



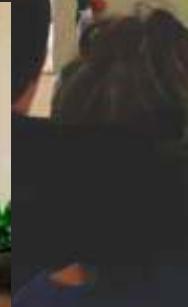
# Empowered women in ELT: a collection of worldwide stories

# Leticia Araceli Salas Serano

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Grazzia María Mendoza Chirinos

## Editors



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# **Empowered women in ELT: a collection of worldwide stories**



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Leticia Araceli Salas Serrano  
Grazzia María Mendoza Chirinos  
Editors

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# Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the opportunity to start this project which stemmed from the need we found in women worldwide of being heard, seen, and recognized by the way they have faced challenges. While we set out a pathway with clear guidelines for our book, we were happily surprised by the magical, emotional, and reflective journey we got to travel with 31 amazing women from all over the globe. We were faced and got immersed into learning about women's realities that really made us reflect on our own experiences.

This project would not have been possible without the brave voices of these amazing women authors who shared their thoughts, wisdom, and lives with us and the readers of this book. We want to thank each one of them for raising their voices for all of us, ELT women in the world, for sharing their journey, for reflecting about their lives and for becoming vulnerable so everyone can learn, but above all be inspired. We thank them for letting us see the beautiful and challenging side of their journeys and putting it out there as a service to the field, so others can relate, see themselves in their journey and become inspired to go in their own life travel. We wish we could hug each of them and say, "thank you".

Our gratitude also goes to our families for the long nights and days we were away from them during a year to put this wonderful volume together. Also, we thank our readers, editors, and each other. Our friendship has grown bigger and deeper, and it's become woven in these stories that have made us laugh, cry, and think about the beauty of our past, present, and future. We thank the RELO based in Mexico for trusting us and motivating us.

Thank you to each person who has contributed to turn this project into an amazing reality!

Leticia Araceli Salas Serrano and Grazzia María Mendoza Chirinos

Puebla, Mexico and Tegucigalpa, Honduras

September, 2023

# Presentation

**S**tories are the makeup of our world, no matter our field or professional journeys. A story is always present behind a face and there are many powerful stories behind the faces of English Language Teachers, especially female teachers. Sharing our stories brings us closer and let us be more empathic to each other's challenges and to be ready to celebrate each other's success. Through the years, women meet in different places with different purposes, but a common necessity emerges; the need to listen to each other and know we are heard and better yet that we are not alone. This is how this book began. We wanted to hear, read, live the stories of women worldwide. We sent an open invitation to women to submit their stories, we asked them to organize their stories in I. Background, II. Empowerment and leadership development, and III. Looking into the future. While they reflected on their journeys, we wanted them to have the freedom to talk and share what was important for them. This book collects the contributions of amazing women worldwide who share about their context, the challenges along the way and their success to be the empowered women they are today.

This collection of stories in ELT has two things in common, the stories of women worldwide and the passion for teaching language. When these elements blend, they produce stories of overcoming challenges, developing strength, and growing despite life circumstances. What we have found by collecting these stories is that women have more in common and we can all relate to these stories one way or the other. When women gather, there is an energy that creates and heals.

We hope that readers find themselves in these stories and that the stories of these amazing women serve as an inspiration to heal hearts and souls and to create a better world, a more educated world, a more empowered world for all of us.

Leticia Araceli Salas Serrano and Grazzia María Mendoza Chirinos

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# Foreword

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**A**s I sit down to write this foreword for a remarkable collection of essays written by thirty exceptional women, I find myself humbled and honoured. Araceli Salas and Grazzia Mendoza, the dedicated editors of this volume, approached me with a request that stirred a mix of emotions within me. I felt humbled by the opportunity to contribute to a project of such significance, but I also felt a sense of trepidation, for what could I possibly add to the stories of these amazing women? Nevertheless, I accepted the challenge, recognizing the importance of amplifying the voices and narratives of empowered women from diverse backgrounds and contexts.

When we embark on a journey through the pages of this remarkable book, we encounter a tapestry of narratives that weave together the experiences of teacher educators, immigrants, mothers, researchers, travellers, more than 30 extraordinary women who have fearlessly embraced their unique paths, defied societal expectations, and shattered barriers to achieve their goals. Their stories are testaments to resilience, strength, and the transformative power of education.

Araceli and Grazzia, the editors of this volume, have curated a collection of essays that spans the globe, capturing the diverse experiences of women living and working in different countries, from Mexico to Syria, from Cape Verde to Tanzania, from Germany to the United States. Through their lived experiences, these women have navigated the complexities of language teaching in diverse forms, harnessing their personal and collective pasts to shape an empowering future. Their stories serve as a beacon of hope, protection, warmth, and encouragement, not just for women but for anyone seeking inspiration and strength.

Key concepts reverberate throughout these narratives. The notion that “leadership is not chosen, it chooses us” emerges as a guiding principle, reminding us that leadership is not confined to formal positions of authority. Instead, it flourishes in the everyday actions of individuals who make a difference in their families, communities, and the wider world.

Another concept that emerges prominently is the need to be bold in all that we do. These women have confronted all sorts of challenges, from gender discrimination, to dominant native speaker ideologies or being Muslim immigrant women in the United States to name but a few. Their stories embody the spirit of fearlessness, urging us to step outside our comfort zones, speak up against injustice, and embrace our own agency.

The contributors also shed light on the significance of solidarity, collaboration, and community-building. By creating supportive networks, nurturing relationships, and engaging in powerful collaborations, these

women have cultivated leadership and effectuated change. They demonstrate that true empowerment arises not from competition, but from collective action and the creation of inclusive spaces.

Moreover, the authors emphasize the importance of well-being as an essential aspect of empowerment. They remind us that caring for oneself is not a selfish act but a prerequisite for sustained activism. They advocate for emotional well-being, recognizing the significance of addressing trauma and fostering a supportive environment that embraces vulnerability and nurtures personal growth.

As I immersed myself in the essays, one section stood out to me: “Looking forward into the future.” It is within these reflections that I discovered the seeds of growth, transformation, and empowerment. The notion of projective professionalism emerges as a driving force for growth and transformation. These women envision empowered selves, driven by research, continuous learning, and the propagation of best practices. They are boundary-pushers, change-makers, and advocates for equity in education. By foregrounding these values, they strive to create a future that is characterized by inclusive and transformative educational practices.

This book has the potential to become an empowering and thought-provoking pedagogical resource, offering future educators insights into the experiences of diverse women in ELT. Furthermore, the impact of this book can extend beyond formal education settings, encouraging individuals to share their own stories in various languages and formats, expanding the narrative on women in language education.

As I conclude this foreword, I am filled with a sense of excitement for the future as well as gratitude. The stories within this volume are catalysts for change, affirmations of strength, and invitations to action. Let us embrace the lessons and wisdom offered by these amazing women and work together to create a world where gender equality, justice, and empowerment are the cornerstones of education and society.

As a female Latin American teacher of English, I am immensely grateful to Araceli Salas and Grazzia Mendoza for the opportunity to contribute with this foreword. To the readers, I urge you to immerse yourself in the stories within these pages, to listen, learn, and be inspired. May these personal narratives inspire and ignite the flame of empowerment within each and every one of us.

# Leadership is not chosen, it chooses us

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## I.- Background

I come from a poor family in El Salvador, a country with a high rate of adolescent pregnancy and limited access to quality education. According to Cortez et al., (2015), "in 2011, El Salvador was ranked among the 50 countries with the highest adolescent fertility rates in the world (p. 4)." As a result, many of our teachers did not have high expectations of us. For example, my writing teacher taught us how to knit baby shoes and hats instead of teaching the content from the national program. She expected some of us to become pregnant before finishing high school. The worst part is when the same teachers become aggressors. When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, one of my classmates got pregnant. The father of her baby was our science teacher. My classmate had to stop attending classes because the religious school we attended did not allow mothers to have classes with regular students. The teacher still works at the school. He married my former classmate. Even though I grew up in this environment, my parents instilled a love of learning in me. They had high expectations and cared about my wellbeing.

My parents were always involved in my education. Since my siblings and I were little, my mom and dad would read stories to us and question us about them. They would encourage our critical thinking asking us how we would react to the different scenarios. Klass and August (2015) stated that "children

who were exposed to more books and home reading showed significantly more activity in the areas of the brain that process visual association (para. 6)." Having this reading time is one of my favorite memories as a kid and it has shaped the way I process ideas and question information. My parents would ask me about my day at school and review the lesson in the afternoons to help me with my homework. Even during times of war and displacement, they always made sure we had time to study. They always emphasized the power of education. They believed in me and my abilities to succeed. Their love and support built the foundation of the leader I am now.

I have taught at all educational levels. My first job was at a preschool in a small private school. I had just completed my second year of college and I was only 18 years old. I have been a teacher for more than 20 years. I have coordinated English Language programs; taught children, teenagers, and adults; designed English programs; and more. Nowadays, I mostly train teachers. Since I decided to study English Language Teaching, I knew I wanted to train teachers because I wanted to make a greater impact on them. I always tell my participants that each of them represents at least 200 children. The only way I can make sure they get quality education is through them. I know firsthand how it feels to have unmotivated teachers. Therefore, I remind my participants that teaching is not just a job, but a calling. I tell them that students care about the lesson when they feel a teacher cares about them. I also make sure they know how important their words and actions are for their students' motivation. Students might or might not remember a grammar point, but they will always remember how the teacher made them feel. I focus a lot on developing my participants' emotional intelligence as I believe it forms the foundation for creating a community of learning.

I mainly work on professional development for teachers in private schools. During 2021 and 2022, I was the president of the US Alumni Association. I managed different projects to improve quality education, professional skills building, and gender equality. By the end of 2022, I submitted a project to the US

embassy in El Salvador for a Capacity Building Crash Course to support English Language Teachers who studied the program (a three-year certification) during the pandemic. As a result, they lack the English language competencies to pass the TOEFL, which is a graduation requirement. In addition to that, they are lacking in their knowledge of teaching methodology and skills development. Thankfully, I was awarded the grant and I am currently training about 30 participants. This is a great opportunity for them to develop the skills they need to become effective teachers. I plan to continue working on projects that benefit English teaching in public schools.

Becoming a leader has not been easy. There have been many decisive moments in my career, and I have made some strategic decisions. However, one of the decisions that led me to have my first leadership position was to quit a job I had. In 2006, I used to work for a Technical Institute on an hourly basis. There was no job stability and the number of courses to teach was often given arbitrarily. One day I realized some coworkers were being interviewed for a coordination assistant position that I had not been informed of. I asked to speak to my immediate boss, who was also my friend, to find out why I had not been considered for the position when my TOEIC score was the highest, my students' quality surveys were excellent and I had demonstrated my loyalty to the institution. He looked me in the eye and said: "I don't see you leading people." I froze. I could not believe that the coordinator who had seen me working long hours designing materials and helping others with their resources and lesson plans could think I was not a leader. What was I lacking? Where had I missed my chance? At first, I felt sad and betrayed. Then, I decided to leave. When your talents are not appreciated, it is time to find a new place to shine.

Leadership is not chosen, it chooses us. After leaving my job, I worked for a call center for a year. Then, I was contacted from the university where I worked on Saturdays to offer me a full-time position. I immediately accepted. After I had worked for a year, the Director of the School of Languages asked me to take the coordination position for the Saturday pro-

gram. The previous coordinator had been toxic, and the work environment was very affected. He told me the teachers had written a letter and wanted to sit with authorities to express their concerns. I asked him to wait for a month. I told him I wanted the teachers to experience my leadership. If they still were upset, I would happily sit down and get to agreements with them. After a month, the school culture had completely changed. Teachers felt valued and respected. They loved working for the institution and even volunteered to help outside their working hours. There was a team-work spirit. It felt like a healthy professional community. After some months coordinating the Saturday program, my boss asked me to take on the Intensive English Language program. I remember telling him: "I know you are giving me this opportunity because you have no one else (still doubting of my leadership skills). I accept the challenge, but I will need help." He agreed to hire a coordination assistant who I mentored to become the coordinator when I left for my Fulbright scholarship to study a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. I was not expecting to lead more than 30 teachers and hundreds of students.

My leadership skills have been questioned several times, not only because of my gender but also because of the type of leader I am. In a country where we are often led by authoritarian leaders, it is sometimes questioned when someone leads with their heart. I have always considered myself a transformational and collaborative leader. I focus on building strong relationships with my team members, fostering a sense of collaboration and teamwork, and creating a positive and productive work environment. I strive to make each member of the team feel heard and included. This has led some to believe that I might be a people-pleaser, or that I am simply trying to be liked. Actually, I am trying to understand my staff's needs and concerns in order to build a community that nurtures their growth and develops their abilities. When doubts about my leadership abilities arise, I collect data. I used to have an anonymous quality survey that allowed teachers to express their ideas and concerns freely. Most of the time, I received very positive comments. As women we question ourselves about our

skills unnecessarily when what we need to do is ask for constructive feedback. Most women would be surprised at the amount of positive feedback they would receive. Do not let fear stop you from leading. Keep leading despite self-doubt and fear.

Before others recognize us as leaders, we must see ourselves as leaders. This is easier said than done. Women tend to avoid confrontations, making hard decisions, and giving direct orders. As I have taken on different leadership roles, I have had to push myself to do the things that I did not want to do as a leader. For example, I had to terminate staff members who did not meet expectations. This may sound harsh, but before being terminated, they received all the support the department could provide. Thanks to my experience in the call center, I established a three-month learning period for new teachers. During this time, they shadowed seasoned teachers with more experience on our methodology and school culture. They had one-on-one sessions with me to discuss lesson plans and class methodology and were evaluated through a quality survey by their students midway through the module and at the end of the module to provide an opportunity to observe changes in methodology instead of having only a final evaluation. After the three-month adaptation period, we sat down and reviewed their progress. If there was no change in the students' reviews and class observations, teachers were informed that they were not meeting the expectations and had to be let go. The teachers I had to terminate thanked me for the adaptation process. They knew they lacked the experience and training to meet the level of performance required for the English Language Program, but they appreciated the support they had received. We informed them that they could re-apply to the program after a period when they felt ready to meet the requirements. Even difficult tasks such as terminating people can become more manageable when your leadership is people-centered but based on principles. In conclusion, my message is to be confident in your abilities as a leader, do not be afraid to seek help, and mentor others to take on leadership roles. We need more women leaders. We are setting an example. We are creating a nurturing path.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

There are two challenges that have defined me as a leader. First, during my Fulbright scholarship, I became an international student advocate. Second, when I became the president of the US Alumni Association in El Salvador, I transformed the association culture.

When I was studying for my master's program, I experienced homesickness like never before. It was a form of depression that left me feeling incredibly sad. I sought support from the International Office but felt that they were not providing me with the necessary resources to help me with my mental health. I continued to feel worse until I was invited to an international café hosted by a local church. They provided international students with dinners on Friday nights, which was a moment to interact with other international students. When I arrived, I felt so happy. I had not met with other students and had felt isolated. Now, I was surrounded by people who understood how I felt and were interested in listening to me. As I learned from their stories, I realized we were all feeling homesick, and it was more of an institutional failure than an isolated case. I became part of the Bold Future Workshops, where the new president of the university listened to students, professors, and community members express their ideas and concerns to create a plan to improve the university. The new president had a vision of bringing more international students to the university as they enriched the community and paid out-of-state tuition, which helped the economy of the university and community. As I started speaking up about my concerns and challenges, he became interested in my story. I was even selected to deliver a speech at the closing ceremony for the Bold Future Workshops. He asked me to discuss my ideas with the vice-provost and share some insights to improve the experience for international students. I even founded an association named Global Student Organization to provide a safe place for local and international students to learn about different cultures. When faced with homesickness, I could have locked myself in my room and cried, but instead I sought solutions outside of my comfort zone. We must be brave and face our fears for the greater good.

As I came back to El Salvador, I wanted to be an active member of the US Alumni Association. However, despite emailing my information several times, I did not receive invitations to events or much information about the association. One day during the pandemic, a post appeared on my feed. The association was asking for candidates to run as board members, and I decided to apply. During the pandemic, I had taken some time to reflect on my impact after returning to El Salvador. Although I was very happy with my new job, I felt I was not doing enough for my country. Additionally, I understood the importance of female representation in leadership positions, which motivated me to apply for the president position. Kurtz-Costes et al. (as cited in Hill, & Wheat, 2017) "suggest that individuals need role models who they view as being like themselves with respect to characteristics like gender and race in order to be able to legitimize women in professional roles (p. 2092)." There is little female representation in leadership positions. For example, "women are only 28 percent as likely to rise to leadership positions as men (Goryanova et al., 2017, p. 16)." However, I did not expect to win. Shockingly, during the election day, I was elected as the new president. After winning the election and becoming the new president of the association, I felt overwhelmed. I lacked experience leading an association. I was working full-time during a global pandemic, and the previous board members did not provide a smooth transition process. Despite these challenges, I relied on my transformational and collaborative leadership style to build connections, create networks, and inspire new leaders. Building trust with the other board members took time, but I eventually succeeded. I became a role model for many young women, who asked me for advice, and I also collaborated with many men who listened to my ideas. Although some board members were initially hesitant to have a female leader, I found ways to persuade them to work towards the association's goals. Serving as the president of the association positioned me as a leader nationwide and allowed me to design and implement projects and training sessions that benefited hundreds of people. Although it required sacrificing time, money, and resources, the satisfaction of making a difference made it all worth it.

In recent years, I have been able to appreciate the support of many people. It is undeniable "the critical role that mentors and role models play in contributing to women's professional advancement (Hill, & Wheat, 2017, p. 1)." One of my greatest supporters is my former teacher, Mike Carranza. We met when I was only 20 years old and I joined his class as a Teacher Assistant. He mentored me and my classmate and provided us with opportunities to practice our teaching skills. He was a great teaching model. I appreciate his support along the years. Dr. Wilkins was my research advisor during my master's studies. She has followed up with my achievements and always supports me in my academic adventures. Fernando Herrera and I had the opportunity to know each other's work and interests better during my time as the president of the US alumni association. We developed a mutual respect for our missions as change agents. Joel Peña has believed in my abilities and allowed me to explore projects and training ideas at his university. I feel supported and valued. Dr. Milton Ascencio was the first in believing in my leadership skills. He could see my potential and allowed to grow as a leader. There are so many more who have given me their advice, support, and recommendations. Behind every great female leader are the countless individuals who believed in her and helped her reach her full potential.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

One of my greatest aspirations is to work on project management that empowers women. Although I have applied for different NGO positions in my country, I have yet to be selected. Unfortunately, gender equality is still a long way off in my country. As a result, I plan to take the initiative by designing grant proposals and applying for US funds to implement women's empowerment initiatives led by me. I firmly believe that one must create opportunities rather than wait for them to come knocking on our door. As a leader, I have learned to be proactive. If I wait for the chance to come to me, many people in need of assistance will continue to suffer.

I am not driven to become a leader for the sake of feeling important. Rather, I aspire to leadership

because it allows me to empower others and effect meaningful change. While some may choose to enact change by standing on the sidelines or following the direction of others, true transformation occurs when one takes responsibility and sparks a movement. By assuming a position of influence, one gains a voice and the ability to amplify the voices of those who require assistance. Such energy can be truly transformative.

I encourage other women who want to thrive in ELT to look beyond their own concerns and see the needs of their students. Many students require special assistance, a caring hand, or simply a listening ear. Some struggle with low self-esteem or are victims of bullying. While you wait for validation to confirm your leadership abilities, these students go unattended. As I previously stated, “Leadership is not chosen, it chooses us.” You are in the right place at the right time to make a significant impact. Do not waste time doubting yourself. Even the smallest change can make a big difference. You do not need to believe in yourself to start leading; you just need to care enough to act. Are you ready to make a positive change in someone’s life?

### Critical thinking leading bullets

- Write your name on a piece of paper. Pass the page around the classroom. Then, have your classmates make a list of your strengths.
- Identify the names of mentors and allies who can help you achieve your goals. Write specific ideas on how they can support you.
- Make a list of current events and issues related to your field and discuss how you can better inform yourself about them.
- Write down a goal you have been postponing. List the reasons you have not started yet. Cross out each excuse and come up with strategies to initiate your progress towards achieving your goal.

Use the Think-Pair-Share strategy. First, female leaders will have some time to think and reflect

on the prompt individually. Then, they will share their ideas with a partner. Finally, they can either share it with the class or in small groups.

### Discussion questions

These discussion questions may help EFL teachers or learners to engage in conversations on inclusion or gender issues and how English can help in promoting equity in the classroom.

1. How did the protagonist’s upbringing shape her views on education and the importance of being a teacher?
2. How does the protagonist prioritize emotional intelligence in teacher training, and why is it important in creating a community of learning?
3. What are some challenges faced by female leaders in your community? How can we work towards promoting more female representation in leadership positions?
4. What can be done to address gender inequality in the workplace, particularly in countries where progress has been slow? How can women empower themselves and others to create change?
5. How can English language teachers use their role to effect meaningful change and empower students to embrace inclusivity and celebrate diversity?
6. How can lessons learned from this text be applied in the classroom or in personal/professional development to promote equity and gender equality?

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# Beyond Borders: An Inspiring Autobiography of an Algerian ELT Leader

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## I.- Background

I am an Algerian teacher, researcher, entrepreneur, and consultant, but at the same time a wife and a mother of four children. It is not easy to evaluate what wearing all these hats means.. The Algerian context, mainly marriage within conservative traditions of the large family in the Kabyle region can be challenging for an ambitious woman like me. In our context, I needed to act as a wife, a daughter-in-law, a sister-in-law, a mother, a daughter, and a social actor for the large family. There have been social liaisons of different sorts with various degrees, but obligations to follow the traditions and make connections on all occasions were indispensable. Another fact that accompanied my life during my journey was a health malaise that made my life suffer from time to time. I had periodic crises related to bones and back aches that sometimes make me unable to move and walk in some instances, but with difficulty to move easily in most cases whenever I overwork (too long seating or standing positions, cold, heat, wind, etc. were all affecting my professional life). Additionally, throughout my career as a teacher-researcher, I faced demanding and challenging situations that made my

professional path so cynical. That is, at the university level, being a doctoral student in Algeria was so complex in terms of supervision, follow-up, and facilities by the university I used to belong to. The doctoral phase of my life was so inscrutable because it was full of doubt and injustice.

I was a victim of injustice and bureaucratic procedures for two and a half years. I submitted my Ph.D. thesis in January 2012 and could defend it in June 2014. There was a struggle with an administration that led me to feel disheartened each time I receive information about my doctoral viva. My ultimate dream at that time was just to get my doctoral degree and add a Dr to my name as any young lady. During my doctoral studies, I was obliged to take care of my family and my research and teaching at the same time, two complicated pregnancies and many responsibilities at a societal level, a pedagogic level, and a research level, with potential health issues from here and then.

## II.- Empowerment and Leadership Development

It should, first, be noted, that my love story with the English language started in middle school when I heard my teacher of English talking, explaining, and singing in English. From then, I decided to excel in this language, and this has become my objective as a student. When I reached the third year of secondary school level, it was the Baccalaureate exam in 1997, getting the exam enables a student in Algeria entry into university. I could succeed in it but, unfortunately, English was not given to me because of my scientific stream and with an average score on the exam. I decided to pass it again as a free candidate but in the literary stream, something I did not follow all along my career. It was so courageous to take such a risk. I also could get a second Baccalaureate exam in 1998 with an average score too, but with a good mark in English. Again, the University accepted me in French, and not English. I decided to make a recourse and insisted with all my strength on English, and finally, I was accepted. And I started my journey of being a BA student of English at Farhat Abbas University, Sétif.

When I graduated from Sétif University in 2003; I directly started my post-graduate studies in educational psychology and teaching languages. At this stage, I was eager to start teaching and making research at the same time. I started teaching part-time in two universities simultaneously (Bejaia and Sétif) but also looking for a job in middle schools and secondary schools. This year was also a year of intense back treatment and rehabilitation sessions in Sétif because of my complicated back aches. I was so enthusiastic that I managed to work in two different cities, with medical follow-up and post-graduate classes at the same time. In 2004, I participated in a conference as a speaker and organising committee member for the first time in my life and this was a nomination of the Dean of the Faculty whose choice was based on my energetic spirit, according to his sayings. It was a successful endeavour, and my presentation was also the sample chosen to be announced on the national TV channel. During this conference, the Dean invited guests from the US embassy and many other professors I dreamed to meet and talk to. It was like a dream to be like them (Remember this detail of dreaming to become like them).

