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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 *ELT In Context* 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

The idea that *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* comes from the title of the autobiographical novel by Han Suyin (born Rosalie Matilda Kuanghu Chou, who changed her name to Elizabeth Comber), first published in 1952. That was followed, in 1955, by a movie of the same title (in which the Eurasian lead character was played by American actress Jennifer Jones), which eventually became a soap opera on U.S. television in the 1960s. Many years later, in the first edition of her book *A Handbook for Language Program Administrators*, TESOL International Association Past President MaryAnn Christison (1997) drew on those references for the title of the opening chapter, in which she described an intensive English program (IEP) as “a many-splendored thing” (p. 1).

According to the online Oxford Dictionary, *many-splendored* means “full of magnificent features or marvels,” and although adjectives such as *magnificent* and *marvelous* do not usually come to mind when talking or writing about IEPs, that idea was also the starting point of an article on IEPs by Amy Thompson, published in *TESOL Journal* in 2013. Her article, “Intensive English Programs in the United States: An Overview of Structure and Mentoring,” focuses on mentoring in ESL programs in universities in the United States but also highlights many of the challenges facing IEPs in U.S. universities.

This book in the ELT In Context series, by Rosemary Orlando, sheds more and new light on the ongoing challenges faced by IEPs in U.S. universities, which has been a recurring theme in the literature for many years. For example, in 1993, Steve Stoyneff wrote a brief piece, published in *TESOL Journal*, titled “Ethics and Intensive English Programs.” According to Stoyneff, in spite of the fact that

the IEP administrator is charged with making decisions that have tremendous significance for people, programs, and monetary resources . . . few have the training that prepares them for the decisions they must make. Most have been trained in second language learning and teaching and not in management. (p. 4)

In terms of leadership and management training for language educators, little appears to have improved in this area in the decades since Stoyhoff's article, as I noted recently: "Still today, in 2014, I meet very few IEP administrators who say they have had such training, although there may perhaps be more training provided now than there used to be" (Curtis, 2014, para. 6).

Continuing the theme of the challenges faced by U.S. university IEPs, in 1997 Carlin noted:

The concept of marginality can be applied to IEPs on a number of fronts: English language programs are often departmentally segregated from other educational units, ESL students are rarely mainstreamed with their native-speaking peers, and ESL professionals usually have different academic roles than their colleagues in more traditional disciplines. (p. 50)

Similarly, Thompson (2013) noted that one "possible reason for the lack of research in ESL programs [in U.S. universities] is the unfortunate phenomenon of the marginalization of these programs in the university setting" (p. 213).

This notion of the marginalization of IEPs at U.S. universities is picked up and expanded on in this book. For example, in Chapter 2, Orlando explains, "One of the administrative challenges of being the chair or director of an IEP at a U.S. university is to advocate for the students and to help others understand the nature of an IEP" (p. 10). She goes on to explain that "oftentimes the IEP is frequently misunderstood even on its own campus" (p. 10), and she gives the example that "because international students may need extra time to complete a transaction due to language and/or cultural difficulties, university staff may appear unwelcoming or impatient because of the extra effort involved" (p. 10).

Addressing the "lack of research" referred to by Thompson (2013) is one of the goals of this EIC series, but not from the usual data-based approach used by Thompson and others, in which, for example, "a questionnaire was distributed electronically to the 67 accredited university ESL programs found on the University and College Intensive English Programs website, with 20 of the questionnaires returned" (p. 211). Although data-based research studies such as Thompson's and others are useful, and although the books in this EIC series are thoroughly researched by the authors—this book, for example, draws on more than 50 works published over the span of more than 20 years—it is the experiences of the author, and the students she works with, and the context in which that takes place, that is central, rather than surveys, questionnaire data, and so on.

Another aspect of this EIC series that makes the series distinctive is the focus on the uniqueness of each context, of each teacher and each learner in that context. Thompson (2013) highlights this in the conclusion of her *TJ* article: "Because of the complex nature of ESL programs in university settings both in the United States and elsewhere, there cannot be a 'one size fits all' model for program structures and the mentoring programs" (p. 227). Thompson also

touches on one of the groups of readers in mind when this EIC series was created, namely, recently qualified teachers entering a context that they may be familiar with—and even a product of—but about which they may still have much to learn: “The concept of the widely variable ESL program is crucial to understand, not only for those currently working in IEPs but also for graduate students in the process of becoming language teachers” (p. 227).

This book, then, has the potential to be of use to a wide range of readers, from those at the beginning of their professional lives, as language teachers working in U.S. university IEPs, to new managers of such programs, who have come into program management from teaching, with little or no management training. This book may also be of use to experienced managers, administrative staff, and teachers in IEPs, not only those in U.S. universities, but also those in IEPs elsewhere in the world, facing similar and increasingly global challenges.

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