LB: A very warm welcome to Janice Bland. Professor Bland is currently based on Nord University of Norway and has wide experience as teacher educator. She published various books on teaching English to young learners and is Editor-in-Chief of the open-access journal called *Children's Literature in English Language Education*(CLELEjournal). Let’s start the interview with the first question.

Professor Bland, what motivated you to specialise in the teaching of English as a foreign language to young children?

JB: Of course, the children themselves, because I absolutely loved teaching children before I started teaching students. I have taught adults in Germany at the Volkshochschule. I've taught English in the primary school. I taught secondary school. That was while I was still in the UK and so I taught about all age groups. I learned most from teaching children in the primary school. Also, another reason is simply because it’s needed. That's why I published that book *Teaching Englsih to young Learners* because there just isn't enough. And I don't mean to be rude about it by linguist too much, but a lot that is published in peer reviewed journals, very is on teaching English to young learners. Very often with empirical research. These are researchers who haven't actually taught in the classroom and their work is then just not so useful, even if they do empirical research in the classroom. If they haven't themselves been teachers, they can't easily take the perspective of the children, or of the teacher in that classroom. So, it's just a gap. We just need more people to specialise in teaching English to young learners. And however, I have to say it's not my only area. I've published quite a lot on teaching, also in the secondary school.

LB: English as a lingua franca and a means of global communication plays a key role in our globalised world. In Germany, it is introduced in primary schools. Here in Bavaria, English is introduced in the third grade. However, in Bavaria, English is not graded in primary school education and therefore, it is not relevant for the transition to secondary school. What is your view on this? Do you agree with this system, or would you change it, if you could?

JB: So, as I have never taught Bavaria, I taught in North Rhein-Westphalia in the primary school and also as student teacher. So, Bavaria is a different world for me. However, I from my experience of teaching children, I think it's best not to grade them. I sometimes was teaching children in the afternoons, and this was actually before English was taught in the primary school, and then they started having lessons in the primary school, and they kept on with me because when once the parents realised it doesn't work much faster in the primary school. You know, you just can't teach fast - they learn differently, they don't learn fast, they learn differently. And so, we had lessons in the afternoon, and they were learning English in school. And I very quickly found out that the teachers just were not able to grade them. Which is understandable because children don't communicate only verbally, by speaking or writing. They communicate with gestures, so with body language with facial expressions, and drawing and thinking. They are communicating with themselves, if you like, intrapersonal communication. How is the teacher supposed to grade this? There's a silent period where sometimes even really good children listen and understand. So, a lot is happening inside their heads, but they’re not putting it into words. You can’t grade that.

Just to give you an anecdotal example of recent experience, and because I haven't taught in primary school for some time. I have a nice who lives with his father, not with her mother. Her father doesn't speak English, and my niece speaks English only to me. She speaks Gallo, that’s a language of the Philippines, and German. I've read her many stories and she understands absolutely everything. She understands graphic novels, I mean, it's amazing how much she understands. When I said she speaks English, that is not true. She understands English. She doesn't speak English. That's because she doesn't yet feel confident in speaking, she’s just 10. I don't push her to speak. Why should I? I think this is amazing. But it would be wrong to grade her. Because how is the teachers supposed to know this? She doesn't speak English. Yeah, it's a sign in period we should. We should respect this. She absolutely is communicating with me, she understands. She responds in German to me, and body language, and facial expressions, and interesting questions in German. I shared a picture book on Malaga recently and she was really fascinating that topic. So even at the age of 10 we are fascinated in finding out more about literacy, learn about what happened to this girl who was shot by the Taliban. At the age of 10, they are interested in these things. She understood it all, but she didn't talk in English. We can't grade this because they don't communicate so much verbally at that. What is in the head is far more advanced than what they can actually put in words when they are in the third and fourth grade.

LB: Professor Bland, you were born in the United Kingdom, you hold a Phd from Jena University, and are now a professor at Nord University, Norway. Obviously, you have lived in three different countries and gained an insight into their school systems. On top of that, you portrayed the approach of different countries to teaching English to young learners in your various papers. So, we would like to know from you: What did you find particularly striking when you did research on how different countries handle English Teaching and Learning at primary schools? Could you give us some examples?

JB: Well, Norway and Germany are not so very far apart. The UK is a different issue because English is their home language of most of the children, so of course there are now many children learning English as an additional language. But that that is in recent years, and I haven't lived in the UK for a long time. However, the UK is a special case and actually they have a huge disadvantage these children now in the primary and secondary school in the UK, and that it's very difficult, as an English speaker, to learn other languages. So, not because we can't do it. So, I picked up German within six months. I was quite fluent when I came to Germany, but this was at a time when I had to learn German. I went onto a bus, and I was completely lost if I couldn't ask, ‘When do I get off the bus?’ in German because nobody could speak English. This is a long time ago. I had to learn German very fast to be able to go shopping, and so I did learn German very fast. That was the case in Germany. Now it's very difficult to go to a country and pick up language fast because everybody will answer in English, and that is absolutely the case in Norway. So, I still don't speak anything like fluent Norwegian, and I've lived there now for three years. Although I don't live there permanently. I don't hardly speak any Norwegian at all. I understand a bit now, but I don't speak it. I'm so I'm glad I'm not graded on Norwegian. And the English kids, alright, the British kids in schools are in the same position. Everybody will answer English to them if they try and speak in a different language. There's so much English on the Internet, and so it's hard for them. It's really hard, and it's not their fault. It's not because English are not good at learning languages. I actually speak French too. I'm not bad at learning languages, but it's very hard now for me to acquire Norwegian. So, the Norwegian and German are in a similar position. The Norwegians have a huge advantage because they haven't dubbed films for forever. In fact, they are beginning to dub films now because some of the secondary school teachers are noticing that many young people prefer English to Norwegian. And they are afraid that they are becoming better in English than in Norwegian because they are doing so much on the Internet and gaming. And there are some of them, when they come to university, are really fluent. Most of them actually are really fluent in English and some teachers are afraid the Norwegian is suffering. I don't think that's the case, but it is a different situation to Germany. In Germany films still are dubbed on the television. And still, young people have much more access now to English then used to have. They use Netflix and so. So, I think things are really looking up in that respect in Germany. In school, I've already mentioned in my PowerPoint that there is just as much struggle in in Norway in the primary school, in more I would say, then in Germany. However, I have to say that I work in the north of Norway. So just like I can't really compare North Rhein-Westphalia with Bavaria, because they may be very different. I can't really compare where I live in Norway, right in the far north of the Arctic Circle, with Oslo, and Bergen. Again, they may be, and they probably are very different. In the far north I've been in primary schools where the teachers are literally afraid to speak English to me, which is very sad, because they are practically unqualified in teaching English. And obviously they don't have a lot of classroom discourse in English. It's just mostly Norwegian, and that's very sad. I'm afraid that just happened in Germany too, but I haven't seen it in Germany. I've only heard that it happens. In Lower Saxony I was lucky enough to go into school and see my student teachers teach in the teaching practise - that was brilliant. I learned from my student teachers, they learned from me. The teachers learned from me. I learned from them, and we all learned from the children. That doesn't happen in Norway, and that didn't happen in Nordrhein-Westfalen either. So, one important thing is that researchers need to go into schools if they are in teacher education. And I don't know what it's like in this Bavaria. If your colleagues have that opportunity, and if it's part of their curriculum that they're going to observe you in school when you're doing teaching practise, I find that incredibly important.