A week later once at Sétif University, I met two of the US embassy's staff members I encountered in Bejaia. I was so delighted to come across them again in another university and on another occasion. Yet, what made me feel happier was that they could remember me very well because I hosted them with a permanent smiling face and a caring attitude. I remember very well what the female agent said: "Nadia, I am very impressed about your energy, working in two universities far from each other, participating in events, and attending gatherings". She looked at her colleague and said: "You can get in touch with Mr D. and we can help". I was so glad even without having a single idea about which kind of help she would provide. My sole intention behind finding an opportunity to talk to them was to practice my English with native speakers. Algeria has no other place for practice apart from the classroom and the teachers who are all Algerians, this was one of the challenges I faced as a learner. I shortly contacted them and surprisingly they offered me a scholarship to the USA. A

fully funded travel to participate in the International Youth Leadership Programme (2004). I could not believe it, but I went right away to my father and told him. It was not easy at that time for a family to allow a girl travel alone to the USA. I remember that my father said: "Look my daughter, it is not that I do not trust you, but the USA is so far and frightening. Anyway, talk to your two brothers". This is to show that female in Algeria and in any Muslim culture needs permission to travel and brothers at home have their word in making decisions, and for me, this is natural and good for my decision-making process. In our culture, there is no notion of leaving home at the age of 18 and making all decisions alone. The woman is always assisted and supported through the presence of a man be it a father, a brother, or a husband. My brothers, surprisingly, were more excited than me and encouraged me to go ahead. I need to mention here that my family was one important factor in my success in my studies and professional identity. My illiterate caring mother did her best to serve her six children all along our studies, who are all successful citizens in life. My tolerant and overt father worked hard and created a safe and equilibrated home. The education we received was equilibrated between studies, faith, and culture. Girls and boys in my family were raised in the same way, and communication was encouraged in almost all topics.

Back to my travel to the USA, it was a so profitable and courteous experience where I could practice my English in the USA and could visit many US states with other ten participants from African, European, and Asian countries. The exchange programme had to do with leadership, and I felt that it was destined for me. Once back, I was more determined than before to move my career to the next level. I finished my Magister thesis, defended it in 2006 at Sétif University; got married a month later, and started my job right away as a full-time teacher. During this first year, I taught many subjects, I had the chance to design a syllabus for the new LMD (Licence/Master/Doctorat), I began my Ph.D., and had my first child. Yet, I started my work with enthusiasm and devotion. The head of the department at that time used to applaud the efficient work and the good quality content I used to offer my first-year students. My work as a teacher

was efficient, and effective. The first years of teaching were devoted to pedagogy and doctoral thesis preparation. My professional context has been satisfactory for most of my career except for the period when I got many harassing attitudes from a colleague. Many obstacles for about twelve years, but my response was "work, work and work!!!". My professional life is so stable because I have all the needed criteria to make me prosper and make a change in my surrounding, just because I created a model of a successful teacher, a reputed academic.

Being a full-time teacher-researcher was my starting point of success. With this status, there are many details to focus on, and as a university teacher, one needs to be alert for change, curious, ambitious, flexible in terms of workload, empathetic, ethical, etc. Let me tell you the road to success for a woman once starting a solid professional career. I generally do not get absent from my courses and meetings. I always care about having good relations with my students and try to offer them all I have during and after my courses. At an administrative level, I never delay my work and attend all the activities and meetings. I focus on details, take notes and search for legislative rules to understand better my professional context. In the 2006-2007 academic year, I attained a great step through my work on the LMD system, integration of the Faculty's Scientific Council (in which I remain a member, just changing the position), and registering for a Ph.D. project. From 2006 to 2012, I was working on my thesis but learning more about research and I started feeling the need to balance pedagogy and research. I travelled to France, Turkey, and Tunisia, I participated in many conferences, I started networking with colleagues nationally and internationally, I published many papers and book chapters, and I dared to organise a national conference in Bejaia in 2012. This conference helped me a lot to develop my competences and made me discover that I can be a manager and a chair.

In 2014; I finally could become a doctor after a long journey. For me, not having a title was an obstacle to leading projects and teaching post-graduate students. I knew that the title is important to prosper.

In 2015, I decided to organise a conference and chair it. This conference made my name reach a large number of researchers in Algeria because of its success. As I started a reviewing experience with a couple of journals, I could collaborate with the Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) to publish the papers. My work as an associate editor to release the special issue made me discover the editing and publication world. I also gained experience in this and started thinking to create my own journal, without having a single idea of how to do so. My idea stems from the struggles I used to have to get published on the one hand, and from the nice journey I had with AWEJ.

Of course, my presence in the Faculty's Scientific Council helped me know more about the importance of ranks and positions in academia, about managing scientific stays, journals, labs, publications, and ethics. However, getting a PhD is a step within the scale. However, in Algeria, you still can do nothing until you get accreditation. I worked hard to get it and I could be accredited with the title of MCA (Maître de conference A), i.e., a senior lecturer in 2016.

The accreditation was not problem-free. When I got the official list of experts, it was appalling news because one of the members can be a fence. I directly thought of the circumstances and the possible solutions. I decided to fight and went to the University of Tizi Ouzou with an official request to meet the Dean of the Faculty. She was herself an empowered woman, determined to fight against any kind of injustice. This raised my self-confidence and made me more determined to reach my destination. She was so attentive when I told her about my fear to be wrecked and she followed the situation and changed the expert. Although the process took time, the accreditation was at last validated, and I defended my file.

It should be underlined that my personality looks like a fighter, I never give up on a situation and I go until the end of the process just looking in my direction. I combat any intervening obstacle that hinders my plan, but all through hard work and integrity. In the Algerian higher education ranking system, we need to work hard for five years after accreditation

to be examined by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research for the professorship rank. The date where I had my accreditation viva was grit to get this last rank, with credit. Since then, I doubled my efforts and had a plan based on pedagogy, research, innovation, and creativity. During this five-year working plan, I achieved many goals. I started teaching and mentoring doctoral students, I started a ministerial research project about ESP, I organised plenty of events (conferences, workshops, plays, or competitions). I participated in many national and international conferences, I published plenty of scholarly works (papers, book chapters, two books), I chaired the Scientific Council of the Department, I designed an MA programme and chaired it for six years, I participated in many of the Faculty's activities (interviews with newly recruited teachers, syllabus design), the University's activities (awareness, support and mediation support unit-CASAM, Teaching and evaluating newly recruited teachers of the whole university, organisation of doctoral contests, taking part of the Council of Ethics, Part of the Quality Assurance Cell of the University), I could create a multidisciplinary journal (The Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society-JSLCS) and I take part in many other journals as an associate editor in some and reviewer in many, I also integrated LESMS research lab as a team-chief.

The idea in all this reflects one principle, the more I work, the more I discover in this huge realm at the Higher Education level. That makes me eager to do more mainly when I meet complications. My willingness to reach high levels of excellence among my peers doubled when the ministry created a platform where files need to be treated electronically and candidates would be ranked according to the points they cumulate. My eyes brightened and I looked high. I told myself: "A platform means transparency; this is my chance to prove I am sparkling. I dream to be N 1 at a national level, but it is too hard".

When the time was ripe, I could be the first, my name shined and people started talking about me. I started receiving invitations to be a plenary speaker and to join committees. The ministry appointed me to

evaluate accreditation files. Each time there is a need from the Ministry for an ELT teacher, the Dean of the Faculty suggests my name. For this I could achieve many tasks at the level of the Ministry like translating and proof-reading documents in three languages Arabic-English-French, recording online courses during the Covid-19 crisis for first-year university students, and now I collaborate with a team that prepares MOOCs at the ministry for university teachers via the EdX platform. Our work is the first of its kind in Algeria. My future dream is to launch a digital school in Algeria under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. In a nutshell, the dream of meeting professors is now a thing of the past for me. Looking at them as distant stars made me work to reach their level.

### III.- Looking Forward into the Future

I remain committed to inspiring women to achieve empowerment globally. I remain dedicated to my dreams and transform them into concrete objectives, plans and actions, I remain dedicated to my profession as I envision a future where ELT women can break through all barriers of all sorts that traditionally held them back. I started through social media to influence my community through positive vibes and concretise that: "A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform." - Diane Mariechild

All in all, the life of an academic is overwrought, but being a woman makes it more arduous and that is why we often hear about glass-ceiling for women's empowerment. I did not allow this sociological concept to hinder my progress. I looked sharply to my destination and dared all the time to talk, to act, to fight, to decide, to move forward. I had clear objectives. I worked hard and with sincerity, I believed in myself.

Before I finish my short autobiography as an empowered woman, let me tell you something extremely important. You need to listen to your inner self when you plan to reach a goal, but first, you need to determine your goals as early as you can. My goal

was primarily determined primarily at the age of 14. One can say that it was early. However, this first step of listening to my whispering thoughts that my life must turn toward this language I fell for the right thing I did. I could move from a mere love of English to self-actualization at high levels.

I am that leader in me, leader in my family, leader in my community, and leader in my universe

### Critical Thinking Leading Bullets

My path was not challenge-free as one might notice, but women should reflect on their values and beliefs, and how they shape their vision of leadership. I advise every woman to converse with her inner self and ask herself: What kind of leader do I aspire to be? What are my strengths and weaknesses? How can I leverage my strengths to achieve my goals, while also addressing my weaknesses?

Every woman, in my view, can identify the challenges and opportunities that come with being a female leader in her unique context. It has become routine in my life to receive questions from colleagues at the national level: How do you manage to handle all this and raise your four children? My answer is

always the same, “work, determination, daily assessment, but family, cooking, cleaning, and social visits are equally important as my career”.

### Discussion questions

In a nutshell, let me tell you dear ELT woman “Engage in continuous learning and professional development to enhance your leadership skills and knowledge. Be productive, influential, and impactful”. A woman can be a leader regardless of her context, society, culture, and values are. What makes the difference is the power you have. I can be best served by the quote: “you have to be strong; you have to trust yourself that you can build a new country. You must know that you have the ability to achieve your dream.” Tawakkol (2011).

We can raise awareness among ELT teachers and students about the importance of gender, inclusion, and equity in EFL classes. Cases in point can be:

1. What are some common stereotypes and biases that exist in language use, and how can we address these in our teaching and learning?
2. How can we ensure that our language use in the classroom is inclusive and respectful of diverse cultures, genders, and identities?

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# A Journey towards Being a Thoughtful, Uplifting, Blissful, Adventurous Faculty Member

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If they asked me “should you have a second chance to choose your path for your future job again, what would you do?”, I would exactly pick the same path and same occupation I had dreamt of when I was 16, and the one I am doing it right now: being a faculty member at a university in the ELT department. My being in this profession can be enough to feel as an empowered woman already, but sharing my story will certainly give the women like me the very well-known message that if you have a dream, chase that dream so that you can make that dream come true.

## I. Background

I was born as a last addition to my family, a working father and a mother who is a housewife and two elder brothers. Each of my family members had a huge impact on what I have become right now with their endless support. As in many studies shared, women empowerment starts with the family support, which is unfortunately not happening for many women around the world, who were exposed to fam-

ily restrictions (Shetty & Hans, 2015). Thus, I was advantageous since my father always supported me to get the highest education I could get although he was only able to see my graduation from my BA degree from the top university in my country, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Türkiye. He was the one giving me the opportunity to get the best education by sending me to an elementary school in the city center rather than the school in the village we lived in. In other words, I was fortunate enough to be the only girl going to a high-quality school, compared to other children in my neighborhood, as unfortunately, the village school was not of high-quality.

Another endless support comes from my mother. She is always with me, and she is the one who never doubts a second to give me a hand whenever I need. It is all thanks to her I was able to do and could do whatever I want for my personal and professional development. This reminded me of the well-known saying by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as cited in Shetty and Hans (2015, para. 1), “If you educate a man, you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered.” My mother got only elementary school education, but she is wise enough to support me to further my education and career. At this very moment, she is taking care of my second daughter (18-months old) while I am writing these lines at the corner of a library. Without her endless support, I would not have the courage to write this chapter and could not find the time to write or work, or even take care of myself with some extracurricular activities.

My brother, who is two years older than me, is the one with whom I went to school together, embraced the difficulties and solved the problems if we had any. We were always there for each other during the 30-min travel to the school each day, during our lunch breaks, or during the time we needed to attend secondary school in tents after a major earthquake struck our city, which caused thousands of casualties, demolished many buildings, and made buildings insecure to get in. Showing great enthusiasm in my education, my elder brother suggested me to choose the ELT

department considering the different perspectives regarding the life ahead of us. One of the reasons was a gender-related one: the common sense that “being a teacher for a woman is more suitable in our country.” While my parents provided me with the opportunity to get a good education, the hassle of taking exams, through which my brothers had already undergone, to be able to enroll in the best schools started for me at the age of 10. Thus, my brothers guided me and became the very first examples ahead of me to continue my education.

My journey for learning English started around the time after I started to attend one of the most qualified secondary schools in my city. I was in a prep class during which I got 24 hours of English instruction. Although I was also successful in other school subjects, English was always a catchy subject for me. I was also aware of the opportunities and prestige of speaking English in my country. After four years of education, I took another exam to get into a top-quality high school. Even though I was expecting to get a higher score to get into a high school prioritizing math and science mostly, I was able to get into a teacher training high school, during which our journey to think ourselves as a teacher were shaped. The earliest graduates of these schools would be able to become teachers right after graduation, thus, following a teaching profession would not be a surprise for most of the graduates like us. Considering the opportunities teachers have, my brothers encouraged me to major in a language related field and become a teacher of English. Having two brothers who had already set their minds to be teachers, I followed their advice and my interest in English. I took this suggestion one step further and set my mind to be a faculty member instead of working in a K-12 school. My high school years, the final step in my compulsory education, during which I encountered many invaluable and supportive teachers and friends, were shaped with the dream of becoming a faculty member at a university.

In Türkiye, to continue university education, students need to take a university entrance exam- yes, another one, the third one for me- and generally, after 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they decide in which specialization they want

to study at university. For example, if students want to be engineers, they need to specialize in science and math related subjects. If they want to study language at university, they need to improve their language skills during their high school years. Needless to say, they need to study diligently to be able to enroll in a high-ranked university. A lot of things have changed about this entrance exam, but in my time, it was impossible to change the specialization once students picked their area to study for the rest of their high school years, and for the rest of their lives.

With the full support I got from my family and teachers, I studied very diligently to enroll in the university I set my mind to register. My brothers were attending their university in Ankara, the capital, that was why, I was already dreaming about going to a university in that city. However, when I got the exam results, I learned that I had gotten a substantial rank in the exam (69<sup>th</sup> among thousands of students), which was enough for me to choose the best university in Türkiye, even in a different city. As a literal translation from Turkish, we say “we win the university”, it sounds like a lottery, but with this diligent work, it was a well-deserved one, and I “won” the best university in my specialization, the department of Foreign Language Education at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Türkiye. I became the first girl in my village to get the ticket to a university, and eventually the first and the only woman holding a doctoral degree in the village: The family support and the diligent work turned out well and empowered me to realize my dreams.

## II. Empowerment and leadership development

As a country, we had a history of a ban on wearing a hijab in public places, such as schools, as a student and/or as a worker. Unfortunately, both in my high school years and in my university years, I had to live as if I had had a split personality, which was somehow normal to us, girls in the same situation. In my high school, I needed to take off my hijab to attend the school until I left the school grounds, then I was wearing it again while leaving. Similarly, I spent my university years with this dilemma, but luckily, I only had to take off my hijab during the class hours, so I could wear it on the cam-

pus grounds. Wearing a hijab voluntarily, and being forced to take it off was unavoidably a heartbreakingly situation, but I never doubted to attend the school, because I had heard that there were many girls who had just quitted school due to this ban on wearing hijab. I am glad that we could overcome this dichotomy in our country, and now we can wear the hijab in any place. However, the scars of the feeling of being forced to take it off are still present, and I sometimes subconsciously get scared of being scolded by just wearing a hijab, or I feel weird when I get some surprised look by others if I say that I am an assistant professor at a university and I can speak English. These feelings have also made me more aware of the equity and social justice issues. I have become more mindful about the appearance of the people and try to refrain from having prejudices as much as I can, and I am now more confident to share my thoughts with others if I hear a statement about the appearance of others.

I strongly believe that being in the ELT department and being able to read about various cultures in another language have widened my horizon. Thus, I never stepped back due to my gender or rules defined by the community for a gender, and I took every opportunity to improve myself as much as I could throughout my BA education in my university. For example, I took taekwondo and futsal courses, and attended shows or tournaments whenever possible. I also enhanced myself with other club activities as much as I could, ranging from attending social service activities to being a participant in the Erasmus Projects, considering every experience I had would absolutely improve me as an educator. The activities I have shared here may sound very cliché or may be the ones already expected from a regular university student. Nevertheless, wearing a hijab at that time and coming from a “village”, where most girls were hardly sent to a high school, I was doing exceptionally good by attending such diverse activities. Similar to my story, Sundaram et al (2014) concluded that the education is highly important for empowered woman especially for women in rural areas. Therefore, I am certain that my values about social justice were noticeably transformed with what I had to get through these years with a good education, and with “being the only one” in what I did.

When I started teaching after graduation, I always wanted to be a role model for all my students both as a woman and as an English teacher. I always wanted to improve myself, and when the school administrator did not let us go to another city for a master’s degree, I tried to find another solution. I finally found out that there was a scholarship from the Ministry of Education through which grantees could go abroad and get graduate education at one of the top 500 universities. Having attended top quality secondary and high schools helped me a lot, and I could get a higher score to be able to get the scholarship. In August 2012, I was on a plane heading towards the USA to start a new chapter in my life along with my husband who had the same dream with me. Now, I was one step closer to be an academician in an ELT department.

On the first day at the GSE of Rutgers University, NJ, sitting around a table with a hijab for the first time in an educational “public” institution gave me the feeling of proud in that I had a hard time to hold my tears. Even thinking about this very first day after ten years, I can still remember the feeling (and now, I wish my father could see what I have done so far). During my education for my Master’s and doctoral degrees in the USA, I took classes nearly all about social justice, equity, gender equality- the very crucial issues for our world. Unfortunately, these issues were not explicitly or widely discussed during the time of my education in my country, and only now I started to hear people, but generally ELT members, talking about these issues. This made me feel more responsible; thus, I did my dissertation on the preparation of content area pre-service teachers for English language learners- or emergent bilinguals. In other words, it is crucial to recognize that empowerment for women and for all starts with considering the change in mindset (Cornwall, 2016). In my teaching right now, I always mention these issues no matter which course I am teaching, I pay attention to choose materials which we can discuss social justice, equity, racism and so on, and I become happy when I get feedback from my students that they have realized and become more aware of these issues after our discussions.

### III. Looking forward into the future

Being a mother to two adorable daughters, I always want them to be as strong as possible, and I always provide the support which I got from my family, as I definitely believe that the family is one of the most important factors for being empowered as a woman. In addition to the support I get from my parents, brothers, my husband, and my mother-in-law, being in the ELT department has also a huge impact on my worldview and broadened my perspective. I have no doubt that being able to speak in other languages is a huge factor to feel empowered, as it increases the chances of being heard. Hence, I always advice people around me to learn other languages and be knowledgeable about other cultures, and more importantly be open to listen to others, and willing to change.

We, the ELT women, are the bridges in the world connecting the people of our own culture to the people of other cultures. This profession gave me the chance to talk to you right now. This very moment, thinking that another female student or any other student studying in another corner of Nigeria or Australia or Argentina or anywhere else will read these lines gives me the hope, the courage, and the belief that we can do whatever we want only and if only we want it truly, and of course, strive for it, embrace the challenges, and overcome them with the support that we have around us, be it from family, friends, teachers, mentors, or other empowered women that we just read about. There will be bumps, but the road will absolutely reach the destination we dreamt of.

Thank you so much for taking time to let me share my journey with you. My journey... it never ends, I do not know when these lines will reach you, but I am pretty sure that I will be in a corner of a library, or hopefully, in an office of my own writing some articles, books, or chapters so that I can be an associate professor or a professor at a university or getting prepared to be a role model for my students to feel empowered in my courses. I am also sure that I will be the mother

providing endless support to my daughters or other women to be thoughtful, uplifting, blissful, and adventurous, as my mother (and my family) does to me.

#### Points for Critical thinking

- Family members' support and awareness about empowerment is a must; we should find ways to encourage family members to learn more about woman empowerment.
- The struggles and challenges, especially for woman, will always be there; we should promote sources and support women and many others to overcome these challenges.
- Women empowerment is not only about being "equal" in terms of accessing resources; we should embrace a change in our mindset to empower women.

#### Discussion questions

1. Reading between the lines, what kind of challenges do you see in this pathway, and what emotions would have been felt in each situation?
2. What do you think about the effects of English in the author's life? How would you describe your own life conditions considering that you are an English speaker?
3. What do you think about author's belief, when she says, "We, the ELT women, are the bridges in the world connecting the people of our own culture to the people of other cultures"? Who others can also have this responsibility and what kind of actions do they need to take?
4. What would be your biggest take away from this story? What would you add to your life from this story?

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# Stepping Into Leadership in ELT: Finding My Path and My Voice

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## I.- Background

### The Turning Point

I was at lunch with a male colleague who had invited me to join him, as I was a new hire at the university. I was at the bottom of the teaching rung as a yearly contract lecturer, having had to give up a tenured position to move across country for my family. And I was told at “There’s no point in trying to put in a lot of extra work, you’ll never be promoted to a tenured position.” That crucial moment was the start point of a new trajectory for me: Where I stopped letting the little whispers in and around my ears dictate who I was and who I could become. I moved forward in my work true to who I was and who I wanted to be in the future. I was the first person to be promoted to a tenured position from a contract position in my department. My colleague never was.

### Who I Am and Why I Want You on This Journey with Me

Being an empowered woman in the field of ELT and as an academic is important to me. I have come to where I am today through a number of stages, from the beginning of my career trajectory to building myself as a leader, to passing along my skills and experiences to others, providing encouragement for women who are tapping into their own sense of empowerment, finding their own voices, and stepping into leadership. I am currently a 33-year U.S. expat in Japan. I came to Japan straight from graduation from a 4-year university with an interdisciplinary major in Japanese studies. I planned to stay in Japan for one or two years before moving back to Japan, but that never materialized as I became engaged in work, then engaged to a Japanese national and continued life in Japan.

The university where I have spent the last 23 years of my teaching career is a 4-year private university with approximately 6,500 students. I am a professor in our foreign language institute, which handles the foreign language education for a majority of the colleges and departments in the university. If I were to isolate three main challenges that I have faced during my tenure as a university teacher, they would be these three:

- 1) Being marginalized as a foreign woman. I have felt this marginalization not only from Japanese colleagues, but more severely from non-Japanese male colleagues and professional acquaintances. What has this meant specifically? I have not been taken seriously, been talked down to, ignored, faced with bullying and microaggressions, and made to second-guess or doubt myself.
- 2) Facing expectations that I participate in every way the same as my male colleagues, many of whom had full-time caretakers/house managers (i.e., spouse) at home. This meant that evening meetings were the norm (as I sat at those meetings paying outrageous evening rates for babysitting services) and morning classes or meetings

with start times that were impossible for me to meet when getting children off to school/child-care before leaving for work.

- 3) Experiencing the positioning of being the “token” member of groups, including research groups and conference panels. I have been expected to give “the woman’s perspective” or the “foreigner’s perspective,” forcing me into gross generalizations of my gender, my (increasingly waning) foreign identity or as a representative of my “home” country.

How have I been able to navigate my way through these challenges and find solutions that were viable within my own working professional paradigm? Two areas of development were crucial to who I am today (1) developing a strong sense of self as a full-time educator/researcher and as a mother as I pursued education and developed professionally, and (2) finding my voice and developing as a leader. In this chapter, I would like to take you through different stages of my professional growth to shine light onto the common threads that we may face as women educators striving to find balance and meaning in our professional and personal lives. Woven into my narrative are constructs that have guided my journey and empowered me: Executive Presence (EP) and Collaborative Leadership (CL), which have served as frameworks for who I am as a professional. I also hope to leave you with ideas for how we can pass on our knowledge and experience to the next generation of women educators and academics and why our community of practice as empowered women is so vital to our field of ELT.

#### **Career-track Mom: Neither a Member of the Mommy PTA Nor the “Boy’s Club”**

I began my university teaching trajectory as a part-time teacher in the last trimester of my pregnancy with my first child. With that job posting, I made a commitment to further my education and start on the career track of an academic and professional educator four months after having twins. I went on to complete an MEd and EdD and graduate when those twins were 10 years old.

During the time that I was completing these degrees, I was teaching full-time, raising three children under the age of 10, commuting to graduate courses in another city every weekend, and maintaining the household. Without family to rely on for childcare, I made good use of the Japanese daycare system and supplemented with professional babysitting services, which used up most of my teaching salary. Loans covered the rest.

What I experienced was both mommy shame and societal shame. I wasn’t able to participate in the many activities that moms are expected to do: PTA (weekday afternoons), assist with soccer practices / school sports day / mommy play groups, not due to lack of common interests, but due to lack of time. I was told that I was no busier than anyone else and shamed for my lack of participation in these events related to my children’s lives, although I was pursuing educational endeavors that would assure the financial stability of my family and a more solid career path for myself. I also bore the brunt of societal shame from friends, relatives, and even colleagues. How could I be so selfish as to put my own educational pursuits ahead of the welfare of my children? How could I leave my children with strangers as I ran off to academic conferences and graduate classes? It felt to be a never-ending battle of outside pressure and inner conviction as I struggled to define and remain on my path.

