

this makes them better able to deal with differences in pronunciation and accents. Another teacher was 'won over by the interview method. She stated that she "used to want to interview her own students, but now (saw) the value of having another foreign teacher do it," adding that it is a "more formal and an authentic 'test'" as opposed to "classroom 'practice.'" An unexpected benefit of testing each other's students was also revealed. One teacher felt that "it is very important for all of us to see the strengths and weaknesses in our teaching approach." Presumably, working as a team had encouraged discussion on teaching methods. On the benefit of repeating questions in subsequent tests, the same teacher wrote: "the students need a core knowledge or ability with English communication. Asking some of the same questions has a lot of value."

For the most part, the teachers approved of the testing method; however, there was some input regarding content. Two of the teachers of lower-level classes felt that there were too many questions for the students to handle. Also, there were two requests for more opinion-based questions. In the following year, the number of questions in the test were not reduced, but some of the questions were changed to opinion questions.

Conclusion

Teaching poorly motivated, beginner-level non-English majors does not have to be a thankless task. By properly assessing students' needs, designing the curriculum accordingly, and setting appropri-

ate goals, there is plenty that can be achieved by students and teachers alike. This course shows that the language attrition expected over the duration of the year could be reduced, and the anxiety generated from contact with English speakers could be overcome and even harnessed to better motivate the students. At the same time, impartiality and standardization were improved, as was the interaction between the teaching faculty.

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Julyan Nutt has been teaching in Japan for twenty years. He is a full-time lecturer at Tokai Gakuen University. His research interests include peer assisted learning and improving motivational issues in the ESL classroom. Outside of the classroom he is an avid vegetable gardener who is striving towards his ultimate goal of self-sufficiency.



[JALT PRACTICE] TLT INTERVIEWS



Torrin Shimono & James Nobis

TLT Interviews brings you direct insights from leaders in the field of language learning, teaching, and education—and you are invited to be an interviewer! If you have a pertinent issue you would like to explore and have access to an expert or specialist, please make a submission of 2,000 words or less.

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Greetings! From this issue and beyond, we will have the pleasure of serving as the column editors for TLT Interviews. As you may already know, this is a brand new column for 2017 that will bring you insightful dialogues with some of the top experts in the field of language learning, teaching, and education. This issue's featured interview is with Annamaria Pinter from the University of Warwick, a specialist in English education for young learners and one of the distinguished plenary speakers at the JALT2016 conference. She was interviewed by Lesley Ito, a teacher, teacher trainer, school owner, and

award-winning materials writer based in Nagoya. Lesley's 20-year experience teaching young learners made her the ideal person to interview Annamaria Pinter. Her school for young learners, BIG BOW English Lab, has a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) curriculum with a strong focus on literacy. Her ELT writing credits include interactive graded readers, online support materials for interactive graded readers, teacher's guides, workbooks, and an e-book on tips for teaching young learners. So without further ado, to the interview!

An Interview with Annamaria Pinter

Lesley Ito

BIG BOW English Lab, Nagoya

I had the privilege to interview JALT2016 plenary speaker Annamaria Pinter, a leader in the field of teaching English to young learners, child second language learning, and teacher



development. An associate professor at the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, she has published widely in the area of teaching English to young learners and is the author of *Teaching Young Language Learners* (Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers) (2017) and *Children Learning Second Languages* (2011). She is also an editor of an e-book series titled, *Teaching English to Young Learners*.

Lesley Ito: *You are known for your work on how to best do research on young learners. When Caroline Linse was a JALT plenary speaker in 2013, she said young learners make up about 70 percent of English language learners, yet are subjects in only about 30 of the research. In your opinion, why is there so little research on young learners?*

Annamaria Pinter: First of all, I think this is changing. There is a lot more research, certainly a lot more research that I am aware of being done. I think this is because, in the last few years, we can see new countries making the commitment to starting English at earlier ages. I know this is the case in Japan. Also, there is just a little bit more awareness now about how important it is to get the foundation right. Without good, solid knowledge about what happens in primary schools, we will struggle in the secondary sector.

Soon there will be a huge handbook coming out on young learner research by *Routledge*, something that Fiona Copland and Sue Garton are editing. I think that will be a collection of empirical studies which will be unparalleled in our field in terms of bringing together so many aspects.

I think there are reasons why fewer people do research on young learners. This is quite upsetting, I'm afraid, but it's true, that once you're very good in the primary sector, you're moved up. For doing a good job in the primary sector, whether you're a textbook writer, inspirational teacher, or teacher trainer, in many contexts, to get more money or more prestige, you get moved up to the secondary or tertiary level. I know of projects I've worked on, an inspirational group of primary specialists came out with a great product and five years down the line, none of them are in the primary sector anymore. This is a real trend. We also see this reflected in research grants and sponsorships. In master's programs, it is rare to find someone who wants to specialize in young learners. In some countries, having an MA in TESOL, specializing in young learners actually closes doors, rather than opens them. Having a general TESOL degree means you have a chance to teach younger or older learners, but in some countries having one that specializes in young learners is considered lower status. In the face of this, I think it is quite normal that a lot of research students who are sponsored or MA students on scholarships will go for adult related research. I think it is a real problem across the world that primary teachers have lower status and a lower salary, and as soon as you are good, you get moved up.

Your book, Teaching Young Language Learners, is recommended in my Teaching English to Young Learners master's program, and one I believe every teacher of children should have on their bookshelf. I heard a new edition is coming out. Congratulations! Could you tell us some more about the book and your new edition?

Thank you very much. I'm very pleased to know that you are using it and it is useful to you. The new edition is coming out in January in the UK and obviously, every chapter has been updated. So, there's new research inserted in every chapter. Research is handled exactly as before, in a very reader friendly manner. As you remember, at the end of every unit there were tasks for teachers to do. There is a set of 25 new tasks. In addition, there is a whole new chapter, which is about intercultural education for children, what English teachers can do in this area. The classroom research chapter has been fully updated, including lots of ideas from my new projects where I'm trying to get children much more involved in research. So, there are examples of child research, and ways for teachers to encourage children to explore classrooms together.

Your book is very all encompassing, touching on every aspect that teachers of young learners need to know. If

you were trying to tell a brand new teacher about your book, how would you characterize it?

My book is exactly like that. It doesn't go into very much detail into any one topic area but gives a comprehensive overview. This book is very readable for those who are new to teaching. It doesn't use a lot of terminology or jargon. I've been told by teachers, "In my course, I was told to read Vygotsky and sociocultural theory and after reading about this in your book, I could understand some of the basics and this helped me make the next step to tackle reading academic journal articles." The main advantage of this book is that it is for people who don't have much experience and everything is explained step-by-step in a way that is easy to follow.

Yes, I thought your book took a lot of difficult educational concepts and brought them down to earth, making them easy to understand.

You have worked with teachers from many countries, including Japan. Some teachers in Japan say that sometimes the European perspective on young learners does not apply in their EFL classrooms. What's your opinion on this and how can we bridge the gap?

I think one could argue that every teaching situation is unique and every country is unique. I think every teacher should be in the position to decide for themselves what is possible and desirable in their own classrooms. I think it is important for teachers everywhere to familiarize themselves with debates around the world, theoretical ideas, and practical ideas, not to copy them or take them on board uncritically, but to engage with the ideas and see whether any aspect of it may be suitable. Sometimes we find it difficult to step outside our comfort zones because we believe that there is a reason for the way things are. I always say to teachers, "Ask the learners. Find out from the learners what they feel and what they enjoy and start from there. Don't pre-judge it or assume you already know what is best."

I was very interested to see that you have recently become interested in children who need to adjust to life in their own countries after living overseas with their families for a short time. Helping returnees, or kikokushijyo, adjust to life back in Japan after being in international or local schools where the language of instruction was English, is an issue that affects teachers here more and more. What advice could you give them?

My advice for classrooms with different learners, whether they have different backgrounds or languages, or are returnees, is that teachers should try

to include everyone and appreciate what everyone can bring to the classroom because those returnee children will be very good at certain things. They could be used as a resource, maybe as English language users, or for wonderful cross-cultural activities that would speak to everyone because returnees would perhaps know about other cultures in more depth. Any student can benefit from these lessons, as I say, you can't really understand about other cultures until you understand your own. So, to have those intercultural interactions in a meaningful way, for example taking a cue from what the returnee children actually notice, say, and comment on what is different or what they found surprising about their country when they returned. Those can be excellent starting points for raising intercultural awareness. For those children who have never been away, I think it is still important to contemplate the idea that they might someday go away and what it feels like.

Recently, I visited a primary school in my local area where 80+% of the children use English as a second or third language and some children come to the school without any previous education at all. Typically these schools would be considered as difficult. Indeed this school used to really struggle until some years ago when a new headmistress turned it all around. Now all children are encouraged to talk about and celebrate their different languages and cultures they come from. The school also cultivates ambition at every level, all children are encouraged to aim high, and they are all told nothing is impossible. The head teacher employs an English as a second language specialist, not just to do remedial work in English, but to work with children to prepare them in advance proactively in terms of their English skills for tasks and content coming up in the curriculum.

Children are trusted to take control of important decisions, and they talk to visitors with enthusiasm and pride about what kinds of activities are happening in their school. This positive attitude about all cultures, all languages, and all possible backgrounds is infectious and inspiring.

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