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Introduction

One of the goals of this English In Context series is to explore some of the new and emerging contexts, which the virtual world of online language teaching and learning certainly qualifies as. One of the earlier books on the topic, John de Szendeffy's (2005) *A Practical Guide to Using Computers in Language Teaching*, is only 10 years old, which is an indication that this area within the field of TESOL is still one of the newest and most rapidly changing. This was followed by books such as Lamy and Hampel's (2007) *Online Communication in Language Learning and Teaching*, Dudeney and Hockly's (2007) *How to Teach English With Technology*, and, more recently, Meskill and Anthony's (2010) *Teaching Languages Online*.

One of the more in-depth and most relevant articles published in this area is by Andreas Lund (2006), at the University of Oslo. Published in *Language Teaching Research*, the title of Lund's article, "The Multiple Contexts of Online Language Teaching," represents an answer to the question: Is online a context? The answer—for Lund, for us, and for others—is a resounding yes. But perhaps with the caveat: Teaching and learning languages online is a context, but not in the same way as the other contexts written about in the other books in this series.

This book happens to be closely aligned with Lund's (2006) focus on the importance of contextual factors in the virtual world of teaching and learning English online. For example, Lund examines "multiple contexts that appear and how they give rise to diverse practices" and highlights the "need to understand how these practices can be explored and exploited in educational contexts" (p. 181), as does the author of this book, Dr. Glenda Rose. Lund's article is based on a longitudinal study of Norwegian teachers of English, and he discusses "the implications of teaching in and across multiple contexts that emerge in technology-rich environments" (p. 181).

Lund (2006) refers to the multiplicity of contexts in online environments—in which a class of a dozen language learners can be in a dozen different countries, all at the same time, and in real time—as *polycontexts*, and he refers to teaching in terms of didactics: "A future-oriented EFL didactics will have to embrace practices

we—paradoxically—cannot predict today. Didactics as a boundary object has to prepare for unexpected outcomes as learning becomes increasingly polycontextual” (p. 199).

In addition to the notion of *online as a context*, another distinctive feature of this book is that it does not follow the template used by other books in this English In Context series, because of the differences between physical, brick-and-mortar classrooms and those in which physical constraints no longer define what is a classroom, a lesson, or a course. Therefore, after introducing herself in the opening chapter, Dr. Rose goes on to summarize the current global context of online language learning, including up-to-date facts and figures about Internet access in different countries.

In Chapter 3, Dr. Rose presents an overview of adult ESL online in the United States, using five students (Jack, Claudia, Maria, Tuan, and Edna, whose names have been changed to preserve their privacy) to illustrate a number of important points, and Chapter 4 focuses on teaching and learning English online, specifically at the tertiary level in the United States. Chapter 5 presents another clear and concise summary, this time of adult education and workplace English language learning and teaching online in the United States. In terms of the socio-economic aspects of adult language education in the United States, Dr. Rose notes that the “English language students [she] taught in publicly funded programs worked hard, but they were generally living below the poverty level in the United States” (p. 24).

In Chapter 6, which describes social media lessons, tutoring, and webinar classes for students learning English online, Dr. Rose highlights the fact that being able to work with students all over the world, at the same time and in real time, from the comfort of her home in the United States “is a context unique to the digital age” (p. 31). In Chapter 7, she dares to peer into the virtual crystal ball and make some tentative predictions about some possible futures for English language teaching online. In the eighth and final chapter, in relation to the scale and scope of ELT online, she notes that, in 2014, “a quick Google search will give you 432 million hits in less than 1 second if you type in ‘online English courses’” (p. 48).

During my years of teaching online MA TESOL classes through Anaheim University, based in California, in the United States (not *at* AU, as I have never been there), I noticed that even the most advanced technological tools are just that: tools. As Dr. Rose puts it in her conclusion: “For language instruction, I strongly believe the personal touch cannot be overstated. Language is meant for communication, and while computers can simulate this interaction, they fall short of producing meaningful social and emotional relationships. My final reflection is to remind myself and you, my reader, that technology is a tool. We are the teachers” (pp. 49).

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