What I found during that time were other women who were balancing work and educational studies while being spouses and parents, also juggling things as diverse as elderly parental care, childcare, and hiding their educational pursuits from their employers. I found solidarity with women for whom a graduate degree wasn’t something pursued in the solitary linear path of pursing a higher degree but fitting in graduate level study into the already full kaleidoscopes of their lives. It meant time away from my kids and my family, financial sacrifices that made null of my teaching salary, but gave me the key to open doors for my future career as a tertiary educator and researcher.

I am certainly not alone in my frustrations over pursing a professional path for myself through

further education and aiming to break through the barriers that still exist for women academics in tertiary education in Japan. As evidenced by the numbers in Table 1, the percentage of women educators drops dramatically as the education level increases, with only 26.7% of the university teaching force women in 2022. For those who do manage to secure a teaching spot in a university, women represent less than one-fourth of all professorships, university presidents, and vice-presidents (Table 2).

**Table 1**  
*Percentage of Women Teachers at Japanese Educational Institutions*

Level of Education	Duration	# of Institutions Surveyed	% of Teachers Who are Women
Kindergarten	1-2 years	9,111	93.4
Elementary	6 years	19,161	62.4
Junior HS	3 years	10,012	44.3
Senior HS	3 years	4,824	33.1
Junior College	2 years	309	53.6
University	4 years	807	26.7

(MEXT, 2022a)

**Table 2**  
*Percentages of Women Teachers at Japanese Universities*

Position	% of Women (All Nationalities)	% of Women Foreign Nationals
President	13.9	0
Vice president	14.9	22
Professor	18.8	22.4
Associate professor	26.5	31.6
Lecturer	34	36
*Assistant professor	32.4	40.2
Research assistant	57.8	51
Total:	26.7	36.9

\*Ranked lower than lecturer (MEXT, 2022b)

## II.- Empowerment and Leadership Development

### Moving Into Roles of Leadership and Establishing My Voice

Several years after my eye-opening luncheon with the male colleague who tried to define my limitations as a contract teacher, I found myself in two extraordinary positions: One was to make my way into bigger, university-wide committees, where I was the only foreign woman, and sometimes the only woman at the table, and the other was to be the first-ever non-Japanese promoted to a tenured position from a contract position. This was a double-edged sword for me, in that I felt that I proved my worth to my university – but did I feel I had to work so much harder to prove myself than those who came into tenured positions straight out of graduate school, as is often the case with Japanese national hires? Yes. But was I glad to be in rooms and spaces where I could find and begin to develop my voice, having an impact on my workplace? Yes. Am I glad that I didn’t listen to the little voice in my ear telling me that I would never be promoted, no matter how hard I tried? Yes. I ended up opening a door for myself and for others to follow through, and I never looked back.

As I attended more meetings and found my way as a committee chair being forced to conduct meetings in my less-than-full-proficient second language, I slowly but surely began to build my leadership skills, ones that would continue to serve me during my professional career. I learned about using my voice – how, when, and where to use it. I learned about my “outer voice,” my projected voice, and my “inner voice” that helped mitigate how I portrayed myself on the outside. I learned about *gravitas* and the importance of the preparation and background work before going into meetings.

Sylvia Ann Hewlett’s work on Executive Presence (EP) incorporates the concept of *gravitas*, which embodies features such as “knowing your subject well” and “poise under pressure” (Hewlett, 2014). As a foreign woman in professional contexts where I was the sole woman and/or the sole foreigner, tapping into

my own sense of *gravitas* helped me find the agency that I needed to find my own place in the room. Doing so helped me find and strengthen my voice. Hewlett's (2014) model of EP also focuses on communication, particularly speaking skills. My extrapolation of this is the "voice projected," employing oral skills in presenting ideas and in small talk, as well as the "inner voice", which feeds into our confidence and ability to read situations (Brown, 2020).

As the chair of committees and participant in university-wide committees, some of my work necessitated the use of *nemawashi*, or behind-the-scenes consensus-building, before entering official meetings – employing my skills at small talk in my "voice projected." Once in meetings where important decisions were being made, it was crucial that I was able to read the room quickly to be able to gauge which way discussion and decisions might move, all while navigating the nuances of the Japanese language, calling upon my "inner voice." EP for me was a pragmatic way to approach difficult situations whilst building my leadership skills and maintaining a seat at the table.

### Creating My Own Leadership Style

As a tenured teacher, I learned how to have confidence in coordinating language courses and working with part-time staff, some of whom could be resentful of having to listen to and follow a woman leader. My workplace currently has 9 full-time teachers covering 5 foreign languages and Japanese as a second language. Our full-time teaching staff is of 6 different nationalities and 6 different first-language backgrounds with 4 women and 5 men teachers. Why is this salient to my journey in leadership?

Firstly, my colleagues are a diverse group of educators. Diversity in the workplace necessitates the development of skills that can navigate different cultural backgrounds and norms, communication styles, language backgrounds, and proficiencies in the *lingua franca* (i.e., Japanese). For me, this has meant developing skills in collaborative leadership (CL). This leadership style allows for members of a group to work together in problem solving, enabling the sharing of

knowledge, power, and responsibility as the group works towards consensus building (Jameson, 2007). As a leader of a multicultural, multilingual group of educators, it was imperative for me to find a way to be a leader that allowed for space for all of the voices in the room and space to explore those differences comfortably while moving towards concrete decisions that the group felt represented their ideas.

Secondly, I work with a team of educators of whom half are women. This has meant more collaborative work in research, support, and camaraderie. It has also meant soft power when bringing in new teaching staff and shining light on candidates that are not traditionally the "norm" for hiring (e.g., male). Working within a team of equal numbers of women and men colleagues, I have been able to explore more of what it means to be a woman leader and what that looks like from the inside. A concept that has spoken to me is *empassertiveness* (Athanasopoulou, Moss-Cowan, Smets and Morris, 2017), which in combining "empathy" with "assertiveness", brings together stereotypically female and male attributes into a new way of presenting oneself, stepping outside of the binary conceptions of what leadership is supposed to look like. This allowed me to explore new spaces as a leader in groups of diverse backgrounds, genders, and value structures.

### III.- Looking Forward into the Future

#### Looking Back to Look Forward: Who Am I as an Educator and What Is My Impact Factor?

Isn't one of the reasons that many of us end up in education is because we hope to make an impact somewhere, on someone? When reflecting upon on all my years of teaching, I can identify three important focal points where I am making a difference:

- 1) Making an impact on my students, inspiring in them the desire to engage with and take ownership of a foreign language (English), in whatever direction and to whatever depth they chose to take it in the future. Broadening young peoples' horizons, bringing them out of the narrowly

focused “We Japanese” way of looking at the world, exposing them to the variety in ways of thinking, ways of living, and ways of expressing oneself in a global community.

- 2) Serving as a role model for young women students and further expanding their conceptions of what might be possible for them in their futures. Encouraging young women to tap into their unique skill sets and develop their skills as second language users. Providing a role model for what it looks like to be a working mother, a woman educator, a foreign national living abroad, working, and raising a family.
- 3) Paying it forward by helping to build up the next community of teachers, particularly women teachers. Sharing my experiences, ups and downs, skills, and support for women entering the field and finding their way through the next level of education and professional development.

Several years ago, I was hugely impacted by the book “The Third Third of Life” (Wright, 2012), and although written by a man, it set my mind and thoughts to how I wanted to approach my own third third of life. A cornerstone of my thinking has been the idea of stepping up for others, using connections, networks, and opportunities accumulated over years in my professional field to open doors and opportunities for others, particularly younger women, to support their own agency in creating their own pathways for their careers. When I was first starting as a part-time teacher, I had two very important people in the same department, both older and close to retirement, who took the time to listen to my many ideas and help open up doors through connections to others in the university to help actualize these ideas. They were an important part of the committee that saw my promotion from contract to tenured teacher realized.

The importance of mentoring cannot be emphasized enough. We hear a lot about the role of mentoring in business settings, but not enough about it in academics, outside of teacher/student roles. This is a new and important construct in tertiary insti-

tutions here in Japan, and particularly for women, so important to continuing to grow the number of women who are appearing in upper-level tenured and administrative positions, from professors to faculty deans and university presidents.

### Who I Am as an Empowered Woman in ELT

The word “empowered” carries so much meaning, and such different meaning to each woman who wants to embrace it as part of her own narrative. For me, the image of empowerment is the precious gold thread that ties together all the different patchwork pieces of my life, giving shape and structure and durability to the quilt that is a life well lived. Each piece so very important in my life journey, each piece shaped through tenacity, embroidered with richness and depth, and all woven together with the power that creates my own unique life tapestry. My quilt pieces and my empowering gold threads are:

- 1) My Life Path as a Working Mother: I have ventured through hectic, sleepless days with three small children, graduate school, and contract work. I am now navigating the other end of a career as a lifelong educator.
- 2) My Workplace: I have left my mark on my workplace – helping to cornerstone the building of a new language program curriculum, serving on the hiring committee that has brought in a diverse workforce into our teacher positions, and demonstrating new ways of leadership.
- 3) Professional Development: I have been a member of organizations where women help other women – support in the big and the small things, from writing conference proposals to securing full-time, tenured work.
- 4) Paying it Forward: I am someone who was mentored in my early years as an ELT professional and am now able to pass along my mentoring skills to others as we continue to build a community of women ELT educators.

5) Finding my Voice: I have learned to use my voice to make change, in a country, a society, and a professional environment where using one's voice is not often a respected vehicle for implementing change.

### We Women in ELT Around the World

We as women educators in ELT are a **global community**. We have strength in our **networking** and support of each other. We can combine resources to make enormous **change** in our immediate communities and in communities that reach far beyond us. We are a **community of practice** that has enormous depth, strength, and potential. Our capacity for **impacting** the world around us is unbounded. Through personal and professional connections, we can continue to support and foster the **next generation** of women educators. Let's do this.

### Critical Thinking Leading Bullets:

1) Identity and Confronting Microaggressions: How can our environment feed into our sense of identity either positively or negatively? What skills can be employed to counteract microaggressions in our professional/learning spaces?

2) Language and Power: Bourdieu (1991) writes of language as a mechanism of power. How is your language proficiency in one or more foreign languages related to your own sense of power in your workplace/learning environment?

3) Leadership Skills: How can the concept of "executive presence" be applicable to leadership for educators in academic spaces?

### Discussion Questions:

4) How would you define your "voice"? What does that include for you? How have you been able to use your voice in your professional/learning settings? What might your "outer voice" and "inner voice" look like? How would you like to develop your voice further? What skills could help you do this?

5) Are there any expectations laid upon you as a woman in your professional/learning environment that are different than your men counterparts? What support is available for you as a working professional/student and as a parent/caretaker/manager of the household?

6) What do percentages of women in the teaching profession look like in your country? Has this changed over the past decade? Why or why not? What can you/we do to move these numbers/percentages further?

7) What might "executive presence" look like in your workplace? How could a collaborative leadership approach aid you in your current workplace? What could be different in implementing these leadership styles?

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# The Resilient Trailblazer

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“It was *our* responsibility- *we* failed him,” said Stael when discussing Juan, an unsuccessful candidate in a teacher training course at the Institute Stael Ruffinelli de Ortiz-English. We had just finished a feedback session with the Trinity CertTESOL course moderator from the UK. Juan, one of the eight teacher trainees on the course, had failed to meet deadlines for almost all his written assignments.

“But we did everything we could,” I said, defending our position as course tutors “We gave him so many opportunities. We set up guidance meetings, extra tutorials, warning letters, and so on. – we can’t do much if the candidate does not take responsibility and stay committed.”

“We are! Our student’s failure is partly our failure... we were not able to motivate him; we were unsuccessful in finding the right path to make learning happen.”

Stael Ruffinelli de Ortiz is a teacher trainer, founder of the *Insitituto Stael Ruffinelli de Ortiz- English* (SRO-E), consultant of the English program at *Colegio del Sol*, ex-President of the ParaTESOL Board, current President of *Centro Paraguayo de Estudios Canadiense* (CPEC), my mentor and so much more! (Stael’s picture in the section of authors’ bios).

## I.- Background

Only female among four siblings, Stael was born into an affluent Paraguayan family. Her father was a doctor, her mother a housewife. She grew up during a time when educational opportunities for women existed only within families with higher economic status. Women stayed at home, managing the housework, and minding the children while men stepped out and earned the money necessary to run the house. These were times when women who aspired to study found limited work opportunities, almost always as secretaries or primary school teachers. These were the times when women from the upper class were expected to play the piano, sew, be experts in organising events, manage households and operate skilfully in society.

Stael studied in a private German school in Asuncion during a turbulent period of ‘the Stroessners regime<sup>1</sup>. In high school, she witnessed the violence and oppression of dictatorship first-hand. An after-school public-speaking class she attended was banned by the police; the priest who taught the class was jailed for promoting free thinking. An environment of fear and mistrust prevailed where people were wrongly accused and sent to jail. Stael was no stranger to the incident- two of her classmates were among those imprisoned and one had fled the country for safety. These incidents shaped Stael’s ideas of rebellion and paved the way for her future.

After school, an opportunity to travel and study in the US took her to Denver, where she enhanced her English skills and experienced learning without restrictions. Six months later, love and marriage saw her back in Paraguay. Stael agreed to the marriage on the condition that she would be allowed to study and pursue a career. This, however, was easier said than done. After marriage, her mother-in-law was not pleased about Stael attending the university for evening lessons. It was not a norm for married women to go to universities in the evenings;

<sup>1</sup>Alfredo Stroessner Matiauda was a military leader and the president of Paraguay from 1954 to 1989. He is considered the longest serving rulers in Latin America and was overthrown in a coup that led to the end of his regime.

plus, studying would be a distraction from the duties of raising children or attending to her spouse. Stael eventually gained the support of her family, and it was time for her to define her future path. Her older brother, who recognised her spirit of rebellion, suggested the field of education as a path to provoke change silently, non-violently, one student at a time. She agreed and joined the *Instituto Superior de Lenguas* to pursue an arts degree in English.

In 1975, her last year at university, her phonology professor offered her a job teaching English at the *Centro Cultural Paraguayo Americano* (CCPA). During this time, the Stroessner regime was at its crest. Stories of military tortures and disappearances were unbridled. The government had zero tolerance towards any form of protest or complaint against the government. Everything was controlled, including the lessons at the CCPA where English was taught using the Audiolingual Approach<sup>2</sup>. Classes were conducted and controlled military style, with timed drills that could not deviate from the plan. In every classroom, a speaker above the board came to life at a predesignated time to play the listening passage for the day, from a remote room. Teachers had to ensure that lessons ran like clockwork with activities completed at the planned time and without regard to learning. There were rumours of classes being secretly monitored, to confirm that teachers stuck to the plan and spent no more than the allotted time on drills, or specific material. Teachers, who deviated from the plan or broke into natural conversations with students, were reprimanded.

Stael's job at the CCPA consisted of writing 80-minute lesson plans of structured drills. Having experienced educational methodologies promoting student interactions, Stael found the task neither legitimate nor gratifying. When she could teach, she began experimenting with pair and group interactions in class. Without a doubt, she got reported and was called before the board which neither appreciated, nor encouraged her ventures at meaningful and dynamic

lessons. Communicative Approach was against the institutional philosophy during that time, and if she wanted to try something else, she would have to quit.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

Soon after, Stael left the CCPA and opened the doors of her own school, Instituto Stael Ruffinelli de Ortiz-English. In 1986, she rented a premise of five rooms in an upscale location and started to design and teach lessons that would allow the learners to think and express themselves in a safe space. Courses were limited - with eight teachers in total and twelve students per class. Stael personally wrote the syllabi and trained teachers to teach communicatively and foster interaction. English literature became the core component of the programme and the USP that defined the institute as a place that opened the doors to the world. In all, the school became an instant success.

But running the school was not an easy task. A frequent challenge was the Japanese Embassy next door, which received a regular visitor, none other than President Stroessner. His visits were preceded by the chief of the police demanding a list of parents and students connected to the institute. All calls, in and out of the institute, were recorded. The visits brought in busloads of Military Police (MP) who blocked the streets, not letting the students enter or leave the school for the duration of the visit. Members of the MP entered the institute and guarded the hallways with loaded weapons, producing an environment of fear. On one occasion, the school secretary, concerned about the safety of the students, tried to block them from entering the premise and ended up in prison.

Another area of challenge was the constant visits Stael received from different government officials in the early years of inception. These 'officials' would often remain at the institute for hours, pointing out procedures as illegal and mentioning how much trouble the institute was in because of that. Stael believes that these 'visitors' came to her thinking

<sup>2</sup>The CCPA now employs a variety of approaches to teaching and learning English. They also offer teacher training courses and work closely with the Regional English Language Office (RELO) team of the Embassy of the United States.

that women were gullible and easily intimidated (not many women were well-versed in their rights and the legal procedures at that time.) It was an opportunity to exert power and extort money from the situation. Stael made sure to be well-informed about her rights which gave her the confidence to stand her ground firmly and politely. Eventually, the visits stopped.

“It needs a lot of courage to build something up and get to a certain position when you are a woman. You need to be very strong. Along the way, you will be able to build confidence and enhance your leadership skills. I was deeply convinced about my profession and very passionate about it. I could say to all the women in the ELT profession to be self-confident and recognise that women are both strong and tender, at the same time. They are capable of reaching the highest levels of cognition and growth, as any man on the planet.” – Stael R.

A year after the institute opened, Stael was awarded a scholarship for a seven-week training program in San Diego. Stael took advantage of the program to go beyond training. She stayed back after lessons to ask questions and learn about the institution. She was a keen learner and observed how the institution developed and trained its teachers. Using this as an example, Stael replicated the training model at her institute. She recognised the value of investing in teacher development and brought in international trainers who introduced teachers to newer methodologies. She sensed the thirst for innovation and knowledge and opened the doors of her institute to like-minded teachers from all over the country, including teachers from the CCPA, inviting them to observe and learn. Thus, she formed the first community of English teachers in Paraguay.

Between 1987 and 1989, SRO-E signed contracts to design and deliver English language programs in several private schools in Asuncion. Stael personally wrote the English curriculum, hired, and trained teachers and monitored the program in these schools. The institute made a huge impact on the way teaching occurred in schools. In one traditional,

catholic school, the priests were impressed by how lessons came to life and students transformed when the English teachers took charge. However, great success comes with grander challenges; so, when the new head at a school decided that they were paying too much on the contract, they went behind the institution’s back, trying to hire the teachers directly. This was a testing time for the community Stael had formed. To her surprise, all teachers resigned from the schools connected to the parish in response to their unethical conduct.

The experiences and influences Stael had with different schools in Asuncion were unique. At one Opus Dei school, she was invited to fill in a position of a co-ordinator when he moved to Rome to pursue a religious path. As this was strictly an all-male school, she needed special permission to enter the premise and observe lessons. Soon, she realised that the teachers in the school were not qualified and missed classes frequently. She discovered that the school did not have any programme or teaching materials. In addition, the school principal would simply rip off pages of content from textbooks he deemed inappropriate to the values of the church. This was against Stael’s teaching philosophy and everything she had fought for nevertheless; she helped the school by writing syllabi for two of their courses and invested her time in training a teacher with potential. Later, Abel would develop under her guidance to become one of the most influential primary school teachers.

Under Stael’s leadership, the institution pioneered unique approaches to promoting English. In 1987, Stael introduced teaching English through theatre. Young learners and teens got an opportunity to improve fluency and build confidence by participating in an acting school. At the end of the six months, they presented an English play to a general audience. A city thirsty for culture remembers watching classics like *Fiddler on the Roof*, *West Side Story*, *Into the Woods*, and their likes in the original language and packed halls. In 1991, they started an exchange program with the District of Cherry Creek and later with Douglass County, USA. This short two-month summer programme helped build relations with Amer-

ican counterparts. Another pioneering project was English debates, which emerged from working with satellite schools. Stael and her team brought together coordinators from different bilingual schools in Asuncion and started the first-ever inter-school English debate competition in Paraguay.

In the meantime, it was becoming extremely challenging to meet demands for after-school English lessons from within the eight rooms of the institute. The institute bought a premise in 1992 and expanded its clientele, serving between 500-600 clients per month, continuing to lead the way English was taught as a foreign language in Paraguay. In 1993, they became the official representative of Trinity College London's ESOL examinations. The first batch of teachers completed the TESOL international Certificate course offered by Trinity College London in 1994. Since then, the institute has been known for producing quality English teachers who have made a mark in the world by teaching innovatively in the UK, Canada, Australia, Serbia, France, and the UAE.

In 1997, Stael assumed the Vice-presidency of the ParaTESOL Organisation when the sitting VP resigned. She was elected as the President in the following term. During her tenure, she worked hard to bring teachers on board for professional development, bringing trainers and speakers from all over the world to Paraguay. The organisation grew to over 500 members and inspired many Paraguayan teachers to pursue professional development. In 2005 she was invited to Canada to attend a conference and meet with the Ministry of Trade and Foreign Affairs. After the meeting, she accepted their proposal to form CPEC - an organisation that later became a member of the International Council for Canadian Studies. CPEC continues to build strong relations with the Canadian education community through scholarships, cultural exchanges and conferences.

Throughout this period, Stael contributed openly towards the welfare and education of the Paraguayan teachers. She worked with the Ministry of Education in Paraguay as a counsel when they

decided to formalise English as a foreign language in high schools. She gave several interviews in the press, sharing her vision for education. When asked if she considers herself empowered, she consents, saying that an empowered woman promotes others' sense of self-worth. She has done this by sharing her knowledge and experience with everyone from the start, challenging her colleagues, the teachers, and learners to be the best. By creating an environment of healthy competition, she has given her teachers the ability to make decisions based on their choices. When comparing notes or modelling teaching, Stael is seen to have 'given her soul' to every single learner, encouraging them to think critically and challenging them to go beyond their boundaries, thus influencing social change for them and others around them, one student at a time.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

Almost an octogenarian, Stael is still full of vitality, leaving daily to work with teachers at school. Stael's achievements are unparalleled - an example of roads never taken before and success on her terms. She has faced all the challenges head-on, never playing the 'helpless woman' card and yet, never backing down. Today, in the age of cutting-edge competition, her organisation is still thriving, meeting challenges with grit and adapting to the rapid changes in education. Her three daughters accompany her on this dream, expanding the circle of change, producing teachers that provide high-quality English training with the extra mile.

It has been over twenty years since the exchange over Juan's inability to pass the Cert.TESOL moderation. But to this day, her words echo within my head each time I am about to give up on a learner who does not meet the expected goals. Even today, Stael challenges me to think outside the box, do more, and 'give my soul' to every student.

Stael has been an inspiration and a mentor to many like me who considers it a privilege to learn from the best.

## Critical Thinking: Reflections on Leadership roles:

- When on scholarship for a course in San Diego, Stael took advantage of the opportunity to learn things “outside of the course”, staying back and asking questions to anyone happy to talk. In what ways are open curiosity and the ability to ask questions connected to the formation of leaders?
- A leader is never afraid to try out new things and take responsibility for its success and failure. How do parts of the story reflect this idea of leadership?
- Throughout her career, Stael has spent her time and resources in training and developing people. She believes that one grows when people around them grow. Appraise the value of contributions made by Stael and other female leaders in promoting growth? What can you apply in your context?
- “It needs a lot of courage to build something up and get to a certain position when you are a woman.”

an. You need to be very strong. Along the way, you will be able to build confidence and enhance your leadership skills.” Evaluate this statement from the perspective of the tools a woman leader needs to acquire and enhance her leadership skills.

## Discussion

1. When Stael was young, she had to fight to continue her education post- marriage as the role of men and women in the society were very different. Evaluate the role of men and women today. In what ways have they remained the same and/ or changed.
2. Stael believes that bureaucrats and people in power take advantage of a woman’s gullibility and lack of knowledge to exert power and extort money from the situation. Identify the areas where women are most vulnerable and outline a realistic plan for your context to promote equal gender treatment.

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# Women as Leaders in Higher Education and a Language Teaching Association (LTA) in Japan - Part 1

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In this two-part chapter, two strong women in ELT will provide real-life examples through auto-ethnography, illustrating their lived experiences within the intersection of female leadership identity, transnationalism and globalization as foreign women in higher education and language teaching association (LTA) leadership positions in Japan. In 2020, these women were elected to the board of directors of an academic TESOL association; their 2-year terms began in January 2021 and ended in December 2022. In Part 1 Melodie Cook will contrast her experiences of becoming a tenured Professor with her work on the board of JALT, to show how leadership in different contexts results in different demands. In Part 2 Dawn Lucovich will discuss being elected president of the board of the Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT), among a male-dominated leadership.

## I. Background

I am a Canadian woman who has lived and worked in Canada and Japan. My undergraduate degree is in Communications and German, and I hold a Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language, a Master's degree in English Education, and a PhD in Applied Lin-

guistics from Macquarie University, Australia. I am a tenured Professor at the University of Niigata Prefecture. I am also a Series Editor for Candlin & Mynard Publishing as well as a co-editor and author of several books for the same publisher. I am a reviewer for several Japan-based journals and have served in many capacities for the Japan Association for Language Teaching including Membership Chair, Program Chair, Chapter President, Associate Editor and Editor of JALT's flagship publication JALT Journal, and recently as Director of Membership. I am also an adoptive and foster parent and do advocacy work in English for fostering and adoption, writing articles for English-language, Japan-based online newsletters, and hosting a private group for multicultural foster and adoptive parents.

