu.



## PhD completion interviews

In this recurring section of *Language Assessment Matters*, we interview recently graduated PhD students from the ALTAANZ community. They share the highs and lows of their PhD study in order to provide inspiration and guidance for what can be a daunting journey. This section also provides an opportunity to celebrate the achievements and successes of our student community.



**Dr Megan Yucel – Senior Teacher: English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS) Curriculum at the Institute of Continuing & TESOL Education (ICTE), The University of Queensland**  
*Interview by Phuc Diem Le*

**What stage of your PhD are you in and how is it all going?**

I'm happy to say that I've completed my PhD – I officially met the requirements for the award and received my Doctor of Philosophy degree from The University of Queensland in February of this year.

**Congratulations! Did you study part time or full time?**

I was a part-time student, working on my PhD while working full-time as a TESOL Language Teacher at The University of Queensland's Institute of Continuing & TESOL Education.

**And how do you think this affected your progress?**

As a working mother, I also had to juggle family responsibilities with work and study. In terms of my progress, this meant, of course, that my PhD took a lot longer to complete. As we know, a full-time PhD takes approximately three years, so a part-time candidate will take at least six, which is a long time to be committed to any project.

In the years that I spent working on my PhD, I would say that my thesis was a constant companion, consuming much of my spare time, and occupying my thoughts. Like my participants, who were living with IELTS, I too was living with my thesis. Quite ironic, really! At times my progress was slow, while at other times, such as during holidays, I was able to set aside a large chunk of time to devote to my work, and was able to make some headway as

a result. Although I sometimes doubted whether I would ever finish, I was determined to press on, and in the end, I finally got there.

**What was the topic of your PhD?**

My PhD thesis, entitled *Living with IELTS: The stories of IELTS test candidates*, employed mixed methods research with an emphasis on narrative inquiry to address the impact of the IELTS test on the lives of individual test-takers. My study investigated test-taker perceptions and examined the relationship between these views and test performance. The findings underline the importance of listening to test-taker voices when validating and using English language tests. My supervisors were Associate Professor Noriko Iwashita and Dr Paul Moore from the School of Languages and Cultures at The University of Queensland.

**What sparked your interest in this topic?**

This project arose out of a personal enquiry into IELTS test candidates' attitudes and beliefs about the IELTS test, and their lived experiences of test candidature. As an English language teacher on EAP courses, I heard perceptions of the IELTS test from my students that I found both fascinating and sobering. On a pedagogical level, I was interested to hear how they approached the test, but on a personal level, I was struck by the significance that this high-stakes examination held for them. Conversations with my students revealed attitudes and beliefs about the test that at times I found understandable, but at other times completely baffling. I was often moved by the plight of students who were living with IELTS, much as a person might live



with a chronic disease, in that it seemed to be both inescapable and highly discomfiting. At the same time, I was occasionally frustrated by those students whose estimation of the quality and usefulness of the test was different from my own. The knowledge and experience that I had gained of IELTS as a teacher, examiner, and item writer had led me to hold the test in high regard; to hear a different perspective was startling. I wanted to investigate these perceptions in a deeper and more scholarly way. I also wanted to capture the experiences of IELTS candidates and present them in a format that was both immediately accessible and relatable: the story. This kind of investigation might, I hoped, lead to a deeper understanding of the role of IELTS and its impact on candidates' lives.

**What did you enjoy the most about your PhD?**

As a teacher, doing a PhD helped me to develop my professional identity, from classroom practitioner to researcher. That was a really positive change for me. Now I think I have an insight into both worlds: teaching and academia. I also enjoyed making connections with other like-minded individuals with a passion for language assessment. For example, during my time as a student representative on the ALTAANZ committee, I got to meet many experts in the field. They were all so generous with their time, and welcomed me into the language testing community.

**What were the greatest challenges you faced?**

As I mentioned earlier, probably my biggest challenge was just maintaining momentum and making sure that I finished. I suffered from writer's block at one stage, which I was eventually able to overcome. As someone who tends to say 'yes' to everything, I made a conscious effort in the latter stages of my candidature to avoid taking on any new challenges so that I could focus on my thesis and just write.

**How did you overcome these challenges?**

Something that made a huge difference for me was the support that I received from colleagues, academic mentors, fellow students, friends, and family. My managers and colleagues at ICTE were marvellous.

