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Series Editor’s Preface

The TESOL Voices series aims to fill the need for expanding practical knowledge through participant research in the field. Each volume showcases the voices of students and teachers engaged in participant inquiry about language education. These inquiries of participants in various TESOL learning environments are told as insider accounts of discovery, challenge, change, and growth.

What constitutes TESOL classroom life and who is best positioned to research this unique ecology? Traditionally, there has been a hierarchy of credibility in TESOL encouraging the production of knowledge by credentialed “experts” in higher education who offer TESOL practitioners outsider understandings about teaching. In contrast, the TESOL Voices series presents insider accounts from students and teachers who are theorizing the practices of both learning and teaching for themselves. In other words, this series positions practice ahead of theory for understanding the complex phenomena of language teaching and learning. In short, the TESOL Voices series seeks to elevate the value of localized learning through classroom research.

In this series, readers will discover relevant strands of theory extending from accounts of practice. The philosophical point of departure for the series is that enduring theory in TESOL is most likely to surface from participant inquiry that happens among the clutter of classroom desks and chairs. As participants tell their stories, reflective questions and implications for language teaching emerge that illustrate the practical theory practitioners use to make decisions as they experience classroom life.

The TESOL Voices series attempts to give readers a view from the classroom floor on the appropriateness of current policy, practice, and theory in language education. While the accounts in these books are personal reflections colored by particular contexts, teachers are likely to find parallels with their own situation. So as you read, listen carefully to discover what the murmurs, echoes, articulations, singing, humming, silence, cries, laughter, and voices that flow from each of the six volumes might teach you.

Insider Accounts From Young Learner Classrooms

This exciting volume contains 16 chapters organized into four sections: Teacher Education, Developing Appropriate Pedagogies, Young Learners in the Mainstream, and Engaging the Wider Community. Chapter authors provide valuable insider accounts from young learner classrooms that explore new areas of inquiry and more traditional topics. New configurations of research are showcased in this book, including joint research collaborations and practitioner research. This book brings together teachers and researchers from different disciplines, all trying to better understand the classroom lives of young learners. The foundation of this volume is formed by compelling stories of teachers, learners, parents, and preservice teachers becoming empowered, giving a voice to participants who often go unheard in the literature. The voices of the participants in this volume make significant contributions to our understanding of pedagogy for young learners of English, which is a relatively new area of inquiry. The chapters in this volume offer readers valuable insider accounts into young learner classes that will surely provide inspiration and innovation to move the field forward.

Tim Stewart, Kyoto University
Quite recently, we identified teaching English to young learners (TEYL) as a relatively neglected area of English language teaching (Copland & Garton, 2014). Around that time, and since then, a number of research and pedagogy-focused publications have emerged (e.g., Bland, 2015; López-Gopar, 2016; Pinter & Zandian, 2014; Rich, 2014). However, we think it is still uncommon to hear voices from participants in young learner (YL) classrooms. By sharing a range of voices from across the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), this volume addresses this gap, giving teachers, educators, children, parents, and administrators a space to share their experiences. The voices in this book represent a range of contexts, both geographical and educational: from Asia, Europe, North and South America, and the Middle East; in the public sector and the private sector; and in kindergarten, elementary, and junior high (in this volume, YLs are classified as between the ages of 3 and 13).

Some of the chapters offer new and valuable insights into issues that have previously been noted in the literature whereas others address relatively new areas. In the final chapter, we explore how these issues are related and their importance to research in the field going forwards. In this brief introduction, we lay out the themes of the chapters in the order in which they appear in the volume.

Teacher Education

The first five chapters address issues around training for teachers of YLs. The first, by Reynolds and Chang, identifies the theoretical nature of many preservice programmes, which can leave teachers unsure of how to implement their learning when they are finally given the opportunity to teach. They report on a voluntary programme in Taiwan that supported teachers in bridging the gap between their college course and the practicum so that they felt both more prepared and more confident.

