The English Language Learning Progressions (*ELLP*): Challenge or opportunity?

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Abstract

This article provides an overview and critical analysis of *The English Language Learning Progressions* (*ELLP*) (Ministry of Education, 2008). Identifying main themes through critical policy analysis, this review seeks to place *ELLP* in context through a comparison with *The English Language Learning Framework: Draft* (Ministry of Education, 2005) and *English Language Learning Progressions* (*ELLP*) *Pathway Years 1–8* (Ministry of Education, 2020a). Within this review, the structure of *ELLP* is explored along with key ideas and claims. It is argued that there are both challenges and opportunities in *ELLP*. Finally, the key issues are summarised and suggestions are made for future research.

Introduction

This article provides an overview and critical policy analysis of *The English Language Learning Progressions* (*ELLP*) (Ministry of Education, 2008). *ELLP* is a standards-based document which has the following goal:

> These progressions explain what ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] specialists and mainstream teachers need to know about English language learners in order to maximise their learning and participation. They will help teachers to choose content, vocabulary, and tasks that are appropriate to each learner's age, stage, and language-learning needs (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2).

Hence, *ELLP* is a document to help teachers in their daily teaching of English language learners (ELLs). However, since 2015, it has had an additional purpose, as schools have been required to submit *ELLP* scores to the Ministry of Education, in order to access ESOL funding.

The author of this review is a primary-trained, English-language learning specialist teacher working within a medium-sized area school (Years 1–10), and has used *ELLP* since 2013. Adopting a practitioner lens, this paper will argue that *ELLP* has a useful summary of relevant information about language learning for primary school teachers. Despite this, there is also an inherent tension, between offering teaching guidance and acting as a measure to gain additional funding. At the same time, there is a complex relationship between *ELLP* and other policy statements. These aspects make *ELLP*'s application both an opportunity and a challenge for New Zealand teachers.

ELLP is an example of educational policy as it forms part of a suite of policy documents, including *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) (*NZC*) published by the New Zealand government to guide teacher decision making in the classroom. This relationship is made clear on the Ministry of Education's own website (Ministry of Education, n.d.), where *ELLP* is pictured alongside not only *NZC*, but also *Literacy Learning Progressions* (*LLP*) (Ministry of Education, 2011). *NZC* and *LLP* support teachers in the teaching of literacy to all learners (not just ELLs). Hyatt (2013) explains this internal referencing as "intertextuality" (p. 841), where *ELLP* makes links to other established Ministry of Education documents. These policy documents have an important influence on teachers' decision making, as Flynn (2015, p. 21) observes, "the curriculum generates its own rules, which either tacitly or explicitly control the decisions teachers make in the classroom and the decisions that are made at school level". Subsequently, as an identified supporting curriculum document, *ELLP* provides "rules" for teacher action.

Critical policy analysis provides a lens with which to deconstruct *ELLP* and analyse these "rules". Connections between education, policy, and people are explored (Apple, 2019). Critical policy analysis also focuses on the interplay between power (those who are making the policy) and equality (those for whom the policy is written). Apple (2019) states, "we have an ethical obligation to make public the effect of these policies, to challenge these positions, and to defend a robust education that is based on human flourishing" (p. 277). Policy analysis then is important work and *ELLP* is a document that has received limited research attention (Edwards, 2017a). Failure to engage with *ELLP* can potentially disadvantage ELLs, both in terms of teacher knowledge about students' language acquisition and students' access to additional funded language support.

Taylor (1997) suggests that critical policy analysis should consider two approaches to analysis. The first is "text with context" (p. 30); that is, how did the policy come to be, and what was it trying to achieve? Therefore, this analysis will discuss "the broader context" (Taylor, 1997, p. 28) of the educational policy of New Zealand. Consequently, it is helpful to consider the prior draft document, *English Language Learning Framework: Draft* (*ELLF*) (Ministry of Education, 2005) as a means of comparison, and a preliminary way to understand *ELLP*. Taylor's (1997) second aspect of analysis is "text and consequences" (p. 31); that is, what have the outcomes been from the creation of this policy. A very recent addition to this policy narrative is the release of *English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP) Pathway Years 1–8* (Ministry of Education, 2020a). Falling within these broad areas, more specific areas of focus include key themes in the policy, research justification, structure and presentation, challenges, and any gaps or omissions (Sandretto & Tilson, 2017).

The first part of this article provides background to the *ELLP*. In the second section, critical attention is paid to the key issues identified in the analysis. Finally, key aspects are summarised, and areas for future research are considered.