At the University of Niigata Prefecture, while I am not the only female teacher in the university, I am the only foreign female English-teaching in the Faculty of International Studies and Regional Development. The University is a relatively small prefectural one, situated in Niigata City and ranked at the second level in the prefecture, the first being the national-level Niigata University. As UNP was changed from a 2-year women's college to a co-educational school in 2009, the student body consists of 70% female students. However, due to the addition of a new International Economics faculty being added to the school in 2020, the population of male students is slowly increasing. My goals as a teacher include helping students use the English they have learned to discuss real issues in society such as those faced by people in the LGBTQ+ community, those facing learning challenges, and the lives of children raised in adoptive and/or foster families. For students studying to become junior and senior high-school teachers, I help them learn how to make their lessons communicative, relevant, and relatable to students with learning disabilities. In short, I hope to educate students about real issues with the hopes that they can become agents of change in Japanese society.

As mentioned above, the University of Niigata Prefecture is a small, prefectural university, with an intake of about 600 students per year, mostly female. There are currently three faculties: The Faculty of In-

ternational Studies and Regional Development, the Faculty of Human Life Sciences (Early Childhood Education; Nutrition), and the Faculty of International Economics. There is also a Graduate School of International Studies and Regional Development and soon a Graduate School of Human Life Sciences will commence. I play a peripheral role in the Graduate School teaching Academic English for Graduate Students in the second semester of each year. Otherwise, I teach mainly first-year required courses in Academic English, and a teacher's choice CLIL course. For second-year students, I teach an omnibus course in Applied Linguistics – my section focuses on teaching students with learning disabilities, native-speakerism, and gender issues in language teaching. For third-year students, I teach Principles of Language Teaching, in which I demonstrate to future Japanese English teachers how to make their courses more communicative and to fourth-year students Thesis Writing for those wishing to write their undergraduate final papers in English. I am also a thesis advisor for fourth-year students. In alternate years, I also teach a pre-departure course for students preparing to study at the University of Ottawa in Canada for 5 weeks.

I feel that while my university is largely progressive, in that working conditions take working parents into account in school policies, and there are committees addressing issues such as workplace harassment, there is still much that can be done. The first is the hiring of more female faculty members. The imbalance between the mostly-male faculty and mostly-female student body is obvious and students are provided with few female professionals for their role models. In an attempt to counter this, I am open about being the main breadwinner in my family, as well as a foster and adoptive parent, and share openly with my students about the trials women face. I use my classes to help students discover gender bias in textbooks, and invite members of the LGBTQ+, and learning disability (LD) community as speakers to help my students understand issues faced by minorities in Japan. I also invite my female colleagues of any ethnicity to be willing to be interviewed about different issues they live with (having a stay-at-home husband; being a single parent by choice).

## II. Empowerment and Leadership Development

There are many experiences that shaped me as a female leader in Japan. For these purposes, it is important to express the challenges I have faced in my leadership roles while negotiating leadership identity within the structures/strictures of Japanese society, particularly in regard to balancing work, family and mental health issues.

### The “easy” trajectory: becoming a tenured professor

I feel I am an empowered woman in ELT, because I have succeeded beyond my dreams, which is a challenge in a male-oriented country such as Japan where the gap between working women and men is unfortunately large. One of the biggest milestones I would say I have reached is being able to become a tenured university Professor in Japan. For women in ELT around the world wishing to follow the same path, I recommend that they be mindful of the three pillars of succeeding in education in Japan (as well as in other countries): teaching, research, and service. In the Japanese context currently, a working knowledge of Japanese is also essential. In the past, universities did not always demand that Professors be proficient in academic Japanese and head committees along with their Japanese colleagues, but this is changing. With regards to service, I feel that in being the Director of Membership for JALT, the second milestone, I have provided service at the highest level of the organization.

When I turned 40, I realized that I no longer wanted to be going through the perennial revolving door of short-term positions in Japan and that also if I didn't upgrade my qualifications and research output, I would eventually age out and lose a chance for better opportunities. At 42, I was accepted into a PhD program at Macquarie University, an excellent choice of school for many reasons: the program was renowned for being created for working teachers, I made many contacts in my cohort who helped me through the program, and at that time the Australian dollar was low compared to the yen, so I even received a refund after graduating. On the strength of having done ev-

erything but completing my dissertation, I was able to obtain a tenured Lecturer position at the University of Niigata Prefecture. This was in part thanks to being a member of JALT – one of the people who interviewed me for the position was a colleague I had met at a JALT conference through another JALT acquaintance.

I was supported through the program by a particular colleague, Diane Hawley Nagatomo, who was in the same cohort. Even before meeting in person, we exchanged papers and reviewed them for each other before submitting them for coursework. This continued throughout our degree program and even until today. Our initial collaboration led to us writing a book chapter together (Nagatomo & Cook, 2018), working together as book editors (Nagatomo, Brown, & Cook, 2020), and then becoming series editors for Cndl & Mynard Publishers. Once entering UNP, after the initial four years working as a Lecturer, I was invited by the female Dean of the Faculty, Dr. Fukushima, to apply to become an Associate Professor. Four years later, a male colleague, Dr. John Adamson whispered “It’s your turn now” during a faculty meeting when an announcement for promotions was made. Encouraged by his confidence in me, I applied for and was granted promotion to full professor in 2017.

The achievement of obtaining tenure, as achievements go, was fairly straightforward to obtain. I had a clear plan for what I needed to do to get where I wanted to go. Of course, I had the support of my cohort mates and instructors, in the PhD program, but I largely worked independently and at my own pace. Personally motivated, and also a social introvert meaning that I work well on my own, but feel stress in group environments if I don’t have enough time to recharge my batteries, I also suffer from generalized anxiety disorder and depression, which were not diagnosed until 2016. This means that before receiving medication, I operated daily under a constant state of stress and anxiety and a feeling that if I didn’t put 100% into everything I did, I was somehow failing my students or family. I also worried constantly about what my colleagues felt about me and was easily knocked off balance. From the outside, based on

what friends and colleagues said of me, I was often described as an overachiever at worst, or Wonder Woman at best.

### The “hard” trajectory: Being on the Board of Directors for JALT

With this in mind, my second biggest achievement, that of becoming Director of Membership for JALT, was far less straightforward and affected largely by family issues and my beginning to suffer again from heart disease (I had three surgeries since 2014). However, it is necessary to provide some background about why I had been asked to take on this role in the first place. I had volunteered for JALT for many years, working as Membership Chair, Program Chair, Associate Editor and Editor of *JALT Journal*, as well as Niigata Chapter President. The first two tasks took place prior to my moving to Niigata for a tenured position (2009) and while working at a prefectural university in Nagasaki I was on an unlimited 3-year contract in which there were no committee duties. Because I had plenty of time and energy, being Membership Chair and then Program Chair were not overly-stressful and I enjoyed meeting people and making contacts. At that time, I also had no children, and my heart issues had not yet come to the fore. My interactions with other executive members were largely positive, and I could channel my stress energy into teaching and volunteering.

After obtaining tenure at my current workplace, which involved committees, meetings, and the demand to regularly publish and present research, I began working for *JALT Journal*, JALT’s flagship publication, as Associate Editor and then Editor for a total of four years. I was flattered into taking on that position by two male colleagues I met while working on questions for a standardized Japan-wide listening test. There, I gained a good reputation for my work and my circle of friends and colleagues expanded around the country. Doing this work suited me. It was largely administrative and helped me hone my editing skills greatly. Also, I could largely work on my own schedule and since the number of papers sent to *JALT Journal* was lower than that of other JALT publica-

tions, I could again work at my own pace, and largely independently. The work did not interfere with the demands of my job and did not put undue strain on my then family of three. After stepping down after my 4-year mandate, I felt I had gained a reputation as a valuable member of JALT. Yet, unfortunately, when I took on the role of Chapter President in Niigata in 2016, I had to step down after only one year. I had just begun fostering a child who was going through the “testing phase” (to see if we could care for her). This phase involved attempting to manage a child who fought, screamed, threw objects, and stole money from everyone else in the household. This took a mental toll on me, and I started having suicidal ideations and required medication for depression and anxiety to help me cope.

Earlier, however, after stepping down as Editor of *JALT Journal*, I would be regularly contacted by someone inviting me to take on a role at the Board of Directors level, and I would have done so earlier, but for the factors mentioned above delayed taking part in these activities. Each time, I replied “Ask me again in two years.” The first time I was asked, I had just been diagnosed with heart disease (atrial fibrillation) and needed to adjust to this life-altering situation and prepare for surgery. I wasn’t sure what the demands of being on the Board would entail but knew they would take up a lot of time and energy that I didn’t have. The second time, mental health, and family issues, as mentioned above, prevented me from joining the Board. There was no possibility that I could, at that time, take on the demands of working on the Board of Directors; there are no “easy” roles at the highest level of administration of a nation-wide organization. Finally, after both of my children were settled and in high school, I felt ready to say, “Yes”, when asked. Unfortunately, though, I could not seek re-election after the first two-year commitment ended (usually members stay on for four years), because I began having heart trouble again and had to double my medication. Not only that, but many of the stresses that contributed to my anxiety and depression began to resurface.

To be honest, I felt overwhelmed working on the Board of Directors; I had never held such a high-

profile position before and while doing my best, always felt that I could have been doing more. It seemed to me that most other members of the Board, such as the President, Vice-President, Director of Public Relations, and Director of Program were more knowledgeable about the organization as a whole, the minutiae of its rules, and seemed to have unlimited time to devote to their tasks. I felt a sense of accomplishment for conducting a membership survey which would be useful in guiding the policies and future movement of JALT, creating a more cohesive atmosphere among Membership Chairs of Chapters and Special Interest Groups, and dealing with administrative day-to-day matters. However, at the same time, I felt that if I had been younger, stronger (both mentally and physically), and childfree, in addition to my full-time job, my other Board of Directors tasks, such as being on several committees, and attending many meetings would have been less stressful and I would have been able to commit to the JALT Board of Directors more fully.

Happily, while in the position as Director of Membership, I was supported by the other members of the Board, as well as inspired by them. Especially inspiring was Dawn Lucovich, author of part 2 of this chapter and who, as President of JALT, took her work seriously and was determined to turn JALT into a more professional organization. Dawn brought her studies of leadership to the role as well as fresh ideas she gleaned from attending many ELT conferences. She attended meetings even when overseas and at odd hours and dedicated herself fully to JALT. Although more than 20 years my junior, she was definitely a role model, and someone I could talk to as the only other woman on the Board. Dawn was always a calm, sensible leader, who weighed all options before making decisions. Although I always had a sense that I was not a “leader”, Dawn, as well as other members of the Board, assured me that I was. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, my decision to not seek re-election was made after my heart troubles arose again in 2022; something had to go, and sadly that was being on the Board of Directors.

In reading my narrative, perhaps readers might notice the lack of mention of gender, which might

show that Japan is heading in the right direction in terms of gender balance. While I had always competed against mostly men, (75% of university positions held by foreigners in Japan are male) (Nagatomo & Cook, 2018) I always felt respected and supported by them, especially my colleagues at both work and within the JALT organization. At times, I have wondered if I have been asked to represent “women” on panels as a token, but know that my research background is strong, my work ethic is widely known, and that I have been asked to take on positions largely due to my own merit. While I recognize that some opinions expressed by a small number of my male colleagues may be problematic, I am not afraid to address these things and call for change.

### Culture over gender

The gendered demands of Japanese culture do cross my mind often, especially when I think of my family, and wonder how my life is viewed by Japanese people

around me, but as a second-wave western feminist, I hold strongly to my identity as a teacher and researcher and take pride in my successes. There were times and situations, such as adoptive/foster family retreats where most women were full-time mothers and I felt I had nothing in common with them and I sometimes do regret not participating in family life as fully as my Japanese husband, but had my family lived in Canada, I could have been “in charge” of paperwork and the daily demands of living a life in the English language. Being a foreign resident in Japan, I am grateful to my husband for taking on the bulk of childcare, enabling me to succeed in my career and support my family. My level of comfort may come from the double-edged sword of foreigners in Japan being allowed more leeway in how they conduct their lives, while also being considered unable to act in a Japanese manner. I cheerfully embrace this one advantage of my visible minority identity.

To be continued...

# Women as Leaders in Higher Education and a Language Teaching Association (LTA) in Japan - Part 2

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If you remember this is a two part chapter, where two strong women in ELT will provide real-life examples through auto-ethnography, illustrating their lived experiences within the intersection of female leadership identity, transnationalism and globalization as foreign women in higher education and language teaching association (LTA) leadership positions in Japan. While both chapters are independent, we recommend the reader to begin with part 1. Just as a reminder in Part 1 Melodie Cook contrasted her experiences of becoming a tenured Professor with her work on the board of JALT, to show how leadership in different contexts results in different demands. In Part 2 Dawn Lucovich will discuss being elected president of the board of the Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT), among a male-dominated leadership.

## I. Background

Dawn is an American woman, born in South Korea and adopted to the United States, who has lived and worked in the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Japan. Her undergraduate degree is

in Rhetoric from the University of Illinois, her Master's degree is in Education with a specialization in TESOL from Teachers College Columbia University, and She completed my Ph.D coursework in Applied Linguistics at Temple University. She also finished a second master's degree in Organizational Leadership and Learning from The George Washington University. She works as a tenured Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Global Management at a brand-new public university in Nagano, Japan, but previously worked in a Department of Linguistics, Literature and Cultural Studies at a prestigious private university in Tokyo. She works as part of a team inside an intensive English Program for Global Mobility in the Department of Global Management in a public four-year university in Japan. She joined the faculty in planning for the university before it opened in 2018, while working full-time and finishing my doctoral coursework in Tokyo.

Although the university is brand new and approximately 50% of enrolled students are female, the number of female faculty recruited is few. She is one of two foreign-born female faculty members in the department and eight total at the university. She organizes an online writing accountability group for researchers in Japan who write and publish in English; the majority of the members are female. My goals as an educator are to bring international experiences and perspectives to students, to normalize being a global citizen, and to be a role model, especially for female students and young professionals in Asia.

Since her workplace is a brand-new regional university, it has been slowly developing and finding its own institutional culture. Although management departments are traditionally male-dominated, over 50% of global management-major students are female at the university. These students can specialize in management, civil service, or entrepreneurship; any of which will help female education and employment. One of the most difficult challenges for the brand-new university, however, is the preference for students to work together and socialize exclusively in single-gender groups. Most certainly this may have resounding effects for perpetuation of gender inequity as students graduate, network professionally, assist former classmates, or guide

current students towards jobs and careers. Although She have often voiced that there is a need for departmental or institutional intervention to promote gender mixing, I have been told by older Japanese faculty that “Japanese people don’t think that way.” To promote friendship among students and to add more points of contact with international cultures, she started and organized the Global Language Table—a daily lunch-time language table where students, staff, faculty, and community members could come together and speak in different languages. Prior to the pandemic, she would invite guests to cook or share food together with students, to teach about their cultures and languages, and discuss global issues. During the pandemic, the language table shifted online.

One of the most difficult challenges for female ELT professionals in Japan is the fact that ELT in Japan is male dominated and the aforementioned single-gender networking tendencies can be a high barrier to female careers. Among full-time tenured ELT professionals in Japan, the vast majority are Japanese men, followed by foreign-born men, while the vast majority of part-time contract ELT professionals are Japanese women (see Nagatomo & Cook, 2018). As the president of one of the largest language teaching associations in Japan, She planned and executed multiple initiatives to contribute to more equitable networking and career development opportunities: First, she proposed and launched a mentoring and orientation committee and recruited an expert on reverse mentoring which organizes mentoring programs and reflective listening workshops. Second, she envisioned, organized, and led a monthly Zoom for Professional Development (ZPD), which leverages the principles of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), and allows for informal networking around crowd-sourced topics of interest. Finally, she created curricula for and piloted a leadership development circle, which focuses on peer-sharing and short leadership lessons which can fit into busy schedules.

## II. Empowerment and Leadership Development

Regarding Empowerment and Leadership, She will examine my experience first as a legitimate peripheral participant of the language teaching association and fi-

nally, now, as a core member of the organization (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, et al., 2002).

### From legitimate peripheral participant to core member

For her, professional empowerment as a woman is the freedom, ability, and encouragement to envision, plan for, and reach one’s professional goals. Marian Wright Edelman, in my capacity as an activist, as well as founder and president emerita of the Children’s Defense Fund, said, “It’s hard to be what you can’t see.” As a woman, not having a female role model in one’s professional context can be incredibly discouraging. One of the greatest achievements in my career has been to be elected as the third female president in JALT’s nearly 50-year history. Although 18 people have been president, with some serving multiple terms, only three have been women. My successor is also a woman. A second achievement has been to be nominated and elected for an elected position to TESOL International Association’s Nominating Committee. As a member of the Nominating Committee, She is am responsible for identifying and selecting candidates who will serve as future leaders of the organization and, thus, as leaders of TESOL as a field. She hopes that her journey and accomplishments will be encouraging, especially for other ethnic minority Americans, Asian women, women in Asia, and women who live and work and are made to question their ability and worth in highly patriarchal cultures.

She started out her career development journey as a peripheral member who was encouraged by graduate school professors and classmates at Teachers College Columbia University in Japan to attend JALT events. She finally decided to join JALT and attend a conference when it was held in Tokyo. Several years later, she happened to live near Sophia University, the venue where the Tokyo chapter of JALT held its events, hosted by then-Tokyo chapter president Dr. Jim McKinley. She was a frequent attendee and, during one event, volunteered to assist with an invited speaker. She was later encouraged to run for the Tokyo chapter vice presidency and then presidency. After attending executive meetings in that capacity for several years, she was literally collared at a TESOL International

Convention by the then-JALT president, Dr. Richmond Stroupe, and introduced to one of that year's JALT plenary speakers. She was approached by members of the current and previous executive board, especially Professor Naomi Fujishima, then-vice president, and encouraged to accept a nomination to become a candidate for an executive board position. Without the explicit encouragement and trust demonstrated by people in leadership positions, she would not have had the motivation or support to run for election. Because the leaders knew exactly what the position and duties entailed and demanded, their endorsement or encouragement resonated strongly with me. However, She also would not have thought to run without learning more about being a director from Dr. Louise Ohashi, a former colleague who had also served on the executive board, or without support from Tokyo chapter officers, Matthew Kocourek and Yuko Tanahashi.

### III. Reflections and Recommendations for the Future from Melodie and Dawn

As you have learned in this two-part chapter, Melodie and Dawn reflect on their experiences, and offer advice and recommendations for up-and-coming women in ELT around the world.

Dawn has learned to build connections and relationships laterally and vertically, identify and cultivate future leaders, adapt and apply new literature and research quickly and flexibly, and to test out ideas and see if they work for her context. In retrospect, she would have said yes to *all* opportunities; she regrets only those paths that she did not take. Dawn has had several principles that guided her early career, which yield the following recommendations. First, try many different things to discover the kind of work that you excel at and that you find the most fulfilling. However, also consider that at different stages of your life and career, these may be enormously different things. Second, when you have mastered those things, give back by teaching about them or encourage a less-experienced person to take your place, and then move on to the next level. This suits Dawn's personality as she places a high value on supporting and mentoring others, as well as on challenge and novelty. Third, show up. Being in the

"right place at the right time" happens much more easily if you participate early, often, and frequently. To progress in your career, professional development should be written into your calendar like a birthday, social event, or exercise. Fourth, be memorable. Dawn is an active Asian American woman in TESOL in Japan with an unusual last name and an unusual life story. Trade on whatever makes you memorable and stick in people's minds.

Melodie has learned much by being on the JALT Board of Directors. She has learned to try to not make snap judgements or bend to the prevailing zeitgeist. She has also learned what good leadership looks like, although she can't imagine being calm and detached enough to do it herself. She has learned to listen to other opinions and that rather than wait to be told what to do, she should take more initiative as a leader, and rather than focus on the day-to-day management of an organization, she should think more about the big picture and direction that that organization should go in. In retrospect, what she would have done differently is shadow the previous Director earlier to see what would be demanded of her before deciding to join the Board. If she had known how demanding the post would be, she may not have accepted it. On the other hand, had she known that committee work entailed her giving her opinions only and not having to actually run meetings (that was the Chairperson's task), she would have felt less stress about being on those committees. For other women wanting to thrive in ELT, she recommends that they find out as much as they can about leadership roles before taking them on. If they have all their ducks in a row, are organized at work, and have the time and mental energy to devote themselves to daily service for an organization, then they should do so. Again, she hopes that the demands and tasks expected of Board members be more transparently laid out to those thinking about taking them on. Perhaps, as in many JALT Chapters, a shadowing system could be put in place, whereby prospective Board members could learn about the task in detail before taking it on.

As for obtaining tenure, Melodie recommends that women be mindful of the three pillars of university work: teaching, research, and service. If they can maintain a balance of all these things, as well as have a work-

ing knowledge of Japanese, they will be sure to succeed, especially since Japanese universities are making efforts to correct the imbalance of a male-dominated teaching force, particularly at the tertiary level in Japan. She encourages more women who hope to work in academia in Japan to get a PhD, publish, belong to organizations and work within them in positions of responsibility and make sure their Japanese will be at more than survival level. If they can do this, they are very certain to go as far as they wish. While they may hear something different from their white male colleagues, some of whom were hired a long time ago on the basis of their “foreignness” or appearance, they should consider how tenure is obtained “back home” (publish or perish) and consider striving for excellence.

Melodie and Dawn sincerely hope that their reflection on their professional and personal experiences will enrich and add to the literature about and for women in ELT around the world.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important for women to take on leadership roles in Japan? Why is it important for women to take on leadership roles in your country and context?

en to take on leadership roles in your country and context?

2. Consider what obstacles may impede taking on a leadership role. How could you overcome them?
3. How can you assist, support, and show up for younger or less experienced women leaders and future leaders?

### Critical Thinking Bullets

- Think about gender equity in your country and how this influences the leadership of women in the field.
- Reflect on how mentors and peers create a strong support network for women who face challenging times
- Consider what you would need to do in order to encourage others, especially women, in your context and how you will do this to promote leadership.
- Explore the possibilities of disrupting paradigms and promoting inclusivity, appreciating changes in gender roles and creating an environment of tolerance and respect for the different perspectives, loves and contributions in any given context.

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# Be Bold in All That You Do

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## I.- Background

My story is incomplete without a backdrop to my childhood. As a child, I often found myself bidding farewell to my friends and transferring schools within the same academic year due to the nature of my father's work. Therefore, I grew up in various countries and learned many languages, which has influenced how I view the world and communicate with people. Constantly being on the move and trying to adapt to a new system was beyond upsetting but this made me who I am: a flexible, independent, and resilient woman who is not easily broken, not even by the most treacherous thing in life: war.

During one of my many transitions and as a newly arrived student, I had no option but to study German as a second language since the French class was at capacity. I sat in class and felt overwhelmed not understanding a single word. The teacher did not attempt to help me and made me sit at the back of the class. I felt like an imposter and soon failed my first test! I was angry and frustrated but determined to show my neglectful teacher that I could succeed without her support. I clearly remember the lack of affirmation and the blank stare the teacher gave me as she handed me my next exam paper with an A written at the top. I vowed that if I ever became a teacher, I would never be insensitive to my students' needs and would do everything possible to help them succeed.

My multicultural experiences and exposure to various languages have made me flexible, accepting of people from different communities, and able to adjust to new environments. These experiences have led me to not conform to any traditions or conventions but rather be more truthful to myself and my beliefs about humanity. They made me an embodiment of Anzaldúa's (2012) borderlands theory but instead of having to choose between two identities, I constantly find myself struggling to choose between many because I am simply a mixture of various cultures.

As a young adult, I returned to my country, Syria, thinking that I could finally settle in a place where I would experience a sense of belonging. To my dismay, I soon realized that it would not be easy to fit in as I was always viewed as a 'foreigner' given that I spent my teenage years abroad. This was my first lesson: our unique experiences shape us and alter not only how we define our identity but also how we are perceived. This was only the beginning of a series of challenges that I endured, fought, and overcame feeling stronger than before.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

### • Cloud One: Non-Nativeness

My path was full of hurdles as a fresh graduate aspiring to become a language teacher in a country where English was becoming increasingly important. I started teaching at an American institution during the summer, which is usually a busy term with many sessions offered since children are off school. My classes were successful and engaging and the feedback that I received from my supervisor was excellent. However, that was not sufficient because according to him I, "...was not an American citizen." I did not give up and decided to pursue a position in another American institution. After days of training and testing, I delivered what everyone called 'a fantastic lesson'. Once again, lacking American citizenship stood in my way of securing a teaching position. That door was closed forever. The dominant native speaker ideology disqualified me and disempowered me as a legitimate English language teacher (Phillipson, 1992). It placed

high importance on nativeness and disvalued my credentials, qualifications, and everything that I brought into the field (Yazan, 2018).

