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The Individual as a Context

We have been working together for the past 5 years as part of the leadership of the language teaching and learning organization (LTO) in Barranquilla, Colombia, that is described in this book. Each of us is a dedicated teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL), but we also have grown professionally to the point that we feel it is time to give back to the profession. That is one of the reasons why we decided to write this book.

Kathleen A. Corrales

Born and raised in the intercultural Washington, D.C., area, I was always interested in knowing people from different cultures. After discarding the idea of becoming an astronomer (because of my lack of math skills), I felt drawn to education. However, it was not until high school, when I had the opportunity to travel to Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Chile, that I was able to refine which area of education to go into. These international opportunities instilled in me a love for the Spanish language and the Hispanic people whom I wanted to work with in the future. At the same time, I wanted to give back to my world and help others. Therefore, I decided to go into the field of TESOL. To begin this process, during my last year of high school, I volunteered as a peer tutor in an English as a second language (ESL) classroom.

Because TESOL was offered only as a master's degree at that time, I decided to pursue my undergraduate degree in Spanish with a minor in education, including a K-12 certification, because I knew I would need the theoretical background in education and, to work in Latin America, I would need to know the language. As soon as I finished my undergraduate degree, I began studying for my master's degree in TESOL in the United States.

In keeping with my plan to live abroad, my first job after graduating with my MA in TESOL was at a binational center in Barranquilla, Colombia. After teaching for a year at that institution, I was hired by the LTO that is described in this

book. During this time, I met and married a Colombian and after a year decided to move back to the United States. In the United States, I continued to work with language learners, teaching content-based ESL (science and language arts) to seventh graders in a public school system. After years in the United States, my family decided to move back to Colombia.

On returning to Barranquilla, I was rehired as a full-time English teacher in the LTO where I still work. Slowly, my role as a leader in the institution began to evolve. In addition to teaching, I became the assistant to the academic coordinator. At the same time, I became involved in teaching in the Post-Graduate Diploma for English Language Teaching Program, developing the curriculum and materials for the Business English Program, conducting research, and carrying out other projects. Then I was hired as coordinator for the undergraduate Business English Program. As the LTO grew, so did the programs under my charge, which now include all of the language programs offered with credits: Business English, International Relations English, and English for Business Administration and Accounting.

English for specific purposes (ESP), business English, and content-based instruction have become my passion, and I have presented at both national and international conferences on these topics, including at TESOL's convention, the CLIL Symposium, and the Association for Business Communication. As English has become an international language and often the lingua franca of the global market, I believe that the combining of both language and content will only increase. I hope to continue to work in this field and contribute to its growth.

Erica Ferrer Ariza

Passion, in different ways, was what initially made me fall in love with English and it is what has kept me working in the field of EFL for almost 20 years. My passion for music as a teenager motivated me to learn English so I could understand the lyrics of the music that I liked at that time. This, added to the passion I have always had for helping others and working with people, influenced my decision to study language teaching. Therefore, I completed a BA in education with an emphasis on modern languages in Colombia.

Later on, my passion for exploring cultural diversity and my desire to advance my professional studies took me to Liverpool, England, where I completed an MA in language teaching and learning. Through this experience, I fell in love with exploring the complexity and uniqueness of language in different contexts and cultures. As a result, I became fascinated by language and language teaching as I learned about corpus analysis, lexical relations, discourse analysis, functional grammar, patterns in texts, and many other issues that help us represent and understand the world.

As a teacher, I have had the opportunity to work at different levels of education, from elementary school to high school to higher education. This experience of working with learners of different ages has given me a broad picture of what

language teaching and learning is—the challenges that each age group faces when learning a language and the role of the teacher for each group. This has helped me grow as a professional, has made me aware of the particular needs of the learners, and has prepared me for the position I now hold.

The passion to grow professionally and experience new challenges led me to apply for a teaching position in the LTO described in this book. For over 14 years, I have worked at this institution in different positions that have ranged from teaching in different programs (Junior English, General English, Business English, and special content-based English courses) to designing courses tailored to learners' needs, teaching and coordinating special teacher training projects, and coordinating English programs. Currently, I am in charge of coordinating the General Undergraduate English Program and the Medical English Program offered to undergraduate students enrolled at the university. As a program coordinator, I have an administrative and academic responsibility to ensure that these programs run as expected. Therefore, I work with teachers, review curriculum and evaluations, and observe classes as well as other logistics activities.

The same passion that has brought me thus far is the same passion that I see moving me toward new challenges. In the future, I will continue working to improve the programs I am in charge of, begin my PhD studies, and lead language educational processes for the benefit of my region and my country.

Lourdes Rey Paba

Born and raised in Barranquilla, my relationship to teaching came very early in life as my family has a long tradition in the field. Also, in the 1970s, when I was born, teaching was traditionally a woman's job in Colombia, and most of my aunts and female cousins became teachers. As my role models, from a very young age, I wanted to follow their path.

But a teacher of what? At that time, I was not sure. This decision came a little later in my life, when my family and I had to select the high school where I was going to continue my education. The first option was an institution that was well recognized because of its quality and because students had the opportunity to learn eight languages (Spanish, English, French, German, Italian, Latin, Greek, and Russian). I was fascinated with the idea and worked hard to get accepted. There I met the most amazing language teachers that shaped my life and helped me decide to become a language teacher.

In pursuing my goal, I completed a BA in education with an emphasis in modern languages in Colombia. After graduating, I thought it was time to see the world and embarked on a teaching exchange program with the British Council, which gave me the opportunity to live and teach in England for 1 year. There I improved my English and worked as a Spanish language assistant. This was a very enriching experience because I had the opportunity to meet people from all around the world.

After returning to Colombia, I started my postgraduate studies in the teaching of EFL and reconnected with one of my former English teachers from my high school. She had an important position in the LTO where I work now, and she offered me the opportunity to teach some English classes, so I started as an adjunct and 2 years later I became a full-time teacher. Since then, I have been working on curricular and materials design, research projects, and teaching. In 2000, I became the academic coordinator of the LTO. This position has provided me with not only challenges, but also opportunities to grow as a professional. Since I have been here, I have actively participated in projects sponsored by the Colombian Ministry of Education focused on strengthening EFL in the country and the region as well as promoting Colombia as a Spanish-learning destination. I am also a member of several teacher associations, I have presented at international events such as those hosted by TESOL and the American Association for Applied Linguistics, and I have published articles. But the most rewarding of all my experiences has been my role as a teacher educator. This has given me the opportunity to meet many teachers and help them, in a way, to achieve their dreams.

I would like to continue my studies and gain my PhD, although I know this would be difficult and would require changes. I also would like to continue contributing to the professional growth of English language teachers and the consolidation of our profession in Colombia.