Completing my PhD wouldn't have been possible without their support, which manifested itself in so many ways, whether that be asking about my research, facilitating data collection, or encouraging me to present my work at conferences. My supervisors, Noriko and Paul, gave me such invaluable guidance too. They believed in me and helped me to navigate some of the more challenging aspects of the project. Fellow students were always ready with an understanding ear or a keen eye, and friends and family members offered plenty of encouragement and practical assistance.

**Sounds like you had great support. Do you have any general advice and top tips for PhD students embarking on their journey? Or any specific advice for those students venturing into the world of language testing and assessment?**

For PhD students, my advice would be to never give up, even when your confidence is at a low ebb, or you're suffering from a lack of motivation. Doing a PhD can be a lonely process, so for part-time students, I'd recommend seeking out opportunities to collaborate with others, such as joining writing groups or online communities, so that you don't feel isolated. As someone who has specialised in English language assessment for the past 20 years, I would say that there are many opportunities for teachers with expertise in this area, such as item writing, examining, or producing test practice materials. I'd recommend volunteering for any opportunities that arise in your workplace to get involved in writing materials or creating assessment tasks.

**Great advice – thanks Megan! And finally, what are your future plans and how do you think the experiences, knowledge and skills you gained during your PhD can help you implement these plans?**

As a recent PhD graduate, I possess up-to-date research & information management skills, and can solve problems systematically by identifying suitable sources of information. I have the capacity to understand and synthesise large quantities of data, design and analyse surveys, and sort and evaluate data in

an organised and principled way. These skills are an asset in any professional role, in my view. In my current role at ICTE as Senior Teacher: ELICOS Curriculum I'm involved in some exciting curriculum and testing projects, and I'm looking forward to seeing those plans come to fruition. To give an example, since 2019, a colleague and I have been co-ordinating an assessment project at ICTE to reform the assessment instruments used in our courses to ensure that they are valid, reliable, and fair. This project entails designing receptive skills tests for General English programs that are linked to the CEFR levels of A2, B1, and B2. B1 has now been completed and we are now continuing with the B2 tests. Following a best-practice approach to planning, we began with discussions with key stakeholders around test purpose, test constructs and inferences to be drawn from test scores. After these decisions were made, test specifications were created,

formalising and documenting these decisions and ensuring that there was a shared understanding. During the test production stage, the test specifications served as a blueprint for the test writing team, allowing multiple versions of tests for each level to be created and ensuring continuity and consistency between these versions. Trialling of these draft tests then occurred, followed by item analysis, and revision of the items, before the tests were ready to go live.

As for the future, who knows what it will hold in these troubled times, but I see myself working as part of a vibrant and productive team, contributing in areas that are my strengths. I think the next few years could mark an exciting new phase in my career, now that I have completed my PhD.

**Thank you very much Megan. I wish you all the best for your future work**



**Ivy Chen – Research Fellow in the Language Testing Research Centre at The University of Melbourne**

*Interview by Maria Treadaway*

**Firstly, congratulations on completing and submitting your PhD thesis! What have you been up to since then?**

Fortunately, the Language Testing Research Centre at the University of Melbourne was looking for a Research Fellow a few months before I was due to submit my thesis, so I managed to find a great position working in the field of language testing and assessment. I've been involved in item writing, test review, alignment projects, and more. In addition, I'm doing some teaching for the School of Languages and Linguistics, which includes Language Testing, a subject offered as part of the Master of Applied Linguistics course.

**Congratulations! Sounds very interesting. What are your future immediate plans?**

I'm currently happy at my position and am also trying to find time to write up my research for publication. With COVID-19, we're currently working from home, so hopefully I can use a bit

of the time I'm saving by not commuting on working on this!

**What's the topic of your PhD?**

My PhD, titled A corpus-driven receptive test of collocational knowledge, used the argument-based approach to validity and modelled how properties of collocations affect item difficulty.

**And what sparked your interest in this topic?**

I first became interested in vocabulary knowledge when I took Language Testing as part of my master's degree. (Yes, it's the very subject I'm teaching this semester!) My final project had to be quite small-scale for practicality, so I thought it would be great to use that as a pilot study and to compete the much larger-scale project I had in mind as part of a PhD.