In 2010, the Arab Spring began, and with it came a series of hardships and life-changing events. I vividly remember March 15, 2011, when the first series of demonstrations marked the spark that lit the Syrian flame. Soon, the situation escalated, and people were afraid that Syria was going into a dark place. Going to work meant spending as many as three hours going through checkpoints, driving through demonstrations and gunshots, and sometimes seeing people die before your eyes. I was determined to remain positive and see my students through the academic year and ensure their success. However, the situation intensified in the capital, where my family resided, and a task as simple as leaving the house could cost us our lives.

One day and after I had sent two of my daughters to school, I heard a horrendous explosion. It was so terrifying that everyone in Syria thought it happened in their area. The phone lines went dead, and on the news, they announced that it happened in an area that was a few miles away from my daughter's school. It was much later that the school called and told me that my kid was safe.

That night, I was watching the news with my child beside me. I hugged her and cried as I saw the pictures of those who died and among them were some of my students. My hesitancy to leave the country was over and my husband and I felt it was time to leave Syria for the safety of our children. To make that move, I decided that I should get a CELTA certificate, which is a certificate in English language teaching to adults. This was a vital step towards securing a job in other countries.

#### • Cloud Two: A Syrian in Transition

In the fall of 2012, we were forced to flee Syria for the safety of our children. I left everything I had worked hard for and started looking for a job in a new country that was alarmed at the flood of Syrians through its border.

I began teaching at a reputable college; my efforts did not go unnoticed and three months later, I was asked to become the coordinator of the entire program. It soon became apparent to me that many were not happy about having a Syrian coordinator. I did not receive my salary for three months in a row and when I complained, I was met with, "You should be thankful you have a job as a Syrian!". Here my non-nativeness was not the issue but my Syrian citizenship, instead.

Everywhere I went, I heard stories about how Syrians were a burden and how they took away jobs from the locals. I was exhausted emotionally, physically, and mentally but I could not complain because 'I am a Syrian taking away a golden opportunity from the native Jordanians!' Life for Syrians in Jordan became insecure because of the new decisions that were made by the Jordanian government, which left us unsure about our future. Every day, we would wake up to new legislations regarding car ownership, work permits, and travel restrictions, and the list continued.

Leaving Jordan was forthcoming and this time it was to pursue a dream of mine, which is earning a Ph.D. I received an acceptance from the University of South Florida with a teaching assistantship opportunity, and with that started a new journey in 2015.

#### • Cloud Three: An Immigrant in the U.S.

As a Muslim Syrian woman, I could sense that people looked at me differently and I could not easily acclimate. Every time I walk into a new class, I see the astonishment in the eyes of many students who immediately inquire about my background. During one of my classes and after I showed a video about the first school for girls in Afghanistan, I heard a male student talk about how Islam is backward and how it prohibits girls from receiving an education. Following this, I was happy to denounce his statement by sharing that I was an Arab Muslim mom who was still pursuing her education. This resulted in a rich class discussion about cultures from around the world and how religion and culture are separate from one another.

Three months later, that young gentleman told me, "I am glad I met you. This was my first encounter with a Muslim, and you sure gave me a great impression about them!"

During my Ph.D. program, a professor asked me to define my identity. I sat puzzled for a long time thinking about this seemingly simple question, yet one that was extremely difficult to explicate. My identity is a mixture of all my experiences, all the languages I learned, and all the cultures that I have been exposed to. I even had trouble discussing my identity as a teacher, but later developed a clearer awareness of it with the help of my students. What kind of a teacher am I? And how do I want my students to remember me?

While volunteering at an after-school refugee program, many of the students asked me if I had children of my own and if I helped them with their homework. One of the kids told me, "They are lucky they have you. I wish my mom could help me with my homework, but she doesn't know English." That sparked an idea in my head. I started teaching at a center that catered to immigrants and refugees. Most of my students were Syrian women who had children and were held back from learning English due to systemic challenges they endured like inaccessibility to daycares and transportation services. These women came to class with much zeal and passion to learn English and change their lives. My role surpassed teaching them English to helping them understand how to adjust to their new life in the U.S. and understand the system. At the end of the course, these refugee women were informed that English classes would be suspended because they did not have daycare services. I was saddened that they did not have a choice and decided to find a way out for them, which materialized in the form of online learning.

Many women were reluctant at first, but they soon warmed up to the idea and began to enjoy it and benefit from it. I noticed one of my students' hesitancy to participate in class. She always stuttered and told me that she did not feel capable of doing well. I listened to her concerns and provided encourage-

ment and comfort to reinforce that she is capable of succeeding. She later broke into tears as she told me how a previous teacher made fun of her while reading, which caused the entire class to burst into laughter, something that instigated the stuttering, which eventually worsened and continued to accompany her for the next 30 years (Hadid, 2020).

A second woman told me that learning English online has enabled her to study independently. Opening this door has empowered her to consider becoming a language teacher for children who speak her native language. This empowerment has reached an all-time peak during the pandemic at a time when learning was disrupted for many. These women reached out to me and shared stories about their resilience and success learning online. They talked about how they were able to help their children study and how they could continue to learn English despite the challenges that many other students faced.

Hearing my students' stories made me want to raise my voice so we can all be heard. This materialized through an invite from the University of Rhode Island on International Women's Day. I was honored to share my story and those of many empowered and resilient women who despite the war were able to rise above all the challenges and start again in a new country and dream big of a better future for them and their children.

Working with these female students was extremely rewarding. This experience helped me better understand that everything that I had been through was for a greater reason. My experiences made me more sensitive and prepared me to reach out to a vulnerable population. It has made me in the words of my students a "caring teacher". These students helped me better understand who I am as a teacher and allowed me to make sense of my teacher identity. Caring is the one quality that I truly hoped for as a student and that I am grateful for having as a teacher. Personally speaking, I believe teachers need to possess many important qualities of which I would place care at the forefront. Caring is essential in all aspects of life and has been deemed central to education (Noddings, 1984).

### III.- Looking forward into the future

- Moving Forward

Finally, my dream to effect bigger change became a reality when I was hired as an assistant professor in TESOL at Rhode Island College. Walking on campus, I recalled all my struggles and people's sarcasm at dreaming of teaching TESOL as an immigrant in America. I thought to myself, "... I'm happy to say I'm not only living *that* dream, but I have learned how to harness the fearlessness that came so easily as a child to bring my grown-up goals to life. Teach yourself to dream without limits, and you will achieve without limits." (Leyba, 2014, p. 4).

As I stepped into Rhode Island College's campus, I felt an immediate connection. Looking around, I felt proud that my efforts have not been in vain. Every day, I feel reassured and encouraged seeing this sign "Be Bold in All That You Do." I feel proud not because of what I have accomplished but because of the support I could provide these powerful and resilient women whose paths crossed mine. I would like to tell them and many others - if I could do it, so can you.

I speak up so others can be heard. I want to share my story and the stories of other women hoping to effect change and prove that after every struggle, every stumble, something good will happen because what does not break you makes you stronger.

Working on this chapter, I continuously asked myself why I wanted to spill myself on paper. Being vulnerable is not easy so why do I want to do this?! I guess I am hoping that some woman out there might read this and relate to it. Maybe this could be my way of reaching out to others. However, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I was doing it for myself, too. I remembered Anazdula's (2012) words about writing as a form of healing and how in "reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make 'sense' of them, and once they have 'meaning'

they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy" (p. 92). It helps me feel liberated and empowered to reach out to others and provide them with a glimpse into what believing in themselves, persisting, and having courage can help them accomplish... it does not have to always be painful... because every cloud has a silver lining.

#### Critical thinking leading points

After reading this story, reflect on the following statements:

- The role of people/events in shaping our identities
- Are our identities fixed or changing?
- The relationship between identity and professional growth
- Women and their impact on the ELT field

#### Discussion questions

You can use these questions for discussion in the classroom:

1. How does the native speaker fallacy impact non-native English teachers and language teaching?
2. In what ways do cultural barriers impact women language teachers?
3. In what ways can female language teachers impact the lives and career paths of other female teachers?
4. How can women teachers promote equitable learning opportunities?
5. How does fear impact people's chances of receiving equitable learning opportunities?

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# Strong belief in overcoming challenges: a success story to share

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## I.- Background

I believe most of us have at least once asked a question of how strong we are and what kind of circumstances beyond our control could break us. People can say that many things are in our hands and there is a possibility to change or improve quite a lot if we want to, but it might not always be true, or things may not work as we think they should. However, there is always a way out of any situation, and my life experience has proven it several times.

Being a fresh master's degree graduate in applied linguistics I was accepted for a position of an academic English lecturer at one of the transnational universities in the capital city. I was not a novice teacher as I was already working in the pedagogical higher education institution and had a part-time job in the language learning center for a couple of years. But it was a new experience for me in the English-medium (EMI) university, the place where I started working more than ten years ago and am still working now. During this time, I have taught several subjects to the pre-university, first- and second-year students, which include those connected to language, academic, transferrable, and employability skills. Currently, I

am a senior lecturer involved in teacher training and international research projects, teaching Academic English to the first-year students, conducting professional development training sessions, mentoring newcomers, designing new undergraduate and post-graduate courses, and conducting research studies in and outside of the university.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

Becoming who I am now was not easy as I had to overcome several challenges at work and handle life difficulties on my own. The first challenge was faced when the head of the department appointed me to be a module leader of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) after almost two years of my teaching at the university. As de Chazal (2014) explains, EAP is a broad concept that is concerned not only with teaching four language skills, but also critical thinking and study skills as well as developing students' autonomy. At that time, apart from the module content and structure, a module leader was responsible for doing quite a lot of tasks, such as developing the assessment tasks, designing academic calendars for two semesters, selecting students' papers for cross marking and making copies for all team members, manually entering students' marks into the students' record system, appointing second assessors, bringing all the students' scripts from the registrar's office, manually distributing the scripts among the team members, assigning teachers for material design, and providing feedback on the lesson plans. In addition, I was in charge of conducting team meetings on a regular basis, replying to the emails of students on the course, and participating in the course committee meetings (CCMs) that were organized twice a semester to obtain students' feedback on EAP content and structure, teachers' methodology and any other issues.

Although similar responsibilities were assigned to the module leaders of other subjects, they might not have faced all the difficulties that I did due to several reasons. One of them was my colleagues' attitude as they questioned my actions or decisions made regarding the module. Being the youngest module leader made me vulnerable as they believed that as a young female, I was not experienced enough to

perform this role well. In addition, the head of the department was not supportive and was doing her best to let me down rather than assist in certain aspects. Hearing such a phrase as “this young lady will not manage it” for several times made me disappointed in the beginning. Another difficulty was the number of students enrolled in the course as when I became the module leader it increased three times, from 300 to almost 950 students. Some of the learners were not satisfied with their EAP teachers who seemed to be boring for them. The comments were related to the teaching strategies and the way the material was explained as the transfer of information might have “restricted the dynamic of communication” between the lecturers and students (Roman, 2014). Some other students believed that they deserved a much higher mark, while the rest thought that the subject itself should be modified. I received and replied to up to fifty students’ emails every day, observed my colleagues’ lessons to identify possible issues, talked to the students and lecturers in person, and read university handbooks/regulations and a lot of books on teaching and assessing EAP in different learning contexts to solve the issues.

I wanted to give up the module leadership very many times. I loved teaching and thought that it was a job that should bring me positive emotions and satisfaction. My teaching was never questioned either by the students on the course or colleagues, and the only problem was me being the module leader who was appointed without being provided any proper explanation and not knowing how much would be required. Such a psychological pressure influenced my health badly and I had to make a few appointments with a general practitioner to find out what could be done to become physically stronger. I took little medical treatment for some time but started doing yoga and later pilates on a regular basis and spent much time with my family and friends. The greatest support provided by my family members and close friends helped me a lot, as they believed in me and knew that I could survive and overcome all these difficulties at work. The first year passed in a blink of an eye and the first biggest challenge was confronted. During the next years I was able to introduce several important changes into EAP teaching and assessment

that resulted in positive feedback from the students and teachers. It was possible to achieve because I did my best to create a pedagogical culture “where educational issues and learning is central for the learning organization” (Bolander et al., 2016). I was an EAP module leader for seven years, which is the longest period for any other leaders who used to be or currently are performing a similar role.

The second significant challenge that I had to respond to at the workplace was research. It is believed by most content lecturers at the university that English teachers cannot be great researchers because they do not seem to be able to conduct quality research. Unfortunately, it takes time and much effort to disapprove of it, and I, as many other ELT teachers, had to provide solid evidence to prove that a study carried out in education or applied linguistics is also true academic research. The university I am working for is quite young as it was one of the first international EMI universities established and accredited in the country in 2002. Initially, it aimed at introducing the British educational system and focused on the professional development and quality teaching. After some time, there appeared a tendency to make the higher education institution research-oriented, which was a very good intention, however, the one that was imposed rather than promoted and encouraged. A newly appointed head of the research department organized several meetings with the staff of every department at the university and discussed possibilities and support for conducting research studies and publishing quality scholarly papers in the peer-reviewed journals indexed in the international databases. But when the meeting was held with the English language department, he was quite aggressive and informed us that he did not know much about doing research “in our linguistics” and that is why was not sure how helpful he could be for us. Although the whole department was very much offended, we decided not to give up and to show what we could do and achieve in research.

As many English language departments, ours was not an exception and consisted of mostly female teachers. We paired up to conduct action research at the start and later some of our colleagues including me did the studies on their own. Perry highlights that

research in applied linguistics can cover a variety of topics as it deals with anything “where language relates to society” (2017, p.4). Then, in a year, after the new regulations were introduced by the research department, two of my female colleagues and I carried out a study on the effectiveness of writing conferences in teaching academic writing and presented the findings at the teaching and learning symposium at the university. The award for the best presentation of the research results and practical application was a trip to London and participation in the teaching and learning symposium at the parent university, which we won that year. It was one of the greatest achievements not only for us as academic English teachers, but also for the whole department as we proved that a study carried out for the purposes of improving the quality of teaching at the university is important. After some time, the research department introduced a new scheme for encouraging the university lecturers to conduct research, which included research exchange with the partner university, covering fees for participation in the international conferences and travel grants as well as awards for being best scholars.

One of the awards from the research department which was given to one staff member of each department was a week trip to the UK and participation in the conference and professional development training fully financed by the university. I won it and was the only female lecturer among other six winners who had an opportunity to go. Another considerable achievement was the award given by the university for the last three years is the Most Effective/Valued Scholar of the academic year in the department. My female colleagues got this award in the first two years and previous academic year I received it for the number of presentations in the international conferences and publications in the peer-reviewed journals indexed in such databases as Scopus and ProQuest. Apart from this, I participated in numerous research projects organized both at the university and jointly with international organizations. This allowed presenting the findings of the studies at the conferences held offline in the UK, France, Turkey, Kazakhstan, and online in the USA and Latvia. Two presentations were made in collaboration with my colleagues at two

TESOL International Conventions and English Language Expo in 2021 and 2022. All these major achievements were not easy to have as I had to learn a lot, i.e., how to properly conduct a study, how to make calculations, what academic phrases to use to present the findings, and how to give an effective presentation at the international conference. This learning facilitated me in addressing the second major challenge and making research part of my professional development as an English teacher at the tertiary level.

The difficulties at the workplace have helped me to become a better leader and language teacher, as well as an academic researcher, but the third biggest challenge that I faced made me a stronger person. I was born in a small town not far from the capital city in a very friendly and supportive family that gave me an opportunity to get higher education although neither of my parents had one. Even studying languages and connecting my life with English as one of the widely spoken languages were recommended by my family members. They supported me in all my beginnings and were proud of me when I had my first international travel and of my achievements in teaching, learning, and research. The family were calling me “our professor” at times and were very happy when I started my part-time doctoral studies. However, I lost all members of my immediate family one by one in a very short period of time. To be honest, I wanted to drop my studies and did not have any wish to work or be a good English teacher to any student. The desire to live and create something interesting or important was lost as I thought forever. But in some time, I understood that great support given by my friends, relatives, and colleagues as well as my job as an English language teacher helped me to survive and not to withdraw into myself. My students provided very positive feedback that encouraged me to continue working because “good feedback entailed trustful relationships” (Esterhazy et al., 2020). I was also offered to participate in a couple of joint projects that kept me going on. My parents were not able to see all my achievements in teaching and research, but all these successes were and are devoted to them as without them I would never become who I am now. So, I did my best to effectively overcome the third major challenge in my life.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

We do not know what kind of difficulties we might go through in our life; however, we should always believe in ourselves. Being a female ELT teacher at the international university is not easy as many things must be proven and justified. My seven-year module leadership helped me to learn a lot about the university regulations and currently I am consulting and supporting newly appointed module leaders. I have also become an academic staff representative at the Academic Council of the University. My resistance to research was overcome and I started undertaking studies with my colleagues and on my own, which resulted in international publications and participation in the conferences. Together with the male and female colleagues we also organize an annual conference on linguistics and education at the university premises and invite distinguished scholars, such as Penny Ur and Joyce Kling. The loss of my immediate family did not break me but made even stronger than I thought I could be because we never know how much we can do if we try our best.

Being a woman might be difficult in the men's world as it requires a lot of effort to obtain what she wants or needs. However, I believe in equity and hope that ELT female teachers around the globe can achieve many things and become valued members of their society and country. Hopefully, my short story of overcoming some major difficulties at work can change the views of young women who have just started their way in ELT and help them to believe in themselves.

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### Critical Thinking bullets:

Some of these critical thinking statements might be useful as well:

- Overcoming challenges might be painful, but the pain can be gone through.
- Family and friends are the most valuable support in any female leader's life.
- It is important for a woman to achieve certain things for herself not for a society.
- Belief is not enough; action is also crucial in obtaining positive results.

### Discussion questions

1. Why did you decide to become an English teacher? What were the main challenges at the beginning of your teaching career? What were the major achievements?
2. How supportive was your family when you decided to be an EFL teacher? Was anyone against your decision? If yes, what were their main reasons?
3. Think of a situation when knowledge of English was helpful in attaining certain goals. What was possible for you to achieve? What role did the English language play?
4. Do you believe that being a female teacher might cause certain difficulties? If yes, what are they? What can you recommend to successfully overcome them?

# Memories of a resilient woman in English Language Teaching worlds

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## I.- Background

It is a post-pandemic afternoon, and a group of English language teachers share some experiences lived throughout their work towards peace construction beyond conceptualizations and practices in certain formal proposals such as peacebuilding, global citizenship, and even peace education in Colombian territories. People listening to this talk are attentive and their follow-up questions deepen this discussion regarding the experiences shared. They feel heard and valued by people in other spatialities and temporalities. Multiple knowledges (de Sousa, 2018) weaved by diverse people have become a source of potential life-inspired transformations. The present narrative tells a series of real-life situations that take place in the same story about an everlasting creation of empowering from diverse positions and life experiences. Indeed, I am one of the teachers who is part of the interaction described beforehand.

Feeling heard and valued as a woman who has the capacity and the right to create proposals towards socially transformed ways of living has not been as constant as expected in an educational world

that is seemingly looking for social justice and equality. Nevertheless, I admit that some challenges produced as a result of socially unjust situations and conditions such as multiple forms of silencing have allowed me to strengthen and turn up an already existing voice in my body. Now, I want to introduce myself as a woman, an English language teacher educator, a peace constructor, a researcher, a bilingual, a resilient *doctoranda*, and a direct and indirect victim of different types of *violences* (Gamallo, 2014), which are naturalized in various social institutions, including the educational one. Moreover, I have taught English at schools, but my professional experience has mostly occurred at language institutes and universities. In both cases, I have confirmed dynamic, rather than linear teaching processes and practices, are appropriate decisions for real pedagogical settings. If education is part of our everyday life, and this one is highly complex and dynamic, teaching and learning experiences should inherit the same nature. When this does not happen, struggles and tensions to face emerge. My story embraces tensions and struggles that have allowed me to learn, unlearn and re-learn different ways of living grounded in multifaceted beliefs towards myself, and co-created empowering.

Let us move some years before the teachers' talk at the outset. It is high school, and my English teacher asked us to listen to and memorize 11 songs in English. Access to the songs to practice them at that time was limited if you had socioeconomic constraints. Fortunately, one of my mother's friends in the neighborhood made me the favor to record a CD with the songs. I felt so encouraged to learn the songs that I practiced them that day till late at night. In the morning at the school, some classmates had not had the chance to access to the songs apart from our practice in the computer room. Then, I felt like assisting them with this task, and I met them in turns during the school break to practice the songs together, based on each classmate's particular doubts. It was a relevant moment in my life story for two main reasons. Firstly, it was an initial experience performing a role similar to English teachers', and it was self-rewarding. Secondly, silencing produced by structural violence through socio-economic gaps seemed locally

challenged by this educational collective empowering to do the class task.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

Three years later, I started my Bachelor in English language teaching at a public university. As a preservice language teacher, I noticed further silencing moves for multiple reasons other than social class ones, which produced diverse struggles and tensions in myself; these ones encouraged, but also hindered my empowering sometimes. Precisely, I recall certain situations where I was silenced for being a woman. When trying to introduce a female voice in a conversation between male academics and prospective teachers, I was ignored or ridiculed, even when having strong arguments to support my positions. I understand and relate it to the male talk rules (Datnow, & Hubbard, 2002, 2013), according to which female preservice English teachers' voices (in the case of ELT) should be silenced, unless they could echo and keep male voices turned up. Interestingly, I have witnessed how this is enacted across multiple gender identities, rather than being only practiced by men. A subsequent unlearning involved challenging the dichotomic tendency to understand gender-based discrimination; in fact, patriarchal practices seem so naturalized that different people regardless of their socio-cultural, racial and gender identities seem to take this silencing as granted.

Simultaneously, some publishing experiences as a preservice and in-service language teacher researcher have showed me certain teachers' marked interest in keeping hierarchical structures in the academy, when guaranteeing their prominent role just for canonical prestige. Despite the emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual efforts of some English language teachers, among whom I include myself, our roles in some bibliographical and research work sometimes seem displayed as a secondary one, or in-existent. Beyond interests in becoming another figure of prestige, I believe that acknowledging the actual whole investment of someone in an academic work is humanly and socially fair from an ethical decision and attitude. Otherwise, a forced symbolic displacement

appears. This could be contradictory if considering the so-called critical and decolonial perspectives promoted in some academies. As a result, one of the pedagogical decisions I include, when teaching prospective teachers, involves the necessary reflexivity on who we are in relation to who our students are; this leads to the construction of re-humanizing ethical positions in the process of becoming English language teachers.

Continuing with this life story, some experiences in later postgraduate studies allowed me to understand how our voices can become tools for silencing. In various situations throughout my postgraduate studies, I have experienced silencing through diverse mechanisms, including the screaming voice. Once, I received an energetic scream, when addressing someone teaching a class through the label of *teacher*. In a second time, I received a negative response in screaming, when I asked for a turn to talk. Albeit I have reflected on the possible reasons why that shouting took place in both situations that produced silencing and some wounds in myself as an in-service English language teacher, I have not found them yet. I have wondered about how offensive the label of *teacher* can be in different situations, or how rude asking for a turn to talk on request, rather than interrupting without any notice, can become. At times, I experience a tension between claiming or complaining and thanking for it, since that produced important emotionalities (Benesch, 2012) for me to keep on building up my epistemological and political positioning as a woman.

Precisely, I refer to the value of all life experiences for resistance, while healing ourselves, and re-existing (Walsh, 2023). For facing silencing moves previously described, I have found and used writing as a healing resource, a therapeutic tool for an oppressed woman to turn my voice up. Writing about pedagogical experiences supported by research processes in modern formats such as an article, a book chapter or a conference abstract has been as restorative as writing for developing those pedagogical experiences otherwise. In both cases, writing based on relationality between research and pedagogy con-

stitutes a site of contestation (Butler, 2004) where some disruptive knowledges (de Sousa, 2018) emerge and put some dominant epistemologies and their promoters in a non-comfort zone. Indeed, most silencing moves previously told represent the cost of resisting mainstream perspectives in English language teaching and research.

Struggles with these barriers devised by dominant voices, behind making my voice heard as a woman, have also taken place in other academic environments to still transform. This life story goes on with an interaction I will refer to. This experience occurred in my recent past when I attended an academic event. It was so interesting that I felt encouraged to talk about some questions I created regarding some presentations, but my turn to talk was denied 5 times. Once some presenters finished, I approached them, but these male guest speakers only addressed each other, producing a type of silencing mediated by ignoring or disregarding another human being. Again, the male talk appeared with its exclusionary goal. When reflecting on it later, I re-felt frustration, disappointment, but also an inner happiness that seemed to re-signify former feelings. Specifically, these emotions were not only psychological, blocking affective factors, but they were empowering me to live silencing differently. Emotions have a social and a political role (Benesch, 2012) in my agencies as a language teacher researcher. Even when conflict and diverse violences endure in our societies (Galtung, 2016; Aldana, 2021), we can make the decision of embodying them differently through empowering otherwise.

