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3: Teaching skill	The teacher brings the outside world into the classroom (authentic materials, nontext materials, etc.). The teacher gives clear instructions including examples or demonstrations. The teacher gives students enough time for each activity. The teachers give students lots of opportunities to practice. The teacher is flexible and recognizes moments to suddenly teach something and accepts correct but different answers. The teacher monitors students during the activity to help them stay on task. The teacher reviews what was learned in previous lessons. The teacher uses a variety of groupings (whole class, small group, pairs, and individual). The teacher uses a variety of materials (textbook, prints, audio-visual, etc.). The teacher uses all four skills in each class. The teacher uses technology. The teacher allows enough time for students to respond to questions. The teacher makes expectations for students clear.
4: Correction and Assessment	In class, the teacher gives helpful feedback on students' questions and answers. The teacher gives helpful feedback on homework assignments. The teacher gives students opportunities to evaluate each other's work as appropriate. The teacher explained clearly how students would be graded earlier in the semester. The teacher uses various methods to assess students (tests, essays presentations, etc.).
5: Other	Please write any other free observations about the teacher you have been observing over the past 5 weeks.

[JALT PRAXIS] 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.*

Email: interviews@jalt-publications.org

Welcome to the January/February edition of TLT *Interviews! For the first issue of 2020, we are excited to bring you two fascinating interviews. The first interview is with Paul Nation, an Emeritus Professor in Applied Linguistics at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies (LALS) at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand. He is a world-renowned specialist in the teaching and learning of vocabulary and language teaching methodology. For nearly 50 years, he has authored numerous books and articles as well as taught in many countries, some of which include Indonesia, Thailand, the United States, Finland, and Japan. He was interviewed by Olivia Kennedy who has taught in Japan since 1999. She currently teaches at Ritsumeikan University and the Kyoto Institute of Technology where she is a PhD candidate. Her main research interest is helping students' learning experience with 21st century tools. So, without further ado, to our first interview!*

An Interview with Professor Paul Nation

Olivia Kennedy
Ritsumeikan University

Olivia Kennedy*: Thank you for making time to sit down with me today. Many of my colleagues are familiar with your research with Marcella Hu in 2000 that finds that 98% vocabulary familiarity is necessary for reading comprehension. Do you know of any research done with children that has the same finding?*

Paul Nation: No, I don't know of any research with that finding. The research on 98% coverage for

comprehension is a bit tricky. It provides useful, common sense evidence, but one of the big problems is the other 2%. If you do research in that area, you've got to be really careful that those words are sensible, and that they're not words which would be known because they are cognates. You can't just take the coverage figures from things like the Range Program or AntWordProfiler (see References). You need to look at the actual words which are occurring in the output data.

With children, I think you'd have to look carefully at other clues to meaning. I have a feeling that if it's children's books with pictures, then the 98% coverage might be strongly affected by the information that is coming through the accompanying pictures.

The idea of pictures and reading is really tricky, too. There is some research that shows that when young native speakers begin to read, pictures can actually have a negative effect on developing reading skills. Instead of using the visual interpretation or recognition of words to read, children start filling in from background knowledge from the pictures. It's important when giving kids practice in reading, that pictures don't work as a distraction from the language clues for reading.

So, I don't know of any research that's been done with young children. Most of the research on coverage is done with university students. There's some corpus research which simply measures how much vocab you need for text coverage, which is done with secondary school students, and some on children's movies. But I don't know of any research which looks at how children actually cope with 98% coverage or less than that. I think it's an important area because a lot of research in applied linguistics uses convenience samples, and they tend to be university students. We actually need to see research focusing on young children learning vocabulary, too. It's a really important broadening of the field to vary the population that you are researching.

It seems to me that children are much more comfortable not understanding everything going on around them than adults are.

There is definitely an adult/child distinction, which probably works not only with native speakers, but also with foreign language learners. Kids are more likely to focus on meaning, where adults are more likely to focus to some degree on form, and feel uncomfortable if not all forms are understood. Kids however are happy to go with the flow and gather what information that they can. That's why I think it's important to broaden the research base to include children's studies.