**What did you enjoy the most about your PhD?**

What I enjoyed the most was being able to focus on just one project. The flexibility was also nice; I could do more teaching some parts of the year and focus more on my thesis during

the periods when there wasn't as much work available.

**And were there any challenges?**

Well, on the flipside, this flexibility made it challenging to follow the timeline I'd set out. Since I knew I didn't want to stare at my thesis every day for three and a half years for fear of getting sick of it, I did procrastinate at times.

**So how did you deal with this?**

My solution was to present various stages of my research at conferences, to push myself to collect and/or analyse data at least semi-regularly. Fortunately, I did not hit many snags in my progress. The only thing that slowed me down was when I realized I'd collected enough data for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), and had to learn how to run multi-level path analysis rather last-minute. I don't know if I can say that I really overcame this challenge successfully. My initial plan had been to reduce my work hours in my last year to focus on writing and on writing for publication. Upon encountering this issue, however, I had to push back my writing time for further data analysis, and ran out of time to write up my research for publication.

**And did you study full time or part time?**

I was full-time, mainly because I wanted to start work in the field as early as possible.

**How do you think this affected your progress?**

I don't think it had too much effect on my progress, as I'd made sure the data collection aspect of my project was relatively contained and data analysis was rather straightforward (apart from the SEM thing toward the end), as I was working with quantitative data.

**That's great. Finally, do you have any top tips or general advice for PhD students embarking on their journey?**

My top tip, especially for those wanting to continue in academia, would be to network at conferences and to publish— I know I didn't factor in enough time for the latter and am still scrambling to catch up now. My general advice would be to find the right balance and think of the thesis as a job (or second job) with somewhat defined and regular hours: have a life (and hobbies) outside of your thesis without feeling guilty, but be clear when you need to be working on your research even if you aren't always as enthusiastic as you'd like to be, with the caveat that you take breaks and holidays like you would with any other job.

**Well, thanks for speaking with me today. Good luck for your future endeavours.**

## ILTA Distinguished Achievement Award 2020 winner

Cathie Elder on team efforts, highlights of her career, subconscious mentoring and medicine bottles. *Interview by Annemiek Huisman*



Late last year, on December 13<sup>th</sup>, it was announced that Cathie Elder, founding member and past Co-President of ALTAANZ (2013-2014), had won the prestigious ILTA Distinguished Achievement Award 2020. The following excerpts from the citation illustrate Cathie's work and persona:

*Cathie's work in the area of the assessment of language for specific purposes has demonstrated great depth and breadth (...) Another area of language testing which she pioneered is the area of post-entry language assessment (PELA), where she was one of the early contributors to this area (...) Cathie has provided outstanding leadership (...) She has served in all the leading roles in our profession (...) In Australia and New Zealand(...), she has played a leading role nationally in setting policy direction in language assessment in schools, in universities and in employment (...) Cathie has played a very active and committed role in*



*mentoring students and early career researchers (...)* In summary, Cathie Elder's contributions to the field have been extensive and varied and have made a major impact on the wider field of language testing.

Soon after the announcement, public congratulatory comments from prominent scholars in the field flooded in:

*"Congratulations for a well-deserved award which marks your enormous contribution to the field and inspiring leadership!"*

*"A richly deserved award. Thank you so much for everything you've done for ILTA, language testing and your colleagues. Great choice."*

*"A hearty congratulations Cathie! Your openness, transparency, diligence and ability to listen have contributed to much progress in our field."*

*"There could not have been a better choice, no more excellent and distinguished scholar, practitioner, mentor and wonderful person!!!"*

I've been lucky to have gotten to know the truly wonderful person that's Cathie through my job at the Language Testing Research Centre at The University of Melbourne. She'd retired as the Centre's Director a couple of years before I started in 2014, but it would soon become clear to me that she was still very much involved with the Centre and indeed the field, working on various projects and providing support and advice. Time to take this opportunity to put Cathie back in the ALTAANZ spotlight! The following interview was conducted in Cathie's office in the Babel Building at The University of Melbourne, pre-COVID-19...

### **Congratulations again Cathie!**

Thank you, but I should say, and you should include this, that I've done everything as part of a team. I was really pleased and touched to get the award, and thankful to my colleagues for nominating me, but I'm not one of these solo stars, so I feel like I'm accepting the award on behalf of heaps of people. Make sure to put that in!