Further unlearning, learning, and relearning deserve attention in the ELT field, considering what I have told so far in this life story. Firstly, silencing practices can also be produced, when attempting to provide a voice to the oppressed. We can create or constitute new oppression, when privileging and imposing voices in the process of giving one. Not all what seeks to emancipate us achieves it, or even aims at doing so. In short, I consider we should unlearn some contradictions pertaining to urging transformation, while covering the same canonical logics of submission and silencing with more subtle mechanisms and

labels. In education as a social institution, we could unlearn that practice of overprotecting modern positions (universalism, homogenization, patriarchy, eurocentrism, whitening...). In contrast, we could welcome our already constituted and changing voices up (Aldana, 2020, 2022) by listening to the oppressed to understand what domination or oppression is indeed (Freire, 2014). In so doing, we could work on relearning what resistances as collective efforts imply towards the co-construction of authentic female educational environments in ELT (I mean: with no disguises or gagging).

This reminds me of another silencing move in this life story that connects experiences in both moments as a preservice and in-service English language teacher. Regardless of our gender, race, geographical and cultural background, social class, and even academic formation, every human being can produce knowledges otherwise, and the academy knows it. The point is that only some individuals are attributed and authorized the right to own and share them. In cases when further people who do not match the imagined stereotypical image of knowledge holders, *extractivist* practices occur to expropriate the epistemological and embodied effort from the former to relocate it to the latter. When some experiences in my teacher research work have allowed me to come up with pedagogical and research methodological proposals, certain knowledges have been re-directed to someone else's work. In my case, they have been both male and female colleagues.

After reflecting upon this practice to problematize in ELT and education in general, I realized knowledge holders also seem socially constructed, when attributed certain characteristics connected to age, gender and affinity with the academic elite. In the moment someone disrupts those hidden and latent conventions or requirements to talk about her or his knowledges, silencing as hiding or shadowing the person occurs, so that re-positioning or re-directing her or his embodied effort to an accepted knowledge holder. At times, some academies seem ashamed to acknowledge certain people as related to them, due to the identities attached to the imagined knowledge

holders, as if knowledge had an appearance to perpetuate. Although some colleagues and I have a formal link to diverse academies as teachers or students with relevant knowledges to the field, this silencing by expropriation of our embodied efforts constitutes ourselves differently. We seem assigned instrumental or operative roles within the public institutional structures and epistemological orders of prestige to implicitly care.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

Notwithstanding previous silencing experiences have affected my personal life, including my physical and emotional health, I have made some decisions that facilitate my life with that silencing, without accepting or believing its underlying pursued effects. Specifically, I decided to resist them as a female English language teacher, a Christian teacher educator, a bilingual person, a daughter, and a peace builder. I understood that inner conflicts (relational to outer inequalities) experienced so far could be transformed into sources of knowledges otherwise and alternative ways of perceiving myself, or what some call: subjectivities (Foucault, 1982) weaving. Thus, I was on the run to those spaces and beings denied by modern academies, –in the sense of de Sousa (2018) and Aldana (2022)–, but still alive. This decision and ethical position allowed me to recall who I am and can become in future experiences. Specifically, I drew on my spiritual, family-driven, together with concrete local language and cultural scenarios. There, I realized about my multicolor body and voice that were co-constructed, while interacting with various bodies and beings, including those denied or forbidden by the rational academy. Even when related to rationality, and part of ourselves reflects it, this does not necessarily mean the rejection or removal of further ways of being, doing and living as a whole, when teaching a language or educating English language teachers.

Additional learnings and re-learnings empowering myself as a woman with a multicolor body may urge women in ELT around the globe to problematize modern (patriarchal, universalizing) conceptualizations attributed to the female and female education.

In this manner, we can decentralize the normal, or what has been naturalized as such, which constitutes the basis of silencing practices narrated here. Understanding that we can feel and have the right to experience fragility without feeling guilty is a first overriding step. Indeed, fragility has become a strength that has allowed me to relate and face my realities in diverse life areas, including those in work settings. This is because I have noticed how my sensitivity has become specially pronounced in relation to more embodied phenomena than merely rational ones. Then, during the last 7 years, peace-related phenomena became my interest from the integral positionality above, where epistemologically and ontologically showing my female side is chief. Constructing peace may start with re-signifying female education and research as different from the stigmatization it receives as weak education or a capricious demand. Revisiting our concepts and sense-making of our realities to problematize our biased monolithic epistemologies and language use seems key to harvest female education in ELT.

Additional recommendations for our future peers revolve around the development of an attitude otherwise concerned with the manifestation of diverse emotionalities in academy, as part of everyday life. In this story, I have also met people who do not only ignore, but mock others for expressing their feelings and spiritualities in ways different from rational expectations. For illustrating, in last five years of academic work, crying has constituted a way of feeling relieved or healing myself; displaying happiness; showing empathy; exposing spiritual calmness, and specially an additional reason to continue personal and collective empowering. When creating peace-driven research and pedagogical proposals, crying as manifesting multiple emotionalities has appeared, but stigma behind mocking of it has simultaneously emerged. This may occur, because we do not still understand the languages of emotionalities, spiritualities, and even less the knowledges derived.

A special invitation is therefore extended to every woman in ELT to resist silencing practices through their embodied tools. While narrating this life story, I realized about important issues for my empowering

as a preservice and in-service language teacher and a woman. I understood a mistake I hope not to make again. I had a submissive attitude to aggression and symbolic violence in the academy since the very first time they took place. It was afterwards that I started writing, but as a private healing strategy, and then as a public one, when possible. I recommend women in ELT to write or talk around those multiple silencing without fear. The most dangerous barriers we hold are within ourselves. Critical and decolonial projects can also explore and start challenging those discriminatory mechanisms we have also permitted and projected from ourselves. I have openly expressed, in my local settings, that decolonization projects, as alternatives to modern ones, should start with problematizing our colonial selves.

And here we are, we come back to the warm talk with teachers who are referring to their experiences with no more interests than sharing and feeling heard. No extractivist practices seem even considered. We have crossed the epistemological and ontological borders as English language teachers and educators who work towards peace construction. Female teachers express their knowledges, while telling their stories and answering questions in modern and non-modern terms by diverse attendant, as we had anticipated. Still, when something unexpected happens various tears fall to caress someone's cheeks and spirit. What

could these tears produce in her life? Whose lives may be transformed in relation to those unexpected tears? How? As life continues, we will keep writing our lives in multiple ways where memory is re-signified as a resource for reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing.

### Critical thinking leading bullets

- Women's empowerment is an embodied effort, which implies the transformation of our ways of living together.
- Transforming our ways of living together may start with accepting and loving differences.
- Women as lovers of differences challenge power structures by weaving leadership networks.

### Discussion questions

- How do female teaching strategies transform the English class environment for horizontal learnings?
- What do female English teachers tell about their unlearning and relearning, when experiencing discrimination?
- How does English become a resource to accept and include the different?

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# The language of my dreams

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## I. Background

I grew up when the only sound in English we could hear in Mexico City was rock music. I fell in love with the rhythm of the words although I did not understand the meaning. Fortunately, when I was nine years old, a small language school opened in the neighborhood, and I asked my mother to take me there and that is how I started learning English. It was so easy for me! Soon, I was reading books in English and understanding the songs that made me love the language. Since then, English has been the language of my dreams.

By reading in English, I have traveled the world and beyond the past and the future of my time. Back then, I was fascinated by learning about other people and cultures. Immediately, I knew what I wanted for my life: I wanted to be an English teacher and make my students feel the same excitement I had when I learned the language. Back in those days, not many people spoke English and before I realized that I was not ready. I received an offer to teach English when I was fifteen years old!

The younger, the bolder, they say, and it is true. Teaching was at the same time fascinating, exhausting and frightening at that age. It still is. From the beginning, I could feel the social responsibility that teaching a language entail for those who teach languages (Salas, 2014). However, my passion for teaching and for the English language made me find

ways to connect with my students despite my age and my lack of knowledge.

By that time, I was already taking an initial teaching program and I started feeling more confident in the classroom. I was very lucky to be learning in a program given by the USA Embassy in Mexico City where the teachers were passionate about the language and about sharing and teaching their experiences as Hidalgo (2017) has affirmed. I can still remember some of their lessons. I am sure that I have followed their example all my teaching career.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

I entered the profession when not much was needed. Back in those days, English was not as popular as it is now. We did not find English everywhere, no television, no advertising nor series in English, not to mention Internet. That is why, not much preparation was needed. There used to be a short course to complete when people already spoke English, the Teacher's Course offered by Embassies or private schools. This course provided English speakers with some knowledge about teaching and pedagogy. That was my initial preparation as an English teacher.

Now, I can say that I have taught English at all levels and to students of all ages; from children to senior students and I have learned a lot from all of them. Having the experience of so many classrooms and so many students, I thought that I wanted to prepare future teachers. When I made this decision, I asked myself, what do I need to do to make this dream a reality? The demands of the ELT field had increased, and I realized that, in order to become a teacher-educator I had to take the next step; get a degree in English teaching. However, it took me several years to achieve my goal to become a teacher-educator.

Personally, I had the need to get a job and I saw an ad in the newspaper looking for English teachers for a car-maker company in my city. I knew that it was the kind of job I wanted. I sent my CV, and they called me for an interview. When I got there, there were two classrooms full of English teachers look-

ing for a job. The hiring process took over two weeks but, proudly I can say that after grammar and teaching skills tests, sample classes and another interview, I was offered the job. Later, I knew that I had been the only teacher who got the job. I was so happy, and I was relieved as that job allowed me to dream bigger for me and my children. Finally, I had gotten a job in a big transnational company that allowed me to feel safe in a changing world.

However, working for the transnational company also opened my eyes to other situations. I could see how difficult it was for non-native teachers to get credibility on their skills. I remember one boss who did not want to take English classes with me, only basing his claims on my name. My boss told me that he said: "please, give me a native teacher." I never met him and what made me angry (and sad) was the fact that he did not even give me the opportunity to prove that I was a qualified teacher. I also became aware that in a company, engineers were valued, administrators were valued but teachers were not valued the same. Even when teachers helped all employees develop the employees' skills and knowledge, teachers were paid less. As grateful for the job as I was, I also knew that I did not want to spend the rest of my life in the same place. I wanted to grow in my profession. I wanted to share my passion for teaching. It was the time to make big decisions.

After some years in the company. I realized that if I wanted to achieve my goal of becoming a teacher-educator. Therefore, I had to pursue college education to be well-prepared for the job I wanted. My level of English was good, but I lacked professional preparation and I wanted to develop my teaching pedagogy expertise. When possible, I tried to engage myself in professional development opportunities to learn and reflect on my teaching beliefs and daily practices in the classroom. Fortunately, I have always tried to be a reflective teacher, and that has allowed me to follow a teaching reflective practice. Ustuk and De Costa (2020) have defined reflective practice as a process of teacher learning in all contexts. My professional development has been a driving force in my teaching career.

However, my personal status did not allow me to continue studying. I remember that as much as I wanted to pursue further studies, as a single mother, I had responsibilities at home that needed to be solved first. My children's studies were the priority then. Time always goes on and brings solutions with it, that is what I can tell women in the same situation: the right moment for your own dreams always comes. That is what happened in my life-story.

My children grew and soon they became independent, and I saw myself in a situation in which I had to make the right decisions for myself. I had several options, two of them were: I could stay in the company and save money for my old age, or I could start an M.A. in English teaching. Of course, I did the latter and soon, I was studying an M.A. in English teaching and doing courses online. After I successfully completed an online course on Critical Thinking, I got a scholarship offered by the State Department of the USA: the E-scholarship to attend a summer course in the University of Maryland at Baltimore County (UMBC) along with 26 other English teachers from around the world. That has been one of the most valuable experiences I have had in my life.

Sharing experiences with the teachers from all over the world, made me realize that we are never alone. There is always somebody, somewhere who goes through similar situations. Most of our conversations started with "in my country, we...". This way, I became part of a global community that has kept me amazed and grateful for every day in my personal and professional life.

After the summer in UMBC, I graduated from the MA in ELT, and I was invited to work for my university. Becoming a professor in a big public university has given me the freedom and the space I wanted so that I could do something for peers and students. I started working with pre-service teachers and I have given many in-service teachers workshops and courses. Mentoring teachers is one of the biggest opportunities I have had in life. Mentoring pre-service and in-service ELT teachers has provided my teaching with purpose and direction. According to Furlong

(2010) and Hobson et al., (2009) good mentors may facilitate mentees' problem-solving skills, identity formation and enhance reflection and feedback on teaching practices which in the end, improve their teaching. Sharing what we know with the teachers who will oversee the profession in the future is, in my opinion, a way to contribute to a better future for all of us.

Then again, I saw that the demands of the educational field were changing, and I applied for a PhD program in Language Science, fortunately, I was accepted. While studying, my supervisor invited me to become part of the Academic Committee of MEXTESOL, the affiliate of TESOL in Mexico. This invitation made me learn what scholars around the country were doing. I could meet many ELT professionals and I became inspired by all the talks I attended during the National Conventions. Since then, TESOL is a big part of my life. My term in the Academic Committee has finished, but I am still involved in TESOL International and have taken some leadership roles to serve my ELT community.

After four years, I completed the PhD program, and I realized that I am still a teacher in love with the language and the profession. I have achieved several of my goals and other goals have emerged. I have always loved reading and writing, so the next step was publishing academic chapters and articles in the ELT field. I loved the journals' world and got immersed in it. I have been serving as an editor for the MEXTESOL Journal and the journal in my university. As publishing has become one of the demands of the academic world. I consider that by being an editor, I can help colleagues and peers with their publishing goals. Another interest I have pursued was gender-equity and I have also contributed with projects to empower women in ELT (*Womentorship in ELT and Equal Voices in ELT [EVE]*) as I know how hard it is for women to pursue and fulfill their professional goals, especially in some cultures such as the beliefs and ideology in Latin America.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

This has been a long journey and there have been many personal and professional stages in my path. From my

own experience, I can say that working hard always pays off. I also understand that the profession and the teaching and learning modalities are changing. That is why by preparing teachers, in my opinion, is one of the ways I can contribute to the future of the ELT profession. I believe that ELT professionals usually go ahead of their time, and they try to be ready for what may come for the education field. Teachers always go further and take initiative, especially English teachers, who are well-known for their creativity and innovation.

What I want for ELT teachers is respect to each one of them as individuals, respect to the profession and equal opportunities for everybody, for male and female, native and non-native teachers, novice, and experienced teachers. We all need better salaries and better working conditions and work environments. During my teaching practice and my research, I have listened to teachers of different backgrounds, and they all agree that there are many things to improve for English teachers now, and for the future.

Regarding my own career and future, I still have many plans and projects to carry out. I want to empower my students; they will be the ELT leaders in the future. I know I represent my country, my gender, and my profession when I attend local or international conferences and I feel proud of doing it. My peers in ELT are my community, they are my inspiration and my motivation to keep working and learning. We share dreams and feelings about students and the profession, and most of all we want to help our students in their journey to become successful citizens and good human beings.

Some years ago, I did not consider myself a leader in ELT, but when peers and students said that my actions have inspired them, I needed to rethink myself and take the role of a leader. Teachers are natural leaders and role models in the end. This has made me aware of the responsibility that leadership entails. Leaders must stay positive and ease the way for the ones who are coming afterwards. Leaders are aware of the uncertainty of times, Jordan (2015) affirmed that uncertainty involves doubting and wondering what

the future may bring and what may happen. ELT leaders must keep the profession growing, advancing and on track in these times of uncertainty.

Personally, what have I learned? I have learned that everything happens at the right time. If I had known that this moment in my life would come, I would not have worried that much. I know that these might not be the words teachers expect when they are tired and feel that nobody values them or their teaching. But the faces that look at us when we enter the classroom are the proof that everything has been worth doing. I hope you feel the same every day when you go into your classroom. After all, English is still the language of my dreams and the one that allows me to share these words with you.

### Critical thinking leading bullets

Advancing in the ELT profession may present women with some dilemmas. However, if you guide yourself with some directions, the path may become easier. These are some examples of critical guidelines for yourself:

- Identify your priorities in each stage of your life.

- Establish personal and professional goals for yourself.
- Develop discipline to achieve your goals.
- Be kind to yourself all the time.

### Discussion questions

Teachers do not usually have the time to reflect on their own experiences. Reminding ourselves of all we have been through is an appropriate way to value what we have done and what we have achieved. Ask yourself the following questions first and, if possible, share your answers in a group and add your own discussion/reflection questions.

1. What changes have you, personally, seen in the profession?
2. How hard have you struggled with these changes?
3. What have been some of your biggest achievements, so far?
4. How can your experiences inspire the younger female teachers in your context?

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# Empowerment through Collaboration: A TESOL Fellowship

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## I.- Background

We have had a variety of roles in education throughout our careers. For Rachel, this has included ESOL teacher, ELL program director, and TESOL teacher educator; for Leila, social worker, ESOL and a Special Education (SPED) teacher, program director, and TESOL and SPED teacher educator. Despite our various pathways, we share a common vision for creating engaging and equitable education for multilingual learners (MLs); this vision is professional but also personal as we are bilingual ourselves and have worked to share our cultural and linguistic heritage with our own children and all the students and teachers we have partnered with over the years. We believe that developing extraordinary ELT educators requires that we move beyond the confines of traditional teacher education to create spaces where needed solutions come from the teachers themselves. Among other roles, we now also serve as educational consultants and carefully select

creative projects that allow us to empower teachers in meaningful ways. This chapter focuses on one such project, a fellowship, with a group of women needing support to recognize their own power within their professional spheres.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

We currently live and work mostly in the US, but our professional lives have extended beyond North America, to include Africa, Europe, and Asia. We first found each other when we worked together in TESOL teacher education at a university in the northeast region of the US. As women who enjoy collaboration, we were frustrated to find ourselves in a system that felt individualistic and hierarchical, yet it was here that we also found strength in each other. Our shared vision for what education could be became known to us when we took a first initial step to risk being vulnerable and admitting the challenges we had had and were facing to each other. We each felt undervalued in the institutional hierarchy and had been scarred by women who, along our individual trajectories, had felt that their ability to rise was dependent on knocking us down. Indeed, Freire (2000) warns, “the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors” (p.45). We also saw that, in contrast to those experiences, we also had female mentors who inspired us, revealing that this cycle could be broken. As we established trust, we grew through partnership and became increasingly comfortable learning from and with each other, making each of us individually more competent professionals. Wenger and Snyder (2000) note that communities of practice “generate new knowledge [and] renew themselves” (p. 143). Ours was a community of two, but we found real strength in our diverse lived experiences and shared vision.

When structural barriers, such as the slow pace of change at a heavily bureaucratic institution, prevented us from implementing the innovation in TESOL teacher education that we saw was necessary, our collective power emboldened us to create our own space for innovation; this new space –as TESOL consultants– allows us to challenge the sometimes

uncomfortable fit of academia and design professional learning to pay forward what we learned about the power of an authentic community of practice. Too often, we have found that teachers in K-12 settings share similar feelings of isolation that systemic challenges create. We seek innovative ways to empower teachers to rise up.

To expand beyond more traditional TESOL teacher education and drive innovation in ELT through the consulting terrain, we assume agency over the best use of the skills we have developed. Empowerment, for us, is grounded in collaborative partnerships that permit forging our own path forward with a shared vision for what ELT can and should be here in the US. ELT is about developing English-language skills alongside deep value for first-language maintenance. Rather than an English-only approach to learning in American schools, we value asset-based recognition of multilingualism and cultural inclusion that allows MLs in this context to develop an English-speaking identity that does not come at the cost of bilingual/bicultural identities. We have found that our diverse cultural, linguistic, and racialized identities provide perspective through which our collective efficacy is improved; we are not alone in this thinking as “collective efficacy influences how educators feel, think, motivate themselves and behave” and can be “a major contributor to the tenor of a school’s culture” (Donohoo et al., 2018, p.42). Essential to our own empowerment was recognizing this and building an alliance through which we could each safely be vulnerable, offer honest feedback, and lift each other up.

### A TESOL Fellowship

This is the story of how a group of women, all ML teachers, in a district that was mired in cultural wars that were negatively affecting ML learning and well-being, became empowered in a community of practice to enact needed change. We believe strongly in the power of authentic collaboration because we have seen its ability to empower women educators who have been beaten down by a system rigged against them and their students.

### The District

As is unfortunately somewhat common throughout the US, we were called into a school district in our home state where the effects of years of divisive political, anti-immigrant discourse could be felt viscerally. The number of MLs were continually increasing here, as in many places around the US, and this rise was accompanied by a dark cultural undercurrent: learn English to assimilate here; if you don’t know English, you don’t know much. In contrast, administrators in this district were aware of this deficiency perspective that framed MLs as an unwelcome problem and their teachers as worthy of blame. The unsurprising result of this low expectation was failure; in fact, the district had not been exiting MLs from English-language support services at an acceptable rate. At first glance, it would have been easy to blame the teachers, and when we first met them they told us explicitly that they felt like scapegoats. Finding truly innovative solutions requires first recognizing that simple blame does not do much to address complex challenges. Here we saw an opportunity to share this with them in order to lift these women up so we could all better address the complexities of their context.

We chose to take a risk on a new approach to professional development, and designed a four-month fellowship, a collaboration that centered around the ML teachers seeing themselves as professionals and each other as resources, so we could then collectively implement and advocate for change on behalf of MLs in the district. We chose the word *fellowship* with great intention; “professional development” felt like an intervention that perhaps placed the blame for the district’s lack of ML progress squarely on these teachers alone. A fellowship acknowledged their skill and the district’s more formal investment in them as professionals. It also more firmly established us as partners rather than fixers. Despite the goodwill of the administrators, the cultural challenges within the district were quickly palpable to us, and we knew these ML teachers were swimming against the tide. We realized that more than throwing them a lifejacket, what they needed was help turning that tide.

## Establishing Fellowship`

When we first met with the ML teachers, we worked to create a psychologically safe space for them to present the challenges within the district without fearing repercussions. While we were used to being university professors and professional development facilitators, we did not see these traditional roles as effective catalysts for the development of a supportive team which could change school practices. We intentionally and immediately positioned ourselves as their partners, recognizing that we brought theoretical and pedagogical depth from our own training and experience that could add to the skills that they brought to the collaboration. By informing them that we wanted to understand their challenges and co-create solutions, we began the process of building their own capacity as empowered professionals.

Four teachers were included in the fellowship with us, each certified to work with MLs and ranging in experience from a few years to over 20. Each was tasked to coteach their ML students within content areas and with content-area teachers of varying desire to engage in the act of coteaching. We hypothesized that by purposefully and collaboratively planning for students who were on the cusp of being exited from English-language support services, the teachers would hone their overall ability to support students of all proficiency levels. Each teacher selected four target students and we began deciding together what essential data needed to be collected, at each turn empowering them in the decision-making process. As a group, we designed a student profile template for shared analysis and began the work of collecting and analyzing their students' profiles. We were very intentional in valuing all of their suggestions and opinions; no contribution was dismissed.

In the subsequent meeting to review the student data –data which now included not just assessment detail but also a comprehensive look at the students' skills, likes, dislikes, challenges, home life, and home language literacy– we came upon a first and significant pivotal moment as we were able to immediately see correlations between key data points that

indicated pedagogical strategies that could be instrumental for these learners. For example, some MLs had abilities to read and write in their home language which signaled the possibility of a more sophisticated approach to instruction. Others had low speaking scores on key assessments but were also quite timid, so they needed frequent, low-stakes and scaffolded speaking opportunities to build their confidence. These pedagogical choices were not groundbreaking –many were common sense for ML teachers– but the realization that teachers had never been given the time to gather, reflect, and discuss their students was. They frantically took notes and committed to trying new strategies, a clear indication that, in the fever pitch to serve so many students as co-teachers across content areas, they simply had not had the opportunity to reflect on their students with other expert ML teachers. Just thinking out loud in a collaborative and supportive space advanced their ability to plan strategically for these target students' needs.

As the fellowship continued, the teachers gathered oral and written samples of their students' expressive language. Again, rather than a professional development workshop that spoke *about* linguistic analysis, this work was embedded within their real contexts. Alongside them and in real time, we modeled how we recognized developmental language structures and saw opportunities in students' "errors." As we identified the language MLs were reaching for, the teachers began thinking about how they could explicitly incorporate teaching in needed areas. At every opportunity we handed the reins over to the teachers to do this kind of purposeful analysis of student language, so they read and heard in their students the language they needed to continue advancing. Progress monitoring of the target students began showing gains and increased the momentum of the fellowship collaboration.

The teachers then brought required readings to our meetings, and we collaboratively analyzed the language of these texts to consider, via backwards design, what scaffolds and instruction the MLs would need for content-area access and linguistic development. Again, this should be standard operating procedure for ML

teachers, but so much came from the collective review as each teacher could share unique perspectives and ideas. They began taking power from this collective, and we began hearing them trading strategies, sharing applications, and strategizing about how and when to approach certain students. Shared knowledge and time in this developing community of practice was proving fruitful for the MLs and their teachers.

