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Series Editor's Preface

In September 2008, *The Guardian* newspaper in England described David Foster Wallace as “the most brilliant writer of his generation.” In its tribute to him, following his death by suicide at the age of 46, *The Guardian* presented a now well-known story that Wallace told at the beginning of his commencement speech to a graduating class at Kenyon College in Ohio:

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys, how’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?” (para. 1)

That water is what this series is about. As Wallace’s story illustrates so eloquently and so succinctly, when we are immersed in our context all the time, we stop noticing what we are surrounded by. Or if we were aware of it at some point in the past, we stopped noticing it some time ago. Wallace went on to explain that “the immediate point of the fish story is that the most obvious, ubiquitous, important realities are often the ones that are the hardest to see and talk about” (para. 2).

The writers in this series were asked to step back from the English language teaching (ELT) and learning contexts that they are most familiar with and look at those contexts with fresh eyes. But why do this? There are many reasons for reflecting on, exploring, and writing about our contexts, one of the most important of which relates to what we do every day as TESOL professionals and how we do it. As Diane Larsen-Freeman (2000) puts it,

a method is decontextualized. How a method is implemented in the classroom is going to be affected not only by who the teacher is, but also who the students are, the students’ and their teacher’s expectations of appropriate social roles, the institutional constraints and demands, and factors connected to the wider sociocultural context in which the instruction takes place. (p. x)

It is that wider context that we are exploring in this series.

To enable them to step back from contexts they are so familiar with, each writer was asked to follow a template, starting with the notion that individuals are a context in and of themselves. Therefore, in Chapter 1, the writers introduce themselves to the readers and explain how they came to be where they are now, doing what they do as, as TESOL professionals. This also helps address the notions of objectivity and subjectivity, as we cannot be objective about ourselves or those things we care about, have an opinion on, know well, and so on. All we can do is to be as objective as we can be about our own subjectivities, which is another function of the first chapter.

In Chapter 2, the authors summarize English language teaching and learning at the national level in their country, with a focus on the level of learners they are working with (e.g., students at the college or university level). Chapter 3 looks at ELT at the local level in each country, and Chapter 4 describes the particular language teaching and learning organization (LTO) where the authors work. To help our readers get as deep an understanding of the context as possible, the Chapters 5 and 6 present “A Day in the Life of a Teacher” and “A Day in the Life of a Learner” at the authors’ LTOs. We realize, of course, that there is no “typical” teacher or learner, as everyone is unique. So a composite of a number of teachers and learners is presented in each of those chapters, to help readers walk in the shoes of those in the LTO and to give readers a strong sense of the day-to-day realities of life inside and outside the LTO, which are often not written about, published, or presented.

In terms of context, having moved from the national and local levels to the institutional and individual levels, the authors were asked to go back to *The Big Picture*, using the focus question: What could readers from other LTOs, that are like yours but that are in another context or country, learn that would help them in their daily work in their own context or country? For example, if the book is about working with adult learners in one part of the Arabic-speaking world, what could TESOL professionals working with adults in other Arabic-speaking parts of the world learn from reading the book that would help them in their particular context? Or what could readers working with adult Arabic-speaking students outside the Arabic-speaking world (e.g., in the United States) learn that would help them? In the final chapter, the authors were asked to give a brief reflective account of what they learned from writing the book, about their own context and about the contexts of others.

These books are also aimed at TESOL professionals who are considering working in LTOs in the contexts and countries described in the series and who need a clear, concise, and up-to-date account of what it is like to live and work there. One of the challenges of doing that is the fact that teaching and learning contexts are changing all the time, some more quickly and more dramatically than others. However, taking that constraint into account, our goal has been to create a series of books that remind us of the importance of the professional

waters in which we swim every day, and to help prepare those who may wish to join us in these particular English language teaching and learning contexts.

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Introduction

In 1976, the British Council published one of its *English Language Teaching Profiles* on Brazil. At that time, the writers of the 16-page booklet noted:

In 1968 the Brazilian government launched major university reforms, and the situation is still fluid. Portuguese is the official language of Brazil and English is learned as a foreign language for international communication, occasionally as a medium of instruction, as a tool for study and academic and professional advancement, and for certain cultural, social and prestige purposes. (p. 1)

In many ways, the situation in Brazil today is still “fluid”—economically, socially and politically—and English is still seen as a tool for advancement as well as for the purposes of prestige.

In terms of English language teaching (ELT) in Brazil today, it is interesting to see what has changed and what remains much the same since the British Council published its booklet 40 years ago. For example, today, as in 1976, “the value of English as an acquired skill is enormous, and it is the most frequently taught foreign language” (p. 1). The historical snapshot also noted that “the most effective English teaching occurs outside the school system in the private sector” (p. 1). According to the authors of this book in the *ELT In Context* series, Isabela Villas Boas and Katy Cox, that last statement is also still true. In this book, the reasons for it still being true after four decades are presented and discussed in relation to Brazil’s private, nonprofit language teaching and learning sector.

In many contexts, *private* and *for profit* are connoted, in the same way that *public* and *nonprofit* are similarly associated. However, in Brazil, as in some other contexts, it is possible that one of the most important and influential developments in ELT in the past 40 to 50 years has been the establishment and growth of private, nonprofit language teaching and learning organizations (LTOs). It is also possible that such LTOs—when run professionally and pedagogically well—can

bring together the best of both worlds, privately funded and publically available language education.

Nearly 20 years after the British Council booklet was published, Palo Kol and Steve Stoyhoff (1995) published “A Status Report on English Language Teaching Brazil” as part of a series titled TESOL Around the World. Kol and Stoyhoff concluded that “there are large differences between teachers employed in public schools and those employed in private language academies in terms of quality of language education” (p. 5). According Boas and Cox, that is another statement that remains largely true. Therefore, some important questions to ask are: Why are such statements still true after all this time, and after so much else has changed in Brazil during that time? What has improved? What still needs to happen? Boas and Cox give a number of insights that help answer those, and other, questions.

Moving from ELT in Brazil in 1976 and 1995 to more recently, in 2010, the *Brazilian English Language Teaching Journal* was launched, which showed how far ELT in Brazil had come, from the brief booklets and one-page reports of the 1970s and 1990s to an online journal focused specifically on ELT in Brazil. It is worth noting that the first article in the first volume of the *Brazilian English Language Teaching Journal*, by Everton Vinicius de Santa (2010), was titled “Foreign Teacher Education and Its Influences Under the Light of Autobiographic Narratives.” In the introduction to the article, de Santa states:

In the process of teaching/learning a second language, educators’ beliefs act meaningfully in their performance, in their pedagogical choices, and in the student/educator interaction. These beliefs can be modified over new experiences, since during his or her undergraduate course, the student-teachers have the opportunity to experience many different school settings. (p. 5)

Although this book is not about foreign language teacher education in Brazil, there is a strong element of “autobiographic narrative” in this book, as there is in all the books in this ELT In Context series. This is deliberate, as one of the distinctive contributions this series aims to make is to put the context and the writers at center of the series, as opposed to other books that focus on the methodologies, materials, technologies, postcolonial politics, and positioning of ELT. Those aspects of ELT do appear, however, in one form or another, in all of the books in this series. But instead of simply paying lip service to the importance of context, and instead of obscuring the writers in an attempt to present the writings as being objective in some pseudoscientific fashion, we have deliberately and purposefully placed the context and the writers’ experiences of that context at the center of these books.

In July 2015, the five countries forming the BRICS groups of emerging national economies held their seventh summit. The original four countries in that group—Brazil, Russia, India and China—were joined by South Africa in

2010. The population of those five countries is approaching 3 billion, which is nearly 40% of the entire world's population. As part of the BRICS group, the first meeting of which was in 2006, Brazil has continued, and will continue, to play an increasingly important role in the new world order, which means that English will also continue to grow in Brazil. Therefore, for anyone interested in learning more about ELT in the world's fifth-largest country, both by geographical area and by population, this book will serve as a clear, concise, and up-to-date guide.

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