### **What did you think when you found out you had won the Award?**

(Laughingly) Well, I knew I was being nominated, and I agreed to that while thinking I had Buckley's chance of getting this award! So when I found out that I had won, like I said, I was both touched and honoured but I also felt rather undeserving.

### **But what about that long list of achievements!**

Oh look, I'm pleased! I've been very lucky, I've had a wonderful career but I'm an eclectic person. I've published on lots of topics, so I guess my surprise was that I could win the award with such a diverse range of inputs and experiences rather than having had a singular

intellectual impact. It just shows that the award is about recognition of different kinds of contributions, so I'm very happy to receive it but still a bit flabbergasted really.

### **What comments did you enjoy reading most in the Award Committee's citation?**

I liked the list of projects and service roles that I've been involved in, the nominees have worked hard to pick through the various things I've done. Because I've retired from university and am in the process of putting my career behind me, it's gratifying to be reminded that it was worthwhile. Plus, it's just particularly touching to know that other people thought I was worth nominating, that's a really nice thing. (Laughingly) But then of course: 'Oh my gosh, now I've got to give a talk!' (the award winner is invited to deliver a plenary lecture at the Language Testing Research Colloquium at which the award is presented). You know how I love talks..

### **Where do you think that comes from? You must have done hundreds of talks in your career!**

Well, I was never a very relaxed public speaker. I think in this case it has something to do with expectations, that because you've won a momentous award you need to give a momentous talk and then you think to yourself, 'What can I do that is worthy of the recognition that I've been given?' Anyway, that's just self-indulgence!

**In terms of your career, what do you yourself consider highlights?**

Well, I guess the first one was actually before I went into language testing, when I came back from Europe and waltzed into a job in Italian Language Studies at La Trobe University. It was a new department and it was a very exciting challenge to work out how to teach Italian effectively and meet the needs of the very diverse population of students which included both heritage and non-heritage learners. It was that feeling of building something new, and I had the same feeling again when I came to work at the Language Testing Research Centre in 1990. I was finishing my Masters in Applied Linguistics at the University of Melbourne and the Centre had just been created. It was part of a national network of Centres, we were a very small team and there was quite a bit of government money at the time, so we thought up interesting projects and felt we were building a body of knowledge and experience in Australia that was new and important. I worked at the Centre for 10 years on short-term contracts, and then left for a 'real' job, a continuing academic position at the University of Auckland. In Auckland, part of my role was to set up a new testing regime for all incoming university students, the post-entry Diagnostic English Language Assessment (DELNA) to identify students in need of language support, so I was again being part of something new, useful and exciting. The beautiful thing about DELNA was that the whole university was behind it, so I got lots of support from on high and felt part of something that mattered to the university. It was also illuminating to realise how much good policy matters for testing; having a nice instrument is irrelevant if it's not properly embedded in the larger teaching and learning environment.

**Are there any particular projects then that you've been involved in that really stand out to you?**

It sounds a bit corny, but I always liked projects where you felt you could do some good. In our field, these are usually projects that are linked to a very specific local context, often at the interface between testing and teaching. They're projects where you can see the immediate value, where the test information will be useful and beneficial. I'm thinking of the range of proficiency tests we developed for teachers, which were designed to model good teaching practice and to generate relevant feedback for teacher preparation programs. Then there has been the OET [*Occupational English Test*] related research, oriented to bringing the test, and the test cut-scores, more closely in line with stakeholder needs. But really, all projects have been interesting because it's all about problem-solving, and I like problem-solving. I think testing is where the rubber hits the road, where you have an idea and you have to find the practical means of implementing it. There are lots of constraints, so you have to work out the most efficient and meaningful way of working within those constraints. There's nothing formulaic about problem solving - it's a creative process which over time builds insights that can be shared and drawn on in future work.

**The Award Committee really made a point of highlighting your role in mentoring.**

Yes, and that's interesting because if I've done it, I've done it subconsciously. My own experience of being mentored in the Centre with Alan (Davies) and Tim (McNamara) was that we were left very much to our own devices to come up with solutions. Alan didn't believe in giving advice, so he trusted people to use their intelligence. He would talk and interact with people and ask questions, but he didn't actually direct you to do certain things. And Tim (like Alan) is a true intellectual whose role has been to get people together and thrash out ideas. So, I suppose if I've been a mentor, I've probably done it in the same way: just getting people together, listening to their ideas and working with them.