Poonpon, Satthamnuwong, and Sameephet present an alternative model of teacher education. They work with one Thai teacher to identify and address classroom-based issues, including
implementing communicative language teaching, classroom management, and developing students’ metacognitive strategies. Their aim is to work with the issues identified by the teacher and through their observations in school so that the training is relevant to the local context. Kırkgöz also works with a teacher, this time in a Turkish elementary school. Through collaborative action research, they designed an innovative intervention to implement effective classroom management, which enabled the teacher to teach the class in an effective and positive way.

In contrast, Bezerra and Di Lello report on working with 97 in-service teachers to introduce a project-based learning approach. They explain how they first experimented with introducing project-based learning to their own classrooms before holding a 1-day training seminar for the teachers.

The next chapter, by Loh and Lai, describes a project in which teachers at a school in Singapore worked collaboratively to reflect on the effect different reading strategies had on children’s learning. Unlike the programmes and projects in the first four chapters, with this project there was no unequal trainer-trainee power hierarchy. Instead, the teachers instigated the project and show how it enhances teaching practice and professional development.

Developing Appropriate Pedagogies

As the age at which English is introduced into schools has lowered (Enever & Moon, 2009), there has been a growing realisation that pedagogies used with older school children and adults may not be suitable for the elementary school classroom (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014). The chapters in the next section of the volume focus on this area. Yanase and Allen-Tamai both show how they have used story-based approaches in their teaching in Japan. The authors describe the procedures for working with stories to develop autonomy (Yanase) and language (Allen-Tamai). In her chapter, Mourão extends the use of stories: In a Portuguese kindergarten, a teacher makes her storytelling materials available in an English corner for children to integrate into their natural play. Adopting another popular approach for teaching children, Inostroza A. shows how games, often cited as a mainstay of YL pedagogy but rarely explored, can be an effective tool in promoting language practice in primary schools in Chile.

Taking a pedagogy designed for adults, Emery and Al-Marzouki describe what happened when they introduced task-based learning to a class of YLs in Oman. Though children and teachers both enjoyed the experience, the innovation was not without problems.

Young Learners in the Mainstream

The next three chapters in the volume focus on English as a second language contexts in the United States, where the children are described as English language learners (ELLs) and are in class alongside English-speaking children. Yee and Li’s chapter examines the experiences of Chinese ELLs and their bilingual teacher of standardised testing in a bilingual programme. Next, de Oliveira and Ma describe strategies used by an experienced and qualified ELL teacher (Ma) to scaffold children’s language and literacy development. They emphasise the importance of ensuring that ELLs are fully engaged in the class in the same way as their English-speaking peers. This point is also emphasised by Santavicca and Terrell, who report on the introduction of a shadowing protocol in preservice teacher education designed to raise novice teachers’ awareness of ELLs’ classroom experiences.
Engaging the Wider Community

As these chapters demonstrate, there is an increasing focus in much TEYL work on making YLs visible through recognising the value of their learning experiences (e.g., Pinter & Zandian, 2014). In her chapter, Ball describes a community-based English language education programme in Brazil that was designed to reflect the social realities and personal experiences of children from low-income families. Using an approach that utilised familiar situations, English was made relevant to the children’s daily lives.

Finally, Ellis steps out of the classroom to explore the role parents can play in motivating children to learn English. Her study of private English classes in France provides insights into how to set up often neglected home-school connections so that parents can be more effectively involved in their children’s education.

Bringing Contexts to Life

The chapters in this volume offer a set of lenses through which to view current issues in TEYL. They allow us to examine the complexity of the field and reveal the multifaceted nature of learning and TEYL in the 21st century. In addition, they not only present the issues and challenges that such complexity brings but also offer practical responses and solutions. The studies reported here are generally small scale; however, the myriad participant voices bring the different contexts to life and make them relevant to a wide international audience.

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References