Background to the article

Development of ELLP

The analysis of *ELLP* needs to be considered within the context of the educational policy of New Zealand in the late 2000s. *ELLP* was released in 2008, during a busy period of educational policy activity. A year earlier in 2007, *NZC* had been published and this was followed 2 years later by the introduction of *Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8* (Ministry of Education, 2009). Each of these policy documents, introduced within a 3-year period, required significant changes in teaching and learning practices in primary schools. Perhaps this is part of the reason why it would appear that *ELLP* received little attention at school level or from scholars when it was first released, due to policy overload. Even now, research on *ELLP* is limited. Edwards (2017a) states "little is known regarding teacher practice in regard to ELLP Assessment" (p. 1).

English Language Learning Framework: Draft (*ELLF*)

Context for the analysis of *ELLP* is developed by the consideration of *The English Language Learning Framework: Draft* (*ELLF*) (Ministry of Education, 2005). Published in 2005 as a draft, *ELLF* "explains what mainstream and ESOL specialist teachers need to know and to be aware of in order to maximise the learning and participation of students who are learning English as an additional language" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 3). *ELLF*'s stated aims were to provide a framework to help teachers to understand language progress in three areas: oral language (which included speaking and listening), reading and writing, and at the same time providing "national consistency" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 3) in measuring progress in the learning of English. In addition, the document explains its "list of the features of oral texts and reading and writing texts is consistent with their description and analysis in curriculum documents, in other key Ministry of Education publications and in assessment tools used in the New Zealand education context" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 3). It is also suggested "teachers can 'overlay' the ELLF on the New Zealand Curriculum Framework" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 14). The claim of a clear link between *ELLF* and the curriculum is difficult to substantiate here, as feedback from teachers at the time, suggested that it could be improved by "a better mesh between the curriculum and EAL [English as an Additional Language] levels" (Haworth, 2007, p. 105). We will return to this theme later.

The key aspects of *ELLF* relate to teacher accountability; that is, teachers' responsibility for the measurement and the progress of ELLs. The document explains those aspects of second language acquisition and language teaching which are considered "important", such as supporting and encouraging "the use of students' first languages" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 6) and "variables influencing language acquisition" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 9). It is also suggested *ELLF* will help teachers answer the question, "what are some effective teaching and learning strategies for working with language learners to help them learn language and curriculum content?" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 5), which suggests the intent of supporting effective practice and providing teachers with information about what they can *do* to teach ELLs well. Yet, the list of effective strategies is not quite two pages, in a document that is 140 pages long, which suggests that practical teaching strategies may be less important than assessment and measurement

information. Haworth (2007) observes when commenting on *ELLF*: "there is no visible EAL theory that might assist teachers in the long term with autonomously planning for, assessing and teaching EAL students" (p. 105).

The English Language Learning Progressions (*ELLP*): An introduction

Looking backwards in this way at *ELLF* helps bring context and greater understanding as we now consider *ELLP*. The document received a name change from "framework" to "progressions", and is no longer called a draft. Like *ELLF*, *ELLP* explains what students might do at different stages of language acquisition. The goal of *ELLP* is as follows: "These progressions explain what ESOL specialists and mainstream teachers need to know about English language learners in order to maximise their learning and participation" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2). This is almost identical to the draft document's stated aim, and it is important to note that this policy is not just for ESOL teachers, but "is relevant for all teachers" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2).

The structure and presentation of *ELLP* is quite different from the earlier *ELLF*. Rather than being one complete document, *ELLP* is divided into an Introduction booklet and three year-group booklets (Years 1–4, Years 5–8, and Years 9–13). An important inclusion, which is not present in the *ELLF*, is the nautilus shell, which combines the curriculum levels and the *ELLP* stages. The nautilus shows *ELLP* stages as a "ladder" to cohort achievement, or curriculum level. The stages are also operating within each curriculum level, shown as the stages curl inside the shell. Therefore, children should be taught the curriculum at an age-appropriate level, while still receiving English support to access the curriculum content. As has already been suggested, the relationship between the *ELLP* stages and curriculum levels may be unclear, as this diagram is complex. We will continue to revisit this theme.

Another structural change between *ELLF* and *ELLP* is that specific language performance indicators are grouped in the four modes (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), rather than the five stages. Each mode has a separate fold-out section, which shows the indicators for all four stages for each mode on one page. Oral language has been divided into two separate modes, Oral Language Input (Listening) and Oral Language Output (Speaking), and a glossary is provided at the end of each *ELLP* booklet, rather than key terms being listed at the end of each section.