But I also have to say that doing research with children, especially young children, is fraught with difficulty. A few years ago, I developed the Picture Vocabulary Size Test which is aimed primarily at native speakers who are preliterate. It tests the first 6,000 words of English, so it can be used with up to 8-year-olds. We tried using it with 5-year-olds in New Zealand schools, and I would say about half of the 5-year-olds did what they were supposed to do, and the other half just got distracted by the pictures. It's a multiple-choice test where you touch the picture which matches the sentence that you hear, but they just wanted to touch a picture because they liked that picture. About half of the data was hopeless because the children had other agendas. At the age of six, they understood that it was a test and could take it seriously, but the 5-year-olds were a real menace in that sense.

Perhaps that's why so many people stick to convenience samples! Let's talk next about your research into speed reading. Some of my colleagues are interested in whether it is still worth doing.

It's definitely well worth doing. There are quite a few justifications for doing it. But first, it's important that we understand what speed reading is. For native speakers, speed reading is reading at an abnormally fast speed. But for learners of EFL, the goals are quite different. The goal of speed reading training is simply to bring language learners up to a speed which is close to that which an average native speaker would read at, somewhere between 200 and 300 standard words per minute. I say standard words because there is recent research done in Japan that finds that when you want to measure reading speed, it's more valid to use standard words (The number of standard words in a passage can be found by dividing the number of characters including punctuation by six).

Why is it important to bring learners' speed up to that of native speakers?

When learners do extensive reading, if they can read twice as much in the same time, they're going to get much more input, and therefore are going to make much better progress as a result. I believe that a speed reading course is a really essential part of an extensive reading program.

Another thing is that if you're dealing with language really slowly, it's hard to bring more global comprehension skills to work. For learners, it is not enough to know vocabulary, collocations, and grammar. You've got to be able to make really good use of what you already know. Speed reading is

a fluency development activity which tries to let learners make the best use of the recognition vocabulary that they already know when reading. So, I'm very much in favour of speed reading courses.

There is plenty of research on speed reading which shows that learners do make significant progress in speed reading courses, that this progress is maintained, that it's transferred outside the course to other reading, and that gains are very substantial. When you look at some of the gains, they almost seem too good to be true: learners can increase their reading speed by 50% to 100% simply by reading 20 passages 500-words long, which takes about three or four minutes per passage, and then answering a few questions at the end. Lots of studies have shown that you can get a substantial fluency increase by doing this activity twenty times. So, it's a very useful thing to do. One useful resource is Sonia Millett's website (see References), that offers free speed reading material at lots of different levels.

In many speed reading textbooks, the lowest level is set at 100 words per minute. I'm curious as to why.

I don't think that there is a lower limit of 100 words per minute. Many learners are reading below that. I know from my own language learning experience that when you start off learning to read another script, your reading speed is extremely slow. It could even be ten words or less, but the idea is to keep reading material that mainly consists of words that you know, so that your recognition times get faster. The vocabulary statistics in a text show that high-frequency words, from the first 1,000 to 2,000 words, cover a very large proportion, 80% or 90%, of the words in any text. Getting fast recognition of those words, and of very useful topic words, is the major way in which speed increases, and you simply do that through quantity of practice.

Do you have other suggestions for planning effective extensive reading courses?

In an extensive reading course, you want to have fluency development through a targeted speed reading course. You also want to have fluency development through reading graded readers which are way below the level of the learners, so that they are pushed, and encouraged, to read faster. Have the learners do plenty of practice and have them focus on the meaning of what they are reading. Those four criteria of easiness, pressure to go faster, quantity of practice, and focus on meaning, are really the characteristics of fluency development tasks. There is good research done in Japan by Stuart McLean, Greg Rouault, David Beglar, and Alan Hunt where they look at gains from extensive reading in terms of fluency. Those gains are reasonably good gains, but smaller than those from a targeted speed reading course. I think it is important to have both speed reading training and easy extensive reading as part of an extensive reading program.

You mentioned the words "pushed" and "encouraged" to go faster. Can you tell me more?