**Isn't that interesting though, because not only the Award Committee but also lots of people in the field commented on your role as a mentor in their congratulatory messages.**

Well, perhaps they felt that they were given trust or that I had confidence in them, and that's all you need, space to do what you need to do. I'm not conscious of having schooled people in doing it the 'right' way at all.

**In your view then, what should mentoring involve? And should academics, particularly early career academics, be actively looking for mentors?**

Well, being around creative and successful people is definitely very important, and for early career academics it is probably good to find someone and initiate contact. What's helpful I think as well in academia is to know what's worth spending your time on, to get the balance right in a way that's going to further your career. I think it's good to have a hard-headed person from outside to advise you about how to do that. So, in my view, mentoring is giving people confidence in themselves by having confidence in them, but also helping them prioritise.

*[At this point in the interview Cathie engages me in a chat about my and her own experiences as an early career academic, and I realise I'm in the middle of one of Cathie's subconscious mentoring moments. We move on...]*

**Then a bit of a cliché question perhaps, but how has the field of language testing changed in your view?**

When I started working here at Melbourne in 1990 we were learning all the tools of the trade: what is language proficiency and how should it be tested, how do we design tests, how to do the statistical analyses. (Laughingly) We were very pleased with what we learned, thought we were pretty fabulous and that we were becoming experts in this specialised field. Back then, the focus was very much on the 'what'

and 'how', and I think the focus of our work and in the language testing field more generally has now shifted to the contexts of testing, *why* we're testing and what we're doing to people when we're testing them. The field has broadened out to encompass issues of impact, consequences, fairness and justice. We've become aware that a test is this tiny little cog in a much larger wheel, and that our responsibilities extend far beyond just designing good instruments. It's more about accepting responsibility, or at least better understanding how test information gets taken up in different contexts by different stakeholders. I think this has made the field more challenging in a way because we feel more powerless than we did back then when we were just focussing on creating good little engines. We now spend more of our time listening to and learning from stakeholders, and also explaining to policy makers what they can and can't do with language tests, what the limitations and constraints are. I think Bernard Spolsky once said that tests should come with labels, like medicine bottles, listing all the counter indications. I think as a field we're now more aware of the side effects of testing and the need to monitor them. I'm not sure that we're very good at it, but we are more conscious of the need to locate our expertise within a wider forum.

**To finish off, now you've retired, what hobbies have you taken up?**

The thing I've done seriously since I've retired is yoga. I've done a teacher training course so that's a whole new set of skills, mind training of a very different kind, and I deliberately chose it to take me to a new realm. Apart from that, I'm currently learning Greek, I garden, read, socialise, travel. I've done a bit of hiking, I've sung in choirs, I go to music festivals. There's plenty to do other than come to work! Work still occupies my life considerably but not oppressively, that's the important thing.

Talking to Cathie is always such a pleasure, the way she articulates ideas, listens carefully and considers your input is really encouraging and motivating. She's generous with her time and attention and is very engaging, no matter what she talks about. I think it's time to take up yoga and learn Greek!

## ALTAANZ colloquia at the Applied Linguistics Conference

Perth, November 2019

ALTAANZ was pleased to yet again be involved with the Applied Linguistics Conference organised by our partner organisations the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA) and the Applied Linguistics Association of New Zealand (ALANZ). This joint conference is held biennially, and this time took place at Curtin University in Perth in November 2019.

ALTAANZ's involvement in the conference was in the form of, firstly, promoting and reviewing the submission of abstracts for an assessment strand which ran alongside other themed strands. Secondly, ALTAANZ sponsored two assessment colloquia. The first colloquium was entitled 'Assessment of L2 pragmatics' and was organised by Distinguished Professor Rod Ellis from Curtin University and Associate Professor Carsten Roever from The University of Melbourne. It brought together a variety of perspectives on the assessment of L2 pragmatic and interactional abilities, each informing new ways forward in the assessment of second language pragmatics.

The second colloquium, entitled 'Connecting post-entry language assessment (PELA) and language support for University students' was organised by Dr Rosemary Erlam and Morena Botelho de Magalhães, ALTAANZ Co-President and Secretary, and featured Professor John Read as discussant (all from The University of Auckland). Please read on for a full report on this colloquium by the organisers.