From teaching and learning to assessment for funding

A very important development in the story of *ELLP* occurred in 2015, when it became mandatory for schools to report *ELLP* stages to the Ministry of Education to access ESOL funding, 7 years after *ELLP*'s original publication. This replaced an earlier cohort-based assessment, where students were scored in relation to the achievement of their peers. *ELLP* remains unchanged and refers to the earlier funding system.

Recent developments: *English Language Learning Progressions* (*ELLP*) *Pathway Years 1–8* and *ELLP Pathway Student Agency Record*

In a recent development, the Ministry of Education has released *English Language Learning Progressions* (*ELLP*) *Pathway Years 1–8* (2020a) and *ELLP Pathway Student Agency Record* (Ministry of Education, 2020b), which are further optional resources to support teachers with *ELLP*. While not replacing *ELLP*, these two digital documents provide additional detail about stages and link to other parts of the Ministry of Education's website esolonline (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The recent production of these additional resources also demonstrates a commitment to *ELLP* as ongoing educational policy for ELLs in New Zealand.

Critical policy analysis

Having considered the background to *ELLP*, we now move to critical policy analysis. Critical policy analysis is the exploration and interrogation of the "complex connections" (Apple, 2019, p. 276) between education, policy, and society at large. Diem et al. (2018) propose five principles of critical policy analysis. These include concern with "policy rhetoric and practiced reality" (p. 6), interest in the development of policy, and, finally, concerns around power, which includes how policy positions groups of people. In other words, this approach will seek to critically analyse *ELLP* in relation to the connection between the stated intent of the policy and the challenges teachers face in the interpretation of the policy. This will provide a picture of the current understandings and tensions that exist for teachers. Sandretto and Tilson (2017), in their discussion of literacy policy and pedagogy in New Zealand, endorse this approach, noting, "if we are interested in deconstructing the literacy landscape in order to instigate change, we need

to consider its linguistic tracings in official policy and teachers' statements" (p. 223). It is clear that we need to know more about *ELLP* as an important policy guiding teacher practice.

Previous research on *ELLP*

Overall, there has been limited research interest in *ELLP*, even within wider Ministry of Education publications. In the *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: New Zealand Country Background Report 2010* (New Zealand Qualifications Authority et al., 2010) there is only one brief mention of *ELLP*, despite an emphasis in that review on "responsiveness to the diversity of the student population" (New Zealand Qualifications Authority et al., 2010, p. viii). It is worth noting that a 133-page report, which highlights the challenge of diversity, does not devote more attention to the one document (*ELLP*) which has been written to assist teachers to gather "nationally consistent" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2) evidence about the English language acquisition of their students.

Locally, Fry (2014) has explored the position of teachers working with *ELLP* and found that there are both opportunities and challenges within this policy framework. Fry also explains that *ELLP* was a document she was required to "promote and support" (Fry, 2014, p. 117), as part of her role as a Ministry of Education adviser, at the time of her research. In Fry's (2014) discussion about teachers' understanding of policy, she explores the complicated relationship between *ELLP* and other key publications, such as *NZC*, and concludes that teachers may still be unclear about the relationships between, and purposes of, these documents. One teacher research participant observed, "in practice it [*ELLP*] seemed like hard work" (Fry, 2014, p. 87). While the other subject of Fry's study valued *ELLP* as describing "specific measurable aspects of decontextualized English" (Fry, 2014, p. 79), Fry observed a tension and confusion in her teacher subjects about "whether it would really enable better understanding about students, or whether it was just a means of regulating the existing assessment procedures" (Fry, 2014, p. 82). Despite this evident tension, Fry concluded, "ELLP provides a platform for teachers to make informed decisions in their curriculum planning about 'where to next' for students' English language learning" (Fry, 2014, p. 155).