### Psychological Safety Allows Failure to Be an Opportunity for Growth

Another pivotal moment occurred when the teachers recorded videos of their teaching. We asked them to reflect on themselves and each other. Following Baecher (2020), we believe that video observation can decolonize the observation and feedback process. In traditional teacher education, the teacher is observed by professors or administrators and is then told what went well and where improvement can be made. This type of observation places all the power in the hands of the observer, who often also makes high-stakes professional decisions. We believe, however, that asking the teachers to lead and present their own video observation empowers them to be critically reflective. In this spirit, we asked the teachers to record and reflect on their own videos and those of their peers.

After watching the first round of videos and reading the self and peer reflections, we were admittedly disappointed. Though we had been making great strides together, each video revealed a teacher who had somehow lost the joy of teaching or was too pressured to stay within mandated curricular scope and sequence to really dive into the art of teaching the students in front of her. The written reflections were superficial, complimentary, and lacked honest criticality. As teacher educators, our traditional roles would have compelled us to “break the bad news,” but we knew that this would add to the sense of blame these teachers already felt and risked slowing—if not reversing—the progress we were making. We struggled to develop an approach that was positive and responsive to their needs and landed on the idea that we needed them to see what we saw without us telling them. It had to come from them.

We began the debrief by recognizing that perhaps we were more used to observing other teachers and that we had not done enough to create a non-punitive space for them to reflect openly. We reminded them that this was unlike regular observational evaluations—this was just for them—and we were in a safe space for critical reflection as our goal was to support each other. Because they were new to providing feedback in this way, we invited them to imagine the ideal classroom. They quickly listed ideal and engaging learning, and, with each new idea, their level of enthusiasm increased. Then we shifted gears and invited them each to take three uninterrupted minutes to evaluate their own teaching videos. The goal of the three minutes was to share what went well and where they saw opportunities for growth; we intentionally did not offer comments or interrupt because we were committed to the space being theirs. The juxtaposition of the ideal classroom and their lackluster videos immediately brought one teacher to tears, but these were productive and honest tears as she announced she was disappointed because she did not recognize herself in the burnt-out teacher in the video. Months of fostering trust in each other allowed her to say that out loud, and it felt deeply therapeutic. The others echoed similar sentiment regarding their own videos and the conversation quickly shifted to a deep brainstorming session about what they could do within the confines of district coteaching mandates, how they could collectively challenge policies in need of change, and how they could help each other. We stayed in that room for three hours; we could feel despair converting into energy as the joy of teaching emerged from the shadows and dusted itself off. As a community of practice, we moved into the final phases of the fellowship.

### The Power of Collective Voices

In the final months of our collaboration, we continued revising strategies based on progress monitoring and expressive language analysis. Another round of video observations revealed teachers taking steps, some gradual and some dramatic, and approaching teaching with a renewed sense of their power to purposefully plan and implement engaging lessons. Our final project was to collaboratively draft a memo recording the shared

experience to the district. Here we felt the final push in power sharing was to ensure the memo was guided by the feedback the teachers wanted to share. What had they learned? Where did they see institutional and policy barriers to ongoing progress with MLs? We served as scribes and proofreaders, but the voice was collectively theirs and it was energized. They advocated for systemic change, including the creation of an ML Department which would allow them to continue collaborating and would offer sustainability to their progress. They advocated for context-embedded professional development to encourage collaboration with content area teachers so that the responsibility for MLs became a shared endeavor and coteaching had a better chance for being meaningful. They also recognized that the district needed to do more to make cultural shifts that better welcomed culturally, linguistically, and racially non-dominant students into the fold. Frustrations they had each had individually were converted into productive solutions through their collective new voice. We ended the fellowship recognizing that this kind of collaboration needed to be the norm.

At the writing of this chapter, since the memo was submitted, we happily report that the district is creating a new ML Department and planning for the exact professional development collaborations that the teachers suggested. The tide is beginning to turn.

### III.- Looking Forward into the Future

As we reflect on this experience, we recognize that there is so much productive power in lifting each other up. When women recognize their own value as well as that of others, we generate power in collaboration. We can learn from and with each other and challenge aspects of the status quo to better support our students as well as ourselves in this demanding yet wonderful work. In partnership, we can bridge the spaces between not only our individual roles but also the gaps between academia and K-12 schooling. These partnerships can help us better achieve equitable, engaging, and inclusive ELT.

We encourage other women to recognize the power they have to mentor and partner with others.

Establishing trust in collaborative alliances requires that we each recognize our own needs and professional vision. Our career trajectories have given us many positive examples of what mentoring and collaboration should be, and we choose to use the negative examples as lessons learned for the kind of work we simply will not do. There is surely some risk in the vulnerability required to do this work, but we argue the potential reward is worth it. Harnessing the power of communities of practice empowers us all.

We further suggest that complex problems require collaborative solutions. The teachers of the fellowship had taken the initial blame for the lack of ML student progress, and they did have individual work to do to re-energize their teaching, but they also needed collaborative spaces and time to understand and address the systemic issues that were also part of the problem. Before this collaboration, they had not recognized their own ability to address issues with the district as they did in their closing memo. Alone, each voice was weak; together, they were powerful.

### Critical Thinking

- Consider how your specific workplace context and the levels of support available there hinder or empower your leadership potential.
- Reflect on how your community of practice can foster collaboration and innovation. In the absence of a community of practice, develop a strategy for identifying and opening up communication with new allies.
- Brainstorm the requirements for establishing the psychological safety needed for shared and creative problem solving within the workplace context. Take time to reflect on successes and new opportunities.
- In this fellowship, the act of writing a memo to the administration gave voice to the unheard. Develop additional empowerment activities to develop yourself and others as female leaders.

## Discussion Questions

1. How can a community of practice help empower women in ELT? The authors note that establishing a community requires taking the risky step of being vulnerable. How can you identify and/or create safe spaces and people with whom to engage in this work?
2. The authors discuss the importance of women helping other women rise up. How can you be an ally to other women in the field of ELT?
3. As women, we are often socialized to take in and not change structures. Here we are recognizing that we need to participate in systemic change to respond to the needs we have and/or recognize. This is very much akin to swimming against a cultural tide. What are the “cultural tides” that exist in your language teaching setting? How could you overcome them?

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# Empowerment and resilience through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

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## I.- Background

I began my teaching career 18 years ago as a German language instructor in the United States, first teaching undergraduate students at a large public university and then adult learners in evening classes at institutions and conversation programs in New York City. I decided to pursue an academic career and become a professor because I loved teaching in higher education, and I was also curious about language learning having grown up in a home and city where many other languages besides English were spoken around me. After teaching German for a few years, I began teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Teaching English has allowed me to meet and work with students from all over the world, such as China, Colombia, Brazil, Chad, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine, Indonesia, Japan, Greece, Albania, and Korea, and many others. By working with them and getting to know them, I have in turn learned so much about the world's diverse cultures, languages, communities,

and religions. Indeed, this is a tremendous privilege that has taught me so much and helped me better understand my own cultural identity as a daughter of multilingual parents born outside the United States.

Since 2014, I have enjoyed my full-time faculty role in the NU Immerse and Global Pathways programs at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, United States. While there are satellite campuses across the United States, in Canada, and in London, Northeastern's main campus is in the heart of Boston, a city that is also home to several other colleges and universities. One defining characteristic of Northeastern is its status as a leading institution for international students. According to the 2022 Open Doors Report published by the International Institute of Education (n.d.), the University hosts the second largest number of international students in the United States. With this significant number of international students, it is not uncommon to hear a variety of languages spoken in the hallways, student center, dining halls, and in other places around campus. I support many of these students by teaching English language courses in two pathways programs that provide conditional admission to undergraduate and graduate international students. We prepare students to study in their destination programs by building their linguistic, cultural, and academic skills while they take English language and content courses (i.e., courses with transferable credit for undergraduates and courses in graduate students' destination programs).

Within our programs, I am part of a talented team of faculty, administrative staff, and student advisors. We work closely on a range of activities, such as teaching, contributing to program and curriculum development and evaluation, sharing our work at conferences, serving on committees, and co-authoring articles, chapters, and books. After working together for several years, my colleagues and I have developed a mutual understanding of the pressures of work and life because our circumstances are alike. For instance, we balance full-time academic careers with family obligations and engage in other commitments outside of work, such as professional service to the field of TESOL and volunteering at local non-

profit organizations. The environment within our department is supportive and non-competitive, and we celebrate each other's success and acknowledge that each person's individual success is also success for our programs and University. For all of these reasons, I cannot say that I have faced many challenges as a female educator *per se*. I have been able to accomplish my professional goals and more because of the support I receive from my supervisor and colleagues.

Our close collaborations and shared passion for international student success has also sustained us during difficult times. Like countless other universities across the world, Northeastern abruptly transitioned from fully on-ground to fully online instruction in March 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting in early January, my colleagues and I began exploring ways of moving our programs online and discussed best practices for online instruction. Despite our preparation, we were unnerved by the sudden overnight shift to online instruction, as well as the unpredictability of international student enrollment, students' ability to secure visas and travel, and the unknowns surrounding the mode of instruction in which we would teach (*i.e.*, online, on-ground, or both). In the fall 2020 semester, months after the pandemic began, Northeastern was among the first institutions to implement a hyflex approach, which allowed students to attend class either virtually or in-person at any given time in case of illness. While many faculty in our programs taught using this approach, the majority of our ESL classes remained fully online because international students could not travel to the United States. I resumed on-ground teaching over a year later in the fall 2021 semester, wearing a mask on campus and undergoing weekly COVID-19 testing provided by the University; in one fall semester, I taught three courses in online, on-ground, and hyflex settings, respectively.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

When I reflect on this two-year period, I think of the struggles and uncertainties that lingered throughout the time in which we were staying home, teaching and meeting online, and constantly worrying about our

health and safety and that of our families and friends. It is safe to say that no educator in any corner of the world would reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic with great fondness, and it seems strange to mention any silver lining related to the pandemic because of the tremendous disruptions and suffering it caused. Nevertheless, I believe that we are at a point in which we are able to reflect on both challenges and opportunities and enter this post-pandemic period with new insights about teaching, collaboration, professional development, and research. For example, due to the pandemic, I gained first-hand experience adapting my flipped learning approach to online student-centered instruction, and I continue to draw from lessons learned to teach more effectively in on-ground classes. While we do not know if we will face another global disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic in our lifetime, we will surely face challenges in the future and likely have the opportunity to use what we learned during the pandemic to overcome difficulties that may come our way.

In a recently published edited volume that includes authors from around the world, Fenton et al. (2022) document the many difficulties English language instructors faced in teaching academic English during the pandemic, such as "having to embrace new pedagogies for online learning, adapt their teaching practices as well as materials, and manage expectations of both their institutions and students" (p. 2). My experiences mirrored those described by other teachers in Fenton et al.'s book, and teaching during the pandemic was the most challenging period of my career. For instance, I needed to ensure that my teaching materials were accessible in students' home countries, and restrictions on websites and the digital tools in our learning management system required me to rethink the pedagogical practices and tools I used to take for granted. I also needed to teach either very early in the morning or late in the evening due to the twelve-hour time zone differences between me and my students. During some semesters, I had both early and late classes on the same day and was teaching until 11:00pm. The amount of grading I did also seemed to increase, as now all of students' work was submitted digitally instead of being completed in class.

During live synchronous class sessions, I dealt with unpredictable bandwidth issues while needing to maintain the flow of the lesson and keep students' attention and engagement in interactive activities. Like many others, I needed to manage all of these while balancing childcare with full-time work.

Nevertheless, these experiences empowered me as an English language teacher because I had no choice but to overcome these difficulties and ensure that students were still learning. In turn, I have increased my resilience and confidence in my ability to deal with challenges that may arise in the future. Zolli and Healy (2012) define resilience as "the capacity of a system, enterprise, or a person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances" (p. 7). My "core purpose," as Zolli and Healy (2012) describe, was to provide student-centered instruction using the resources at hand no matter where or how our class met. While I was not necessarily thinking about my own resilience at the time, Zolli and Healy's assertion now makes sense. When days were long and exhausting, what helped me to keep going was remembering my primary reason for teaching in the first place, which is my students. Maintaining a focus on their educational goals helped me to persevere. I also reminded myself that students were equally as stressed and frustrated with the pandemic. They were excited to come to the United States to study and missed this incredible opportunity to become immersed in English, study, travel, and learn the local culture firsthand. Keeping their experiences at the forefront of my work helped me remain empathetic and understanding. I made sure to check in with them by including more opportunities for them to provide feedback on the course (e.g., exit tickets at the end of each week) and holding additional regularly-scheduled conferences to meet them on an individual basis. I wanted students to feel that they were learning from someone who cared about them and their English language learning journey despite the unpredictable and stressful circumstances we all found ourselves in.

Additionally, I found inspiration in my collaborations with colleagues both at Northeastern

and outside the University within my broader professional network. Some forms of academic work can be lonely, as we often spend long hours planning lessons, grading student work, working on research, and managing the day-to-day elements of teaching during the school year. During the pandemic, we were isolated at home and saw each other much less. Working with my peers to exchange ideas about teaching, write articles, develop curricula, and serve on committees kept me engaged in my work and motivated me to continue learning and growing as a teacher and scholar. One example is my participation in a year-long faculty scholars' group at Northeastern that focused on inquiry-based learning. During the 2021 calendar year, I met with faculty from a range of disciplines to discuss readings and explore connections between theory and practice. Throughout this experience, I was encouraged by our cohort's desire to maintain high standards of teaching through difficult times. We were physically apart but remain closely connected through our passion for teaching and learning.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

As I reflect on the pandemic, I often think about all that I have learned about teaching, work, and life outside of work. For instance, I have come to appreciate the importance of interpersonal relationships and connectivity with colleagues and students even more. I always knew that a fundamental element of teaching involves forming good relationships with students and earning their trust, but I admittedly took for granted how easy it was to do when we shared the same physical space. In person, there are also no technical interruptions and difficulties, and I can easily see and hear all students at any given time. When teaching online, I wanted to ensure that I could still build relationships with students and among students and their peers. It was also important for me that my students still felt that they knew me and were learning from me. One way I tried to connect with them was by providing audio and video feedback on assignments alongside written comments so students could see me and hear my voice. I experimented with the digital tools that were available and leveraged all

my resources and expertise to give students the best possible learning experience in my courses. I needed to be creative about finding solutions to new problems and using the best possible resources so I could remain truly present and visible in the virtual world.

In terms of peers and colleagues, interpersonal relationships are crucial. I have found that the world of English language teaching is small, and we are all connected by mutual contacts and a shared investment in the students we teach. Through my professional activities such as attending webinars and conferences, I have met so many women who are doing incredible work throughout the world in circumstances that are far more difficult than mine. I believe that we can achieve so much more when we work with others, lift each other up, and leverage our professional support system. For these reasons, building and cultivating a supportive network of colleagues is critical. Here I must commend my colleagues both at my university and beyond with whom I have worked on projects, publications, curriculum development, and teaching. These activities are inspiring, and I learn so much from others by working with them. We should not have to work in isolation, as teaching and learning about teaching requires interaction, relationship-building, and collaboration.

Finally, I have truly realized how important it is to take care of our health. Working under intense and unpredictable circumstances and being separated from family and friends was both stressful and unnatural. With an increased workload and a tremendous amount of time spent sitting in front of a screen at all hours of the day and week, I look back now and realize that I should have taken more breaks, exercised more, and ensured that I had enough sleep. Throughout this experience of working during the pandemic, I have come to realize that “work-life balance” is not a buzzword or a catchphrase. Rather, it is a necessity. We can teach and think better when we prioritize self-care, nutrition, and rest. We are also better teachers, spouses, parents, and colleagues to those around us. This was a key lesson that I have taken away from the pandemic, and I now prioritize a healthy balance of work, family, and life.

For other women who want to thrive in the field of English language teaching and who face their own unique challenges, I would say that it helps to remember one’s core purpose. On difficult days, remembering my love for English language teaching and my responsibility to my students gave me the energy to keep moving forward. I would also advise others to continually seek out opportunities to keep learning and connect with other English language teaching professionals. A silver lining of the pandemic is that many professional development resources also shifted to a virtual space, an example of which is the TESOL International Association Convention. There are so many resources that are openly accessible, such as videos on YouTube that offer teaching ideas, webinars, and articles with open access. By participating in these events, we can meet others and get to know colleagues of colleagues. Prioritizing our professional development pays off tremendously, and investing in our own professional development also empowers us to be able to learn new strategies to face future challenges and opportunities.

### Critical thinking

- What has drawn you to the field of English language teaching? What do you enjoy most about it, and why do you do what you do?
- Has your “core purpose” changed since you began teaching? Why or why not?
- This chapter highlights the importance of collegiality and collaboration. What else do you think is needed in order to create a supportive working environment?
- Consider your professional context. Do you prioritize collaboration and teamwork with your colleagues? What steps could you take to overcome or minimize isolation where you work?

### Discussion questions

- The COVID-19 is an example of a unique global event that impacted English language teachers

in similar ways around the world. Though we are in a post-pandemic phase, teachers will likely face a range of other challenges throughout their careers. How can you build your resilience now to address challenges that may arise in the future?

- Consider your professional context. How is a healthy balance between work and life outside of work prioritized? What steps could admin-

istrators take to support teachers and staff in achieving a work-life balance?

- Building professional relationships can play a critical role in advancing one's career. How could you build collegial relationships with others beyond your immediate setting? How can teachers build and extend their professional network when resources are limited (e.g., time, funding)?

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# Empowering Yourself: Steps to Take Control of Your Life

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## I. Background

There was a woman named Kessia Kiwia who was enthusiastic about instructing English. She had been a primary school teacher for 18 years and was constantly trying to find methods to enhance both her own and her coworkers' abilities. In 2016, Kessia decided to act and formed a community of practice for English teachers in primary schools in her region. She organized regular meetings and workshops to share ideas and best practices after assembling a group of interested instructors. She then learned of a group that collaborates with English teachers to find out more about modern approaches to teaching the language to students.

Kessia's community of practice expanded and gained recognition during the ensuing years, and she was recognized as a pioneer in English education. She decided to run for a place in the community's annual election for members of the executive committee in 2018. She ran a vigorous campaign and was chosen

for the committee. Kessia took on a range of duties as a member of the executive committee, including planning workshops and events, working with other groups on the ground, and administering the community report that was sent by chapter leaders around the nation. She discovered that she had a great aptitude for leadership and that the challenges associated with the position were enjoyable.

Kessia decided to run for the role of events coordinator in the community's re-election in 2021. She worked nonstop to raise money for the community's events by contacting sponsors and other groups. And her efforts paid off since she easily won the election. Kessia is still enthusiastically and devotedly leading the community of practice today. She has established herself as a role model for other teachers in her community, encouraging them to assume leadership positions and have a positive influence on their field. Who knows, though? She might eventually go on to become a leader in the greater field of education, making an even bigger difference.

## II. Empowerment and leadership development

Leadership is an infinite and tremendously complex journey along with paradoxes that cannot be captured comprehensively. (Luedi, 2022)

As a country events coordinator, one of my primary goals is to empower and develop the leadership skills of the members of my community. This is a challenging task, but one that I am enthusiastic about and committed to. One of the biggest challenges I have faced in this role is finding ways to engage and motivate community members who may be hesitant to step into leadership positions. Many people are afraid of taking on new responsibilities or may not feel confident in their abilities. (Shore et al., 2018) they talk more about overcoming challenges in workplaces, I have been able to work to create a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and heard.

I have also developed a range of training programs and workshops aimed at building leadership .

Skills and empowering members to take on new roles within the community. These programs have been extraordinarily successful, and I have seen members step up and take on leadership positions that they may not have considered before. Of course, none of this would be possible without the support of my colleagues and mentors. I have been fortunate to have a strong network of supporters who have provided me with guidance and advice throughout my journey. They have helped me to overcome challenges, celebrate my accomplishments, and push me to grow and develop as a leader.

One of my proudest accomplishments as an events coordinator has been the growth and success of the community that I serve. By empowering members and developing their leadership skills, we have been able to create a vibrant and engaged community that is making a positive impact on our country. And I am honored to have played a role in making that happen.

### III.- Looking forward to the future

As a woman and a leader in Tanzania: Looking forward into the future (how you see yourself moving forward, what you envision for your and/or your reflections, recommendations for other women, and your lessons learned). As a woman and a leader in Tanzania, I am excited about the future and the possibilities that lie ahead. I see myself continuing to work to empower and inspire other women to become leaders in their communities and to make a positive impact on society.

Moving forward, I envision myself taking on even greater leadership roles and responsibilities. I want to continue to build my skills and knowledge and to use my platform to advocate for gender equality and women's rights. At the same time, it is important to take time for personal reflection and self-care. Being a leader can be demanding and stressful, and it is important to prioritize my own well-being and mental health. For other women who aspire to become leaders, my recommendation is to believe in yourself and your abilities.

The article "Assessing women empowerment in Africa: A critical review of the Challenges of the gender empowerment measure of the UNDP," (Adjei, 2015) acknowledges the importance of having a supportive network of mentors and peers to promote women's empowerment. The author argues that women empowerment is not solely an individual endeavor, but it requires a supportive environment that fosters growth, development, and achievement. The author cites research that highlights the role of mentors and peers in promoting women's empowerment, as they can provide guidance, feedback, and support along the way. This is why I am surrounding myself with positive people who will not judge me as a woman rather they will take me as a person who is capable to make a change in my community.

My journey as a leader has taught me lessons. One of the most important is the importance of perseverance and resilience. There will be challenges and setbacks along the way, but it is important to keep pushing forward and learn from those experiences. I have also learned that leadership is not about being perfect, but about being willing to learn, grow, and adapt. It is about having the courage to take risks to make mistakes and using those experiences to become a better and more effective leader.

In conclusion, I am excited about the future and the opportunities it holds for women in Tanzania and beyond. By continuing to work together and support one another, we can create a more equitable and just society for all.

### Critical thinking leading bullets

- How can we challenge traditional gender roles and biases that may limit opportunities for female leaders?
- In what ways can we actively seek out diverse perspectives and experiences to broaden our understanding of leadership and empower female leaders?
- What are some strategies for developing leadership skills and building confidence in female

leaders, particularly in male-dominated industries or environments?

- How can we create a supportive and inclusive environment for female leaders to thrive, including addressing issues such as work-life balance and workplace culture?

Discussion questions:

1. How can we, as EFL teachers, create an inclusive classroom environment that promotes equity and respect for all students, regardless of gender or cultural background?
2. In what ways can we use the English language as a tool to promote greater understanding and acceptance of diversity in the classroom and beyond?
3. What challenges or barriers might girl students face in learning English, and how can we as teachers support their language development and empower them as learners?
4. How can we incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences into our EFL teaching materials and activities to promote greater cultural awareness and sensitivity?

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# How Women's Empowerment Can Transform ELT

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I have just celebrated 50 years in teaching and learning, so my story is a long and complicated one to tell. Many younger colleagues have asked me how I never got burned out and I always give the answer that I have enjoyed a lifelong search to understand how learners tick and how I can find the perfect methodology to have them love the language. If they love the language, they will want to embrace it and there lies the key to empowering the students to become the best learners they can be. But to empower my students I first had to empower myself and it was not always easy.

## I.- Background

I was born into an immigrant family in Liverpool in 1950, to an Irish mother and a Welsh father, who both believed in the power of education to promote social advancement. They provided every opportunity for me to benefit from the great advantages offered for free by the state quality education at all the stages up to, and including, University level. Girls had the same chances as boys, or at least we felt we did, and so we flourished and, in the main, achieved our ambitions without obstacles.

My dream was to teach Down Syndrome learners, so I worked very hard during my secondary school days, and I was awarded a place at the University of Warwick in the centre of England to study Dramatic Arts with a specialism in Sociology of Education. However, I soon discovered that I had to take up a position in a regular school for at least 2 years and then return to university to do a Master's in Special Needs Education.

Thus, it turned out that I was thrown in at the deep end, teaching English to eighteen immigrant "remedial" students from seven different countries with eleven languages among them, none of whom could read or write in English. The Indian and Pakistani girls of 14 years of age would often disappear for weeks at a time and miss their lessons as they had to return home to undergo the ceremony of arranged marriages. It was a very difficult group to reach for a newbie just out of University and I cried a lot, believing I had chosen the wrong profession. In those days, we had no professional development courses, no mentors, and no resource books for teachers with tips and suggestions on managing difficult immigrant teens. So, as I had nobody to help me in my suffering, I decided I would have to help myself. I realized that the pedagogy I thought I had learned at university was not a good fit for these eighteen special needs teens that I had to spend eighteen periods a week with, so the only way was to develop my own pedagogy to fit their needs. I got down to observing, thinking, planning and taking into account my greatest influencers from university, namely John Dewey, Marie Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, Ivan Illich, Neil Postman and the brilliant Dorothy Heathcote. I blended my work on Educational Drama, that I had gained from my Dramatic Arts course, with second language acquisition theory and I came up with a pedagogy of English language teaching which was quite original.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

So began my lifelong journey into self-empowerment through the search for the key, or rather, keys in the plural, to find a way to reach these difficult learners by unlocking high self-esteem, motivation, confi-

dence, fluency, and accuracy. I became very interested in thinking skills and studied Bloom's Taxonomy in detail, discovering that the reason why my pedagogy worked so well was because it was right at the top of Bloom's Taxonomy in the creativity area. I never did go back to university to earn my degree in Special Needs Education, but I did go on to take my personal pedagogy for ELT around the world.