The pressure to go faster can come from having a graph where the learners record their speed, and as they do each activity, they see the line on their graph go up by reading a bit faster. It doesn't have to be mechanical pressure, but just a goal for the learners to be aware of.

In the last ten years, I've given a lot of thought to what the jobs of the teacher are. You would think that a teacher's job is to teach, but it's by no means the most important. For me, planning is the number one job. Planning involves making sure that learners have a good range of opportunities for learning. That comes down to the four strands, so that they are getting a balance of input, output, deliberate learning and fluency development, and making sure that the language material is at the right level for them.

The second job is to organize the classroom. Anybody who has seen a New Zealand primary school classroom at work can see how fantastic this can be. Teachers set up their routines and procedures for learners to follow, and everybody knows what they are supposed to do. The teacher is not teaching, but the learners are really working away, doing their stuff. About a year ago, my niece and nephew came to New Zealand, and went to the local primary school down the road for three weeks. I went down to pick them up after school, and I asked what the first day had been like. My nephew said, "It was good fun. I really liked it, but they haven't done any teaching yet." And I laughed to myself. I could see what he was trying to say: The teacher was not standing up in front of the class, laying down the law. The children were doing things—they were doing mathematics, they were drawing pictures, they were writing stories. But he was baffled because there was no "teaching." This organizing is really important because the learners are then spending their time usefully, moving smoothly between activities and not wasting time.

I have one more question, about time allocation to the four strands (see Nation, 2007). Is it possible that some of the strands may be more important for beginners, and others more important for advanced learners?

The principle of the four strands basically says that you should spend equal amounts of time on meaning focused input, meaning focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development. Ideally, the content across those four strands should be integrated, so that the very important learning condition of repetition has the maximum opportunity to occur. The idea of 25% for each strand is an arbitrary decision. There's no research to support it. I've adopted it because it is simple. It seems to work in the sense that three-quarters of the time should be spent on actually using the language through input, output, and fluency development, and about one-quarter of the time should be spent focusing on deliberate learning. It also provides a roughly equal amount of time for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Even in the beginning, the first few lessons of a language course, should include fluency development. You should be learning those first items to a level that you can use them fluently. It's no good knowing it unless you can actually use it in production.

How about when people are at the other end of their language learning journey?

I might have trouble defending it there. You could see that language-focused learning could be about a quarter of the time. But you could be trying to develop fluency in new topic areas, for example. So if you are a very advanced student reading texts about a technical subject that is important for you, you probably need to develop fluency in that area. When it comes down to it, it's an arbitrary decision. What lies in the back of my mind of being rather doctrinaire about keeping the strands balanced is that I don't want language-focused learning to start creeping up to 50% or 75% like it is in some classes. And I don't want fluency development to disappear from some courses because teachers feel that their learners still have a lot to learn before they can use anything with fluency! There needs to be opportunities for learning across all four strands.

Thank you for this opportunity to understand your work further.

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For our second interview, we feature a thought-provoking discussion with Dr. Nicholas Subtirelu, an Assistant Professor in the Applied Linguistics concentration at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. His interests are educational linguistics, ideology, critical discourse analysis, social justice, globalization, and the spread of English(es). His recent publications have appeared in Applied Linguistics, Language in Society, *and* System*. He was interviewed by Daniel Dunkley who hails from the UK and has been a full-time lecturer in English at Aichi Gakuin University, Nagoya from 1991 to 2018. Now, to the second interview!*

An Interview with Dr. Nicholas Subtirelu

Daniel Dunkley

Aichi Gakuin University

Daniel Dunkley*: Dr. Subtirelu, what is the general area in which you work?*

Nicholas Subtirelu: My work is in critical applied linguistics. This is an emerging field in applied linguistics that takes the position that research and educational efforts are not neutral; they are inherently political, and it often takes as its object of study, the politics of language learning and language teaching.

Why are you interested in this field?

I've always been interested in the way that power works in society, and I've always been politically active since I was in college. I came to language teaching later. I did a master's in TESOL thinking that it would be a practical way to live wherever I wanted and meet people from all over the world. Then, as I