Engaging Children in Applied Linguistics Research

Who should speak for children in applied linguistics research? Should it be only adults, or is there room for children’s perspectives and views as well? This pioneering book brings children’s voices to the forefront and shows that listening to them can open up new possibilities to conduct research ‘with’ children rather than just ‘on’ them. It covers a range of possibilities, from simply asking for children’s perspectives to increasing levels of active participation, including adult–child partnerships as well as child-led research. Examples taken from the interdisciplinary literature illustrate what is feasible to achieve in different contexts, and both benefits and challenges are discussed alongside the most pressing ethical dilemmas. A new, alternative framework for researching with children is promoted, which invites teachers and researchers to consider a wider range of roles that children can play. It also encourages them to find their own opportunities when it comes to research involving children.

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Series Editors’ Preface

Global circumstances including migration, language education policy and recognition for the importance of English as a lingua franca have resulted in growing numbers of children learning a language in addition to their home language. This has led in turn to an increase in research undertaken by applied linguists where young learners are the subjects. Researchers regularly acknowledge the age-relevant practices that inform their investigations, but this often involves only limited modifications to normal research practice. It is reasonable to ask in addition whether research investigating children might better conceive of the subjects differently than as producers of data.

In Engaging Children in Applied Linguistics Research, Annamaria Pinter asks this question and responds to it in the affirmative. In particular, Pinter finds much of the research on children as second or foreign language learners lacking relevance for addressing children’s needs, priorities, wellbeing and challenges. The purpose of the book is to sketch an alternative vision for conducting research on children as language learners by treating them as partners in research that investigates their acquisition of language. The idea of partnership is signalled by the title, ‘engaging children in’ rather than ‘conducting research on’, and the book discusses research projects that exemplify the unique findings that emerge when children are engaged. Pinter presents the philosophical motivation for proposing a shift in research orientation in addition to showing that child second and foreign language education could be better understood if children’s perspectives were systematically invited into the design of research.

Engaging Children in Applied Linguistics Research is a welcome addition to the Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series because of the pioneering insights Pinter shares on a topic of central interest to applied linguists. Although the main focus of the book is language acquisition, the issue of involving research participants in the research process has a
wider relevance, as does the issue of researching with children. The book will be a key reference as the need for understanding children as second and foreign language learners continues to grow.

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