I have always been interested in world issues, human rights and equity, trying to ensure that people who are discriminated against, suffer implicit bias, those who are set aside, ignored, marginalised or otherwise disabled have the same opportunities as everybody else, not necessarily the same things, but what each one needs. I have always maintained that we must make visible the invisible and give voice to the voiceless. This is why I have always been an activist in ELT, trying to empower myself and other women in the profession and fighting for rigour with kindness, high standards with empathy and justice with understanding. Even more so today, in this divisive world where poverty is rife, where inequality is the norm and where our livelihoods are threatened by the ills we have wrought through thoughtlessness and negligence, we do need more powerful women who can transform ELT. How we bring these changes is up to us to take up the reins and make it happen. I certainly believe I have felt driven throughout my career to become a better teacher myself and to help others do the same to transform ELT for the millions of students around the world who are still not enjoying their rights to a quality education in the global language.

I am now based in Buenos Aires, Argentina having experienced a number of different contexts on the way, namely Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Spain where I lived and worked for two or more years. All these countries could not be further away from my original context in any manner: geographically, politically, educationally, financially, emotionally, socially and especially in the way girls at school and women in the workplace are treated.

I developed what I call the SPICE of ELT where we deal with the growing learner by creating

tasks which concentrate holistically on their Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative and Emotional development in every single lesson, while integrating the five ELT pillars of thinking, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. I had had my Eureka moment and it seemed to work very well with my diverse group of different cultures, religions, languages, ages, abilities, and levels. If it could work with these teens it could work with anybody.

I discovered that students like using creativity in the classroom to learn a language as it makes for a whole new dynamic where they FEEL they are learning by DOING and through real LIVE tasks which are about the human condition. Through the SPICE they implicitly learn about human rights, taking turns, empathizing with each other, listening to, and understanding other opinions which come from different cultures and the respect for gender equity. They learn all the skills they will need for their personal lives and, through learning communicatively, they become fluent in all the language skills. Apart from the wide-ranging developmental processes embedded in the SPICE acronym, drama deals implicitly with pronunciation, intonation, register, contextual vocabulary, chunks of real language and all in character, either real or imagined. When students get "LOST" in the drama they find the classes memorable, learning how to work together, using just their own multi-sensory faculties and therefore learning to communicate in the foreign language in a dynamic and lively way. They are problem solving, actively, together and they enjoy their progress. The lessons are serious fun so they never get bored or need to use their cell phones, which can be a problem these days. I suppose you might say that I acted as the precursor to mindfulness and wellbeing and all those courses that now have new labels but which I was doing many, many years ago.

This journey has not always been an easy one, partly because most of the authorities I have worked under in Argentina, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and Spain have been males who did not always welcome innovative, creative ideas being brought into the system where they were the boss. They had already

decided on their approach, often based on very conservative, antiquated models of education which had not been changed or tampered with for many years, especially not by a younger, foreign female. I was already learning, in each different context, to walk and balance on the tight rope of maintaining what I considered my identity, engendered by my UK, inclusive, diverse Anglo-Saxon culture and these new cultures with all the complex layers not revealed by the tip of the cultural icebergs I had landed on. In every case I had to fight for my convictions and try to learn, in each distinct society, how to negotiate or persuade in ways that worked positively for me in that particular context. Usually, I had been offered a two- or three-year contract, so adaptation was vital for me if I were to survive. Learning one society's reactions to gender equity did not necessarily transfer to another. I discovered I had to unlearn and relearn every time. This made me more resilient, stronger, and more empowered.

Perhaps the hardest, and most obviously difficult, location was Saudi Arabia (1980-1982) where the law enforced strict segregation of the sexes in all areas of life. Even in your own home, if you invited outside couples, the women had to go into and stay in one room while the men went into another. Females were allowed to go outside the house only if accompanied by their husband or elder brother or father. As from the age of eight, girls had to wear the abaya, a full length, black, closed cloak over a full-length dress with a high neck and long sleeves plus a hijab covering all their hair and often a veil covering the whole face. Schools were segregated and only same sex teachers were appointed to teach in boys' or girls' schools. There were no cinemas, no theatres, no concerts and only men were allowed to drive, to borrow books from the libraries and eat in restaurants. There were few professions open to females and in such a patriarchal society no women held positions of authority in any area.

In the conditions above described, I had to constantly juggle my beliefs, my mores, and my norms. I had to keep my feminist leanings to myself and accept the laws in my new context. The authorities typically expected the men of the family to keep the women in

check and if the women infringed the rules the men would be chastised and even put in prison. Having spent my whole life championing for equal rights, justice, and equity for all I was very aware that if I put a foot wrong, it would be my husband who would bear the brunt of any punishment applied and not I, myself. Obviously, I had no opportunities during those years to get hold of resources, journals, books nor to attend conferences for teachers. I was kept strictly to the curriculum and not allowed to mention any world issues or delicate subjects which I had always felt were important in ELT. It was claustrophobic for someone so used to living in an open, equitable society.

However, I learned a lot about Arabian culture, Arabian values, Arabian cuisine and, most of all, how to enjoy life in a restricted society where I was confined to the house or the school buildings until my husband would come to collect me or take me on an adventure out to the shops to buy provisions. I learned how the Arabian psyche ticks and I learned how I, personally, could survive. I can say that it spurred me forward, once I left, to retrieve my empowered status and to champion for greater female equity in all walks of life, not only in ELT.

I consider myself to be an empowered woman in ELT as I started off from very humble beginnings in Liverpool, being part of an immigrant family in what was a working-class district, and I climbed my way step-by-step, book by book, course by course to becoming many versions of myself in my profession. I started as a teacher, moving up through the rungs of the ladder, to become Head of Department, Director of a Teachers' Centre, a national and international conference speaker, a workshop facilitator, a consultant, researcher, Professor at two important teacher training colleges in Buenos Aires, Argentina, a materials/article/chapter/book writer, a webinar presenter and an on-line tutor. I've also been called upon to take up part time positions as diction coach for two Theatre in Education troupes. Perhaps the crowning glory, and the last post I enjoyed in a formal position, was as Coordinator of English in Action, teaching English through Drama in Special Education, Ministry of Education, City of Bs As, Argentina, training

twenty teachers through blended learning courses to teach English through Drama in Special Education.

All this culminated in my decision in 2016 to open SHELTA, my own online teachers' Academy reaching all over the world to train teachers to teach English through Drama and to include Creativity and Innovation in class. I do a lot of voice coaching and train teachers to fly their own flags, spread their own information and their own knowledge through practicing effective presentation skills. I give them roots to grow and wings to fly. I feel that I may not be in the classroom anymore, but I am improving the quality of ELT the students are receiving from the teachers I have empowered. As part of my own ongoing developmental work, I am now working for companies in empowering women to fight for equity and recognition in the workplace, through English.

I had not realised it, at that time in 1972, that I had given birth to what was to become my mission to transform Education and ELT on a global scale. This is the pedagogy that I felt, and still feel, I want to pass on to teachers all around the world. It doesn't demand costly resources, just a well-trained teacher with a tool kit of excellent strategies and the knowledge of SPICE methodology in a space with willing participants. But I did, in fact, take it around the world, until the Pandemic struck the globe and literally grounded me. However, it did not stop me! I had already developed courses online as long ago as 2004. There was no such thing as Zoom in those days, but I joined those early courses on video conferencing, learning how to use platforms like WizIQ/Blackboard/Moodle where I could do video conferencing online with a group of people anywhere in the world. So, I am continuing my mission through my determination, during all those years, and still reaching out to the world community of ELT pioneers.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

The message I would leave for women in ELT all over the world is this: believe in yourself and your capabilities to empower yourselves and your learners. As teachers of the global language, it is vital to update on

a regular basis. Professional development opportunities for all teachers of English should be two-pronged and built-in by the authorities, not just tagged on as an afterthought or reluctantly dropped in at the beginning of the school year or hosted for a few days in the holidays. I say two-pronged meaning that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) should offer a course on advanced language development for the teacher and a course on trending issues in ELT which work on transformation and real change inside the classroom. The authorities, themselves, should act as models to teachers by updating their skills as leaders too. Having said that, I am well aware that many authorities all around the world are not going to make this happen in the near future, so it is up to the teachers themselves to do it.

Be hungry for PD opportunities and seek out opportunities intentionally and regularly. There is a huge proliferation of PD products on offer on the internet, accessible by anyone, anywhere in the world as long as the teacher has an internet device of some kind and a good secure connection. There are MOOCs (Massive Open On-line Courses like Class Central, FutureLearn, Coursera) which all come in very well designed instructional packages and are free; there is the free EVO (English Village On-line) conducted by volunteer experts every January and February; there are University on-line courses, or at-distance courses, of various durations and with medium to high costs; there are very short courses on a whole gamut of subjects with low to medium costs on sites like Udemy; there are a whole variety of private companies that are making the best use of LMSs (Learning Management Systems like Moodle, Blackboard, Adobe, Canva) to offer all kinds of help; then there are VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments) in which groups can set up their own PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) with their own agenda and finally, in this long list, there exists a myriad of webinars offered freely by publishers, teacher associations, PD companies and individuals. Always accept invitations to do something you don't feel you can do, get out of your comfort zone, be adventurous, volunteer to sit on committees, to moderate on-line, to help in a SIG and read, read, read.

I would say that the great professional and personal journey that I've enjoyed, always moving, meeting wonderful teachers and students from more than 32 nationalities in 17 very different countries, is what has kept me going and enabled me to avoid any sense of burnout. Not only the travelling to worlds far apart but the changes in myself I've had to make in order to adapt to such diverse cultures has kept me juggling my habits, mores and values. It was hard, for example, in Singapore at the young age of 25, to adjust to the incredible mix of Indian, Chinese and Malay lifestyles and yet keep my own identity intact. All in all, I would say it has fired up a passion to climb on to the never-ending spiral of lifelong learning. I feel that, although I should have retired by now, I will never be able to abandon my search for the ever-advancing key to the perfect methodology for teaching English across the world.

I never set out to be an empowered female ELT professional. I just set out to be the best teacher I could become through using all the means available to me. I have many women and men to thank, and I thank them every day for giving me this life I can continue to lead, even after 50 years in the same profession. I am a lifelong learner and that's what I suggest all you great teachers out there should try to become. Jump on to the spiral of lifelong learning and go forever up and wider out, inspiring yourself and all those around you. Never cease exploring! Never stop learning! Never stop sharing!

### Critical thinking leading bullets

- What issues in education, and especially ELT, keep you awake at night? Think of the comments or behaviours that you have heard or seen which make you angry or positively passionate enough to want to DO something to bring about change. Explain what they are and what you think you can do to bring the changes in a realistic, acceptable way.
- Open a journal and write in it every day, just for 10 minutes, before you do anything else. Try to do it in a silent place where you have no inter-

ruptions and read it back to yourself at the end of each week. Don't be formal but you may like to address these points:

-What, or who, are the cheerleaders for your development? Explain what they do for you.

-What, or who, are the obstacles to your development? Explain how they are negative.

-How can you maximize the former and minimize the latter?

- Search for like-minded individuals or groups and meet in person or virtually to discuss and document the issues you are facing in your personal contexts no matter how diverse they may be. Develop this into a PLC (Professional Learning Community) or a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) and invite others to help you, talk to you, suggest materials for you to read/watch. Make your findings into a presentation or an article and submit it to a Call for Articles or a Call for Papers at a conference near you or on-line.

### Discussion questions

1. There should be a proportionately equal numbers of male and female teachers at all levels of ELT education including conference speakers and policy makers.
2. Is it inevitable that certain subjects e.g. Science, Engineering, Math, Economics among others, tend to be regarded as "male" subjects while Dance, Drama, Music and Art tend to be regarded as belonging to the female domain?
3. It is imperative that the policy makers embed issues such as gender equity, stereotyping and inclusion in the curricula of all schools and, in tandem, social, and emotional classes to develop female confidence in themselves.

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# English beyond the classroom: an opportunity for female empowerment

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## I.- Background

Writing about myself is not an easy task, it implies recognizing that I am not just a woman. I am Claudia Bibiana, but I have always been called by my middle name and, for the last 16 years, I have been called Bibi, teacher Bibi. And I must admit I love that title. I am also a mother of two children, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a student, a sportswoman, and an inexhaustible curious mind and passionate about implementing ICTs in the classroom. Like any story, here I share with you this journey of transformation of lives from my role as a teacher-researcher. I have sought to empower all the people who have been in my English classes from love, care and transcendence of the work in the classroom to life. Therefore, we will take this journey to observe how being an English teacher in different settings is an opportunity for female empowerment while being immersed in the framework of three moments. Let's

think first: why not English? It has been more than 14 years of teaching and learning based on challenges. Second, I am a teacher, so I am also a student. Finally, we can dive between games and ICTs. That said, let's start.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

### ● Why not English? More than 14 years of teaching and learning based on challenges

I started primary school at the age of four. My mother taught me to read and write and I was always a bit precocious when it came to studying. I found my passion in letters and I wanted to learn non-stop. In my primary school I never had English classes, but my brother May always listened to "devilish" music (as my mum used to say) by Guns and Roses, Iron Maiden and Bon Jovi, which I hummed back in the mid-80s without knowing what they meant. Then, in high school, I met my English teacher for the first time. A tall, beautiful, brilliant and elegant woman who spoke something that I did not understand, but which captivated me from the first good morning. The beginning of the 90s. It was the beginning of the mix of styles and punk, reggae fusion, punk rock, pop punk, new wave, alternative rock and pop rock. Then, singers like Whitney Houston and Céline Dion kept me humming along, trying to keep up with them. Not an easy task! But it was the Spice Girls who motivated me to go further and not just hum, but sing in English at every school event. However, I don't have a good voice, nor could I pronounce it very well, and so I was faced with the biggest challenge of learning English, which is not the language, but the people around me. Like most people, I became afraid to speak in public, to use my most powerful tool, my voice, to express my ideas with my bad pronunciation, to participate and to dare. I became more and more silent.

Letters were my allies, and so I wrote poems, stories, and did the work of my classmates; but I didn't speak, and a couple of times I even made fun of those who tried. I was not happy, but I joined the "club of the miserable". Suddenly we were all silenced. And for six years there were many situations where silence

in English class reigned in most of the sessions. One day, the elegant, brilliant and beautiful teacher who had inspired me came up to me and said “only you can overcome your fears”. And that sentence joined my mother’s voice: “Mija, study so that you can be somebody in life”. And I always wondered, “am I not somebody anymore?”. Meanwhile, those sentences, what was happening, seeing my friends’ silence left me speechless. And then, I finished high school with a newborn daughter, so I had to choose between studying and raising a baby, which were the only options. Without being able to study “to be someone in life”, I had to work full time at whatever came up. As time went by, I enrolled in as many bilingual courses as I could in order to learn something, getting more and more excited about speaking English, while I quietly kept practicing with Madonna at home. With a lot of effort, I began to study English, between 1998 and 2001, at the Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA), and there my voice began to recover when my teacher asked us to learn a song in English. I went for I’m like a bird by Nelly Furtado. I didn’t know what it said, but I really enjoyed the rhythm. It was the song to put my baby to sleep and little by little I started to understand the lyrics a bit more; and, when I translated it, I understood it. I’m like a bird! Everything took a sudden turn, with my little English I got a better job as a bilingual secretary and I discovered what I wanted to do in my life.

### ● A teacher, a student

*Every expert, was once a beginner*  
Anonymous

Since I was studying, working and being a mother so young, I realized that our feminine power lies in never stopping learning! Finally, I got to university in 2001! A degree in Spanish, English and French at night for six years, with two-day jobs. My daughter was like a flower, growing up to enlighten me; and Jennifer Lopez and Britney Spears kept me up with English. It was simply another universe to start using not only English, but also French, and even my own language; and it made me rethink how to be a teacher and how the power that comes from knowing another lan-

guage fills me with strength and illusion. Then Shakira appeared with her song Hips don’t lie, and seeing this wonderful Colombian singing in English was very inspiring. And the fact is that we, women, cannot be what we are not told, what we are not shown, and understanding how others have opened the path to success is something I began to look for as part of my training, in order to recognize that I cannot talk about what I am without acknowledging the others who have helped me: my grandmother, my mother, my school teacher, my daughter.

Since 2006 I have been a teacher by training, but I recognize that I have had this vocation since I was a child. I was always the one who organized my groups, explained and checked homework, and planned as many activities as I could to have roles with my older brother, friends and neighbors, always teaching them games and activities. As the saying goes, “to teach is to learn twice”.

I first started in the classroom, at the *Fundación Fé y Alegría* located in the Garcés Navas neighborhood in Bogotá, thanks to the internship opportunity offered by my university at the time, and I was there for two years. I taught English and French to children between the ages of 8 and 12 who lived in vulnerable conditions. It was there that I understood that children do not learn by themselves, but from us, and that knowing another language was like belonging to another planet. It was also there that I reaffirmed my vocation and passion for teaching, that I understood that being a teacher is not what I do, but what I am. That same year the film High School Musical came out, so I adopted the theme of the film for each semester of classes, where we all had a role; and, between songs and choreographies, we learned about the verb “to be”, about daily routines and about grammatical structures. For the closing ceremony, we had to do a performance including these practices, so I planned my first musical with my students: *Y si cantamos, ¿qué?*

Thanks to my excellent performance at the University of La Salle, I was invited to participate in a call from the Armada Nacional de Colombia (ARC), to teach English as a Foreign Language at the Cole-

gio Naval Santa Fe de Bogotá. With my degree in my hands, I participated for a place in this institution; I presented more than five tests, both knowledge and medical exams, and I managed to enter after almost a year of many efforts. I started my first paid job as a teacher in 2008 as a professional civilian, but I was a member of this honorable institution and I was working with the Colegio Naval Santa Fe de Bogotá. There, women are very few, but they have large representation in educational environments. This has always caught my attention, because it seems that this scenario is highly feminized. For me, this translates into opportunities for growth and development for all the girls, young women and women with whom I learn and to whom I teach.

In 2008, "Single ladies" was on the radio, and I started to use music as a timer, as a challenge through questions and as a way to review grammar structures in my classes. In the same way, and like many of my colleagues, I arrived with a huge tape recorder to class where I played different CDs to listen to the activities, since I found the routine audio books extremely boring, so I incorporated bits and pieces of songs and new versions of speeches and famous rap phrases; for example, I have a dream, by Martin Luther King. Also, many of the games in classes consisted of shouting, running, jumping, and getting excited, and that was the key to learning. I did all of this while studying at the *Universidad de los Andes*, where I aimed to improve my knowledge on the English language and culture by teaching in depth.

Motivated and inspired by the acceptance of my methodology among my more than 310 students, I was left wondering how I could foster a second language learning environment that would transcend from the classroom to life. Therefore, I proposed the first bilingual program for the 10 naval schools in Colombia, U2 Language, where I sought an alliance with the university where I was studying; and, in an unprecedented exchange, both institutions signed an agreement for five years to transfer experiences and knowledge with linguistic and cultural exchanges in four languages: English, French, German and Mandarin Chinese. This, with the help of native guests who gave an air of glo-

balization at a time when it was thought that this was only possible in the university context.

First, I consolidated inter-institutional relationships by seeking partnerships and experts. Then I formed working teams in the school to involve teachers, parents, and students in this educational experience. The schedule of activities was extracurricular and 100 % free. Participation grew gradually and, thanks to the reception, I organized a graffiti competition to create the program's logo. I still have all the drawings and memories. This was a very important moment in my professional life, because "believing" in the idea gave it more value. An idea alone without action does not transform, that is why we talk about being and doing in education, which is the heart of human and world transformation.

Later, classes and activities were mixed with the songs like Single ladies (Beyoncé), Human (The Killers), so what (Pink), Infinity (Tiesto), I'm yours (Jason Mraz), just dance (Lady Gaga), and If I were a boy (Beyoncé). In the groups, we would create our playlist, and I would buy CDs to mix with the chosen songs, so that we could always listen to them in our classes. When some of them asked if they could include songs in Spanish, I told them that they could, but they had to translate and sing them in English, which was something of a grammatical intentionality. Soon it became a hit, and it was common to hear groups of students singing their own original English versions for emblematic Colombian songs such as *Boquita de caramelo*, by Los Hispanos and Rodolfo Aicardi, or *Predestinación*, by Aries Vigoth. As time went by, they also created choreographies.

At the same time, between classes, the girls began to be confronted with various situations, such as sexual harassment, unwanted pregnancies, use of psychoactive substances and discrimination. How did I find out about all of this? With the help of oral practices, when I invited them to tell their own story, under the premise "if you don't know what to say, make it up", so I did not evaluate the truth, but the prediction; this, so that they could decide who they wanted to be and what they wanted to tell.

That is how I heard stories of life full of pain, fears, and challenges. They cried out for help in their Spanglish. The most shocking thing was to understand that those stories were not made up, but part of their daily lives. Faced with this situation, our classes became a safe space, a space to understand that “to be” implies more than a conjugation. Like that, my purpose in life as a teacher began to have a single objective: to go beyond the classroom. It was no longer an idea, it was no longer a maybe, it was my call to action from my profession towards an integral formation.

Between standard content, guidebooks and systematically boring assessments, the great challenge of educating today's students for the future begins by strengthening their self-esteem so they can believe in themselves. That is why our days began with a prayer and ended with a greeting that we all created together. Today, after 14 years, many of those students and their families are still part of my life, I have been taking part of their children's lives, I have attended their postgraduate degrees and I have found messages in my inbox thanking me not only for having taught them English, but for having given them the opportunity to be their fullest.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

As I envision the future, I am filled with hope and passion for what I do. In it I find hope and inspiration, knowing that many of my students also want to be teachers in their different areas. From there, they will also be mentors who empower and inspire their students to greatness. Regarding these ideas, Sanchez (2002), describes empowerment as a deliberate and ongoing process that transforms individuals into self-aware subjects who understand their social environment. Similarly, Silva and Loreto (2004), approach empowerment from a values-based perspective, which recognizes the inherent strengths, abilities, and competencies of human beings. This perspective enables individuals to take charge of their lives with a sense of commitment, awareness, and critical thinking. Moreover, Wall (2012), from the perspective of social psychology, suggests that empowerment is a process that involves equipping individuals with the

essential skills and resources to achieve desirable outcomes. Considering this, I have consistently aimed to make my classes relevant to students' lives by integrating ICTs, Learning and Knowledge Technologies (LKT), as well as Technologies of Empowerment and Participation (TEP).

By incorporating ICTs, LKT, and TEP, I aim to equip my students with the tools they need to thrive in the digital age. As a result, I want my students to become increasingly proficient in using these technologies, which has helped to bridge the digital divide and the digital gender divide. Through this process, we have strengthened our skills and acquired new ones, all while working towards providing quality education in exciting and innovative ways. My hope is that my students will go on to become effective leaders in their respective fields, empowered to effect positive change in their communities and beyond.

So today, as a teacher of the future, I continue to have a deep desire to make a positive impact in the lives of my students, and I constantly look for new ways to help them succeed. Through ongoing guidance and support, I am developing the leaders of tomorrow, empowering them with the knowledge and skills they need to excel in a rapidly changing world. And as they all go out into the world, they will carry with them the lessons and values instilled in their families, their culture, and our class, forging a brighter and more promising future for all people.

- Diving between games and ICTs

I have always said that Technology will not replace teachers, but teachers who use technology will replace those who don't" Having said that, it can be English or Spanish, with or without fear, with or without ICTs. These are extremes irremediably present in English classes and everything that has to do with the use of this language. I always tell my students that believing in themselves is the most important thing, that their greatest challenge is their fear when hearing their own voice in another language, when sharing or defending their ideas rather than grammar or structures. This goes beyond the classroom; it tran-

scends to life and the opportunities for improvement. Each class is our happy hour, and it is intentional, and we use that to find our purpose and vision in life. We constantly reflect between grammatical tenses and new vocabulary: what did show up from your childhood this week? Did you repeat any familiar patterns? How did your feelings about love behave? What were your conversations based on? With these questions, we go from personal to global, addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the social, cultural, and human issues that affect us in the spaces we inhabit. To talk about female empowerment is to talk about us, the stories that weave us and how they relate to other people, men who surround us and who help us to be. We are not lonely bodies, we dance with the people around us, our histories, and ancestors while we educate ourselves and become increasingly aware of the transformative power of education and our voice. Our ideas, ourselves.

As a challenge and an achievement, sharing reactions in another language has allowