

Report from the President of NZALT

Adèle Scott

As this first online edition of Polyglot is launched I am reminded not only of the environmental and cost-saving reasons for taking this step but also about some of the other ways that 21st Century technology has helped NZALT meet some of its goals in 2008. In addition to the 'regular' activities which keep our webmaster, David Hall, very busy we have:

- run a stamp competition for students which used the NZPOST stamp creation tool ;
- conducted a survey about our strategic plan with members ;
- kept conference delegates informed about our conference programme (including AGM remits and the like) and follow-up presentations; and most recently ;
- supported the national Language Perfect Vocabulary Olympics competition.



Gail Spence, recipient of the FIPLV Award

The highlight for 2008 for the Association has to be the ABSOLUTELY POSITIVELY LANGUAGES conference held in Wellington in July. The Conference Committee, under the incredible leadership of Sue Sutherland and Philippa Doig ably dealt with noisy speakers (the electronic kind), malfunctioning heaters, waterblasting labourers and no doubt many more challenges that we never noticed with true professionalism and speed! Congratulations on such a successful event. See below for a few of my favourite shots from conference. We look forward to 2010 to see what Southland (Queenstown in particular) can put on!

There have been a number of other events at which I have had the privilege to represent NZALT. These include:

- Launch of the UNESCO International Year of Languages at Te Papa in February
 - Languages Workshop (hosted by Victoria University) in February
 - Patronages Reception at Government House in June
 - Reference Group for the ICT and Languages Contract (conference calls and face-to-face meeting)
 - Languages Strategy Workshop (Ministry of Education) in June
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Other members of the Executive have represented you at meetings with the Ministry of Education looking at the alignment of current (languages) curriculum guidelines with the NZ Curriculum. The NZALT Standards-Curriculum Alignment Languages Expert group is also working hard to ensure that the Unit and Achievement Standards of the future will fit in with the new directions of the NZ Curriculum. Having Learning Languages as a separate area in the New Zealand curriculum seems to have generated a lot of activity. I am regularly contacted by journalists, schools, teachers, NZALT members and specific languages associations for input. On one such occasion I was asked to name the 'top three languages' that should be taught in schools. I can assure you that although Japanese is my personal favourite I was very firm in stating that the choice of language involves many key players such as the wider school community, the principal and most importantly - those staff who have the expertise. The following words written in 1975 by Noel Watts, a past secretary and president of NZALT are still relevant today: 'Our voice will be heard only if we are united in our demands.'

I will finish this brief round-up of 2008 with part of a speech I gave at two recent prize-giving ceremonies for the NZALT Vocabulary Olympics competition. While the students themselves were being applauded for their efforts I could not resist the opportunity to turn the light on (you) their teachers.

I would also like to congratulate your languages teachers, who, with their expertise and passion for the language they are teaching, provide you with language learning experiences that help motivate you to take risks with your communication in the language as you try a new phrase or explore a new way of doing something. NZALT was very happy to support this competition to help you all learn your words! However, in order to be a high performance language learner – just like a high performance athlete heading for the Beijing Olympics – language learners have to be organised, you have to take risks and you have to practise! practise! practise! Again, just like Olympic athletes might need specialised running shoes, swim wear or a brace, the high performance language learner might also need specialised help – like a dictionary, a chart of verbs or access to an expert. Knowing how to use the equipment is also crucial. What good is a dictionary if it merely lists thousands of words that you can't read or are unable to put in the right type of sentence, or a chart of verbs that is too complicated to work out how to make the verbs come alive. Much better, especially initially, to rely on the vocab lists containing words you have learnt about in class in a meaningful context and the charts you have created for your own communication needs under the guidance of your teacher.

Those of you who have succeeded with the Vocabulary Olympics goal have found a strategy and tool that works for you for learning individual words. Some of you will need to keep looking, don't give up, and don't be afraid to tap into the expertise of your biggest fan and coach – your teacher.

We all know that even when the teacher puts their heart and soul into preparing exciting, meaningful lessons it is still you, the students who have a responsibility to take on the learning being provided and make

it your own. Success in learning comes from your enthusiasm, your commitment and your perseverance. So, well done to your teachers for providing an environment that encourages you and cheers you on, and well done to you for committing yourself to learning languages and persevering. Now that you have found a strategy that works for you, aim for the next goal - include using these words in real communication! Put them in your blog and try them with another speaker of the language.

Ka nui te mihi ki a koutou mōu koutou mahi i ngā reo.

