**Day 2 ACTA Conference 2018: English Language Learning in a Mobile World**

**Breakfast with Professor Ester de Jong**

**By Sharon Leslie, Lecturer/ELP Manager, Southern Cross University College**

Professor Ester de Jong is a titan in bilingual education and TESOL research. She has also been a loyal and valued supporter of ACTA for many years. In 2014, she spoke in Melbourne when VicTESOL hosted the biennial event. In 2018 in Adelaide she came again, delivering the opening keynote address entitled *EAL Expertise and Taking a Multilingual Stance*. In addition, on Day 2 of the conference Professor de Jong spoke to a group of 20 at a breakfast session. The session gave attendees an informal opportunity to listen to Professor de Jong speaking on a wide range of topics including EAL students with additional learning difficulties, translanguaging, code-switching and the maintenance of home languages.

Professor de Jong acknowledged the difficulties faced by teachers in identifying additional learning difficulties in EAL learners and reinforced the importance of knowing students and their backgrounds. She stated that this necessitated the use of interpreters to interview students’ families in their first languages. If the suspected learning difficulties existed in the first language, then further testing was required. Professor de Jong said that further testing should also be conducted in a child’s first language. Interestingly, she said that in the United States there is no either/or when discussing funding for special education and EAL. If a child is both EAL and faces learning difficulties, then both are recognised and funded. For further information on this topic, Professor de Jong recommended Else Hamayan’s book *Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners*.

Translanguaging was the buzzword of the conference and there was considerable discussion and disagreement about its definition and its impact in the classroom. At breakfast, Professor de Jong outlined some of the current bilingual education programs in the United States. She also explained that the Common Core Standards, which detail what children in the United States from K-12 should know at each grade in maths and what they call English language arts, also outline resources and provisions for EAL students. Professor de Jong touched on her own research in bilingual education and its many benefits particularly Two-Way Immersion programs.

The topic of code-switching was a natural progression in the breakfast conversation. The topic arose from a teacher in the group who recounted her experiences as a teacher in the Northern Territory. The group discussed classroom norms and what instructions teachers should give to co-teachers and students in classrooms where code-switching was common. As with all of the discussion points, Professor de Jong encouraged the group to reframe and reposition their questions. She encouraged the valuing of code-switching as it sent a powerful message to students that teachers acknowledged what they could do in any language.

From code-switching the conversation turned to the maintenance of home languages. Some of the group spoke about the difficulties they encountered maintaining their home languages. They believed that without the support of their children’s schools and the wider community, their own children would turn their back on the language spoken at home. It was stated that this had implications for children’s ability to communicate with older family members and could lead to a devaluing of their home language.

The breakfast provided an unforgettable experience for TESOL practitioners to discuss areas of interest and concern with one of the world’s biggest names in bilingual and TESOL education. Professor de Jong was a patient and articulate speaker who quietly challenged the group to move from a deficit to an asset view of their students’ language abilities if they were to embrace a multilingual stance.