A series of studies (Edwards, 2012, 2014, 2017a, 2017b) that have explored mainstream teacher knowledge of *ELLP* have been conducted. These studies identify both opportunities and challenges for teachers in their use of *ELLP*. *ELLP* is described as providing "useful information for further learning and teaching, not just a process that needs to be completed twice a year for administrative purposes" (Edwards, 2017b, p. 65). On the other hand, Edwards (2017b) in her discussion of the use of *ELLP* states, "little is known about teacher thinking and practice regarding current assessment requirements" (p. 54), and suggests that *ELLP* is not well known or understood by classroom teachers. In an earlier small-scale study, Edwards (2012) found that only two out of 17 mainstream secondary teachers knew their ELL's level in relation to the stages of *ELLP* and only five teachers thought that this was important for them to know. Due to this lack of knowledge, Edward (2017b) notes that teachers need more time and the support of their ELL specialist to complete more valid and reliable assessment of their ELLs against *ELLP*. This suggests that it is the ELL teacher who can provide the most accurate assessment practice and that the document has not met its stated aim of use by both ESOL specialists *and* mainstream teachers.

Analysis of *ELLP*: Opportunities and challenges

Key themes and opportunities in *ELLP*

Key themes in *ELLP* include the value of students' first languages, teacher knowledge about second language acquisition, and associated teaching strategies. *ELLP* states, "teachers, therefore, need to know about the language-learning process and to use teaching methods and materials that have a strong foundation in second language acquisition theory" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 5). There is limited detail provided about what these methods and materials might be, although there are general points about effective teaching and learning, and a longer section about developing independent learners. It is suggested that teachers need to make the link between research and practice: "a learner's language acquisition and learning are more effective when the teacher's practice is informed by theory" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 6), and that a different set of knowledge is required to teach ELLs well. A "micro-level lexico-grammatical analysis" (Hyatt, 2013, p. 842) of these statements shows the repeated use of the auxiliary verbs "need" (used 10 times in the first 11 pages of *ELLP: Introduction*) and "should" (used 23

times in the first 11 pages of *ELLP: Introduction*). This repetition places a sense of obligation and responsibility on teachers to know about and plan for their culturally diverse learners. There is an emphasis on what teachers need and should *do*. For example, "these learners will need their teachers to provide explicit support" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 22). This is consistent with the tone of *ELLF*.

Challenges in *ELLP*

The focus of *ELLP* is the learning of English. However, there is limited advice about knowing learners well and acknowledging cultural diversity in the classroom. "The importance of exploring silences" (Diem & Young, 2015, p. 842) has been noted by researchers as an aspect of critical policy analysis. The term "culturally responsive practice" is not used at all in *ELLP* and "culture" or "cultural" are mentioned sparingly (for example, 10 times in total in *ELLP: Introduction*). On occasion, the term "cultural" positions ELLs as deficient in relevant knowledge. For example, "there are still factors (such as lack of cultural and vocabulary knowledge) that make learning a new language a very complex task for a young learner" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 14). This statement prioritises the cultural knowledge required for learning English, without acknowledging the benefit of other diverse cultural knowledge. Although *ELLP* claims to consider "all aspects of the acquisition and learning of English as an additional language" (p. 4), it can be argued that teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners is about more than just language (Fletcher et al., 2011; Islam & Park, 2015; Taleni et al., 2018). For example, teachers need to understand their own ethnic and racial positioning and explore how this shapes their practice (Fry, 2014; Macfarlane, 2007; Russell, 2015; Santoro & Kennedy, 2016) as well as planning to teach in a way that acknowledges the culture and growing identity of all students, not just students' ability to acquire language. Santoro and Kennedy (2016) have observed this focus on language teaching in their discussion of teacher standards policy documents. They comment that language teaching without acknowledging the cultural uniqueness of each learner "reduces cultural and linguistic diversity to linguistic diversity". (p. 217). Culturally and linguistically diverse students can be seen as "in need of remediation and 'normalising,' in relation to dominant culture and language" (p. 217). There is a sense in *ELLP* that the acquisition of English

should be a classroom teacher's primary concern, perhaps at the expense of a focus on responding to and sustaining cultural diversity.

ELLP is justified with reference to research and literature, seeking to "bridge research and practice" (Diem & Young, 2015, p. 841). *ELLP* states some "important points" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 4) about language. For example, the use of first languages is encouraged (Fry, 2014; Macfarlane, 2007; Russell, 2015). The following statement is found early in the Introduction: "There has been extensive research into all aspects of the acquisition and learning of English as an additional language" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 4). Teachers are then referred to *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis* (*BES*) (Ministry of Education, 2003). This is the only research directly quoted to support *ELLP*'s claims, and *BES* is suggested without justification for its selection. There are other sources quoted in the References section, although, like *BES*, half of these are Ministry of Education publications, and therefore this list of research could not be considered "extensive". A fuller resource list would be beneficial for teachers.