*By Rosemary Erlam and Morena Botelho de Magalhães*

The term PELA has come to be widely used for programmes which administer language assessment to students entering university, in order to identify those who have significant academic language needs and to guide them to appropriate support (Read, 2016). This colloquium featured four PELAs that have been implemented in specific contexts, as well as initiatives that have been set up to meet students' academic language needs. A key theme was the challenge involved in encouraging students to engage with and take up the support that is offered to them. Evidence for the success of these kinds of initiatives, including the opportunity to hear from students, was also a focus.

After a brief introduction to the colloquium, Rosemary and Morena described DELNA (Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment), New Zealand's most comprehensive PELA, operating since 2001 at the University of Auckland. They then outlined a research project which aims, drawing on Knoch and Elder (2013), to continue to build a validation argument for the use of DELNA as a tool to diagnose academic English language needs and support students in their study programmes.

The next colloquium participant was Tamlyn Avery, presenting on behalf of Sharyn Black, who, unfortunately was not able to attend as planned. Tamlyn described the use of the DELNA screening assessment at the Business School in the UNSW as part of a pilot programme to support the English language needs of both L1 and EAL students. She focused in particular on the consequential aspect of this PELA and how it contributed to enhancing students' academic language ability (Read, 2015).

Kellie Johns, from James Cook University, then described the HDR PELA, an initiative set up to ascertain the language needs of research students so that additional language support could be provided as early as possible. Drawing on six years' experience with this PELA, she reported on its successes and challenges, and argued that it provided an ideal framework for developing support for research students.

The last colloquium participant was Cameron Lydster who introduced Bond University's PELA, aptly known as BELA. BELA is distinctive because it is embedded into the curriculum of a core undergraduate subject, as a compulsory homework task completed in students' first semester with a 2% weighting

attached to it. It identifies students with below satisfactory academic writing skills and offers feedback and advice. Cameron reported on feedback from key stakeholders, including the students themselves.

Professor John Read summarised the presentations and discussed how they illustrated the broader picture of PELAs in Australia. He emphasised the importance of institutions having a continuing commitment to PELA programmes linked to appropriate forms of academic language support and development. There were ongoing challenges in ensuring that PELAs continued to achieve their objectives.

## Next ALTAANZ Conference

Even though preparations have been put on hold for now, the Conference Organising Committee has re-committed to run an exciting, engaging and celebratory conference in due course. This means that the next ALTAANZ conference will still take place in the coffee-loving, sports-mad and crazy-weathered city of Melbourne!

ALTAANZ's biennial stand-alone conference is an important event for the Association as it provides the only opportunity to generate income by means of external sponsorship (membership is free). This money in turn gets put back into the local language testing community by offering travel awards for students and teachers to attend the conference, and by sponsoring language testing activities in-between conferences. Our last stand-alone conference dates back to 2016 (2018 was skipped because of ILTA's Language Testing Research Colloquium being held in the region), so we are hoping for much of your support for our next iteration. Get excited!

There will be lots to celebrate at our next conference: not only will we celebrate ALTAANZ's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Language Testing Research Centre at The University of Melbourne will be celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as well. In the 10 years since its inception, ALTAANZ and the LTRC have developed a mutually beneficial relationship, and several past and current LTRC directors have been presidents of the Association (Tim McNamara, Cathie Elder, Ute Knoch). Our next ALTAANZ conference will offer a great opportunity to celebrate both anniversaries.

The Conference Committee is committed to run as 'green' an event as possible, and we are receiving help from The University of Melbourne's Sustainability Team with this. If you have experience running a green event and have tips and tricks to share, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Even though it's still a long way away, we are unwaveringly committed to making the next ALTAANZ conference an exciting, inspiring and celebratory event. Stay tuned for updates!

Warm regards,  
The Conference Organising Committee

**At the LTRC:**

Ute Knoch  
Sally O'Hagan  
Annemiek Huisman  
Kathryn Weller  
Jason Fan  
Angela McKenna  
Ivy Chen  
Ksenia Zhao  
Andrew Pitman

**And also:**

Morena Botelho de Magalhães (University of Auckland)  
Cathie Elder (The University of Melbourne)  
Kellie Frost (The University of Melbourne)  
Susy Macqueen (Australian National University)  
Johanna Motteram (British Council)  
Carsten Roever (The University of Melbourne)