The section on Reading in *ELLP* is perhaps one of the most challenging sections for teachers to interpret, because the indicators focus on text complexity, rather than ELLs' reading behaviours. The other modes focus on what students can or cannot do, and in a recent case study one teacher commented that the reading matrix is "out of step" (Edwards, 2017b, p. 69) with the other indicators. *ELLP* itself states, "there is no matrix provided to indicate reading behaviours at the various stages because the interplay between the level of complexity of a text, factors affecting text difficulty for individual learners, and learners' text-processing skills is too complex to be presented in this way" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 30). Interestingly, the Reading section is substantially different and almost unrecognisable from the earlier *ELLF*. Helpfully, the *ELLP* Reading section does include a matrix, which is consistent in layout with the other modes, and was not included in *ELLF*. Significantly, though, the *ELLF* text examples included a year-level band. This reference to cohort achievement is not in *ELLP* at all and this is an omission that does not help teachers to see the relationship between *ELLP* progression and other widely known and understood reading assessments. Perhaps the removal of the year levels reflects the authors' desire to show that the stages are extended and lengthy. *ELLP* states it is "designed

to monitor and record learners' progress over the long term, not the short term" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 47). It could be argued that it is difficult for primary classroom teachers to show "progress" if the stages are so broad and take more than a year to achieve. Teachers already have more finely grained measures, especially for the measurement of reading progress, which will show progress more readily within the frame of a school year. Running records are a commonly used test of reading and Edwards (2017a) explains, "running records provide information about reading behaviours, whereas the ELLP Reading descriptors describe features of texts" (p. 10). In another article, Edwards (2017b) also observed the general difficulty between aligning a range of Ministry of Education recommended assessment tasks in reading with the indicators in the matrices. This raises the question of how useful the progressions really are in maximising "learning and participation" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2) for primary ELLs, especially in reading.

The relationship of *ELLP* and *NZC* is potentially complex. *ELLP* states "The English Language Learning Progressions don't align exactly with the New Zealand Curriculum levels" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 14). Other related documents such as *LLP* closely match *NZC* levels. This lack of alignment between national curriculum expectations and *ELLP* is further complicated, as *ELLP* suggests that it provides a "nationally consistent set of progressions" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2) that teachers are expected to use "accurately" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 15). It is difficult to make consistent and reliable judgements when the relationship between curriculum levels and *ELLP* stages is unclear. At the same time, "the progressions are intended to indicate the general direction of language learning rather than to present a rigid or inevitable progression" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 16). Judgements will "never be 'absolutely accurate'" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 35), but rather a "best fit" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 20) based on a range of assessments and teacher knowledge. These apparent contradictions between judgements being made "accurately" while at the same time "never absolutely accurate", place teachers in a difficult position.

ELLP for funding: Opportunity and challenge

From 2015, schools were required to submit *ELLP* scores to the Ministry of Education in order to access ESOL funding. This was a change from a

previous system of cohort-based assessment. Edwards (2017b) explained "the move to ELLP assessment represents a significant change in the assessment of ELLs for funding eligibility" (p. 60) and as Haworth (2007) has noted, the outcome of "linking the assessment of EAL students with funding provisions makes it high stakes since there are likely to be important, difficult to reverse, implications for students' lives" (p. 100). Teachers' willingness to engage with *ELLP* can now potentially determine who does and who does not receive additional targeted language support.

It is possible that this move was to raise the visibility of a document (*ELLP*) that had not been well used prior to this time. Hyatt (2013) comments: "examples of such levers in education can be seen in target-setting, inspection and funding, the impact of which are meant to facilitate the implementation of the policy" (p. 838). Indeed, Edwards (2017b) noted, in referring to *ELLP*, "adopting the new system had also involved a move to more assessment by mainstream teachers, this had enabled mainstream teachers to learn more about the ELLs in their classrooms" (p. 65) and the author of this article would suggest "forced" teachers to interact with the document, in some cases for the first time. This interaction with *ELLP* by mainstream teachers is a positive outcome, because teachers are required to consider not only students' achievement against *NZC*, but also the English language acquisition of their students. As well, in highlighting achieved indicators on *ELLP*, students' next steps in language acquisition become readily apparent for teachers.

While this increased prominence of *ELLP* after 2015, is a positive outcome for teachers and their students, it is important to note that the actual document remains unchanged and refers to the previous funding scheme, which is potentially problematic for teachers. Edwards' (2017b) research supports this observation: "the findings revealed that although teacher attitudes towards the new assessment system are positive, they encountered a number of challenges relating to the validity and reliability of the assessment process" (Edwards, 2017b, p. 53). These challenges included understanding and implementing *ELLP* for the purposes of applying for funding. When applying for funding, there is an important distinction between the stage a learner is *working at* and the stage the learner has *achieved*. It is the stage achieved that is required for funding. However, *ELLP* talks about stage

working at, or within. For example, "The ELLP writing matrix focuses mainly on how writers within each broad stage of development typically organise and develop a text" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 35). There is potential for confusion between measuring language progress, which *ELLP* defines as stage *working at*, and justification for additional funding, as required by the Ministry of Education, which is stage *achieved*.

English Language Learning Progressions (*ELLP*) *Pathway Years 1–8:* A new opportunity

In May of 2020, *English Language Learning Progressions* (*ELLP*) *Pathway Years 1–8* (*Pathway*) (Ministry of Education, 2020a) was released to schools. The timing of this release is significant, as all of New Zealand had been in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and schools were busy transitioning students and their worried parents (Jeffs et al., 2020) back into more normal school routines. Priorities for schools were diverse and complex and COVID-19 was (and still is) a critical concern.

Issues of timing aside, however, the *Pathway* addresses many of the identified challenges in *ELLP*. It was "created in response to feedback from the primary sector" (McQueen, 2020), and has "involved members of the Migrant, Refugee and International (ESOL) team working with primary teachers and ESOL experts" (J. McQueen, personal communication, 28 May, 2020). The *Pathway* provides direct links to a range of available Ministry of Education support material and aligns these with *ELLP*, while also providing greater detail about each of the stages. Teaching strategies and resources are presented together with indicators, which provides both practical and theoretical support for teachers. The *Pathway* promotes culturally responsive and sustaining practices. For example, there is a detailed section called Know your Learner, which encourages teachers to find out "significant cultural values and practices" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 3) from the learner and their whānau (family). The Reading section includes a reading guide (much like *ELLF*) that links each stage to Ministry of Education published reading resources (for example, Ready to Read levels). For these reasons, the *Pathway* is a welcome addition to support the use of *ELLP* in schools, and goes some way to providing greater clarity on *ELLP*'s relationship with *NZC* (especially in Reading).

However, some challenges continue. The *Pathway* is optional and in addition to the use of existing *ELLP* matrices. Specifically, schools are still required to complete the original *ELLP* matrices for funding (Ministry of Education, 2020b). At 12 pages, the *Pathway* is not long, although it contains a large amount of complex information presented in a series of tables. Teachers will need time to engage with the *Pathway*. As well, due to the timing of its release, post lockdown, schools may feel that it is an option they would rather not investigate until 2021, or at all.

Summary

It is clear that *ELLP* presents both opportunities and challenges for New Zealand schools and their ELLs. In considering the development of *ELLF* to *ELLP*, and then to the *Pathway*, it can be seen that there is an ongoing commitment to supporting teachers in their teaching of ELLs. *ELLP* encourages teachers to consider carefully their students' language acquisition progress, while promoting first language use, and can help teachers to identify their students' next steps. Challenges with *ELLP* include limited discussion of culturally responsive teaching practice, difficulties of teacher interpretation (especially in the Reading section), alignment to the wider curriculum, and a potential tension around *ELLP*'s use for teaching and funding.

However, the recent release of the *Pathway* has gone some way to mitigating the challenges found in *ELLP*. Culturally responsive practices are supported and encouraged. Greater clarity has been provided for teachers in the depth and scope of indicators, and the reading section, in particular, is much improved. The relationship with other policy documents, such as *NZC*, is clearer. However, challenges still remain. This is yet another resource in a crowded policy environment. Will teachers welcome or resist this recent policy development? It is too soon to tell.

Conclusions

Considering the complexity of *ELLP* itself, combined with the apparent opportunities and challenges that this document appears to present to teachers, further investigation is warranted. Also, *ELLP* has received limited

research attention and there is still much to know about the ways teachers understand and negotiate this complex policy landscape, especially taking into account the recent release of the *Pathway*. Further research could consider the extent to which teachers use *ELLP* for teaching, learning, and assessment in mainstream classes, and whether the release of the *Pathway* encourages more teachers to interact with *ELLP* on a regular basis. Equally important is an exploration of how *ELLP* shapes primary teachers' understanding of English language learning and teaching, and the extent to which teachers are able to apply the theoretical principles of *ELLP* in their daily decision making in New Zealand's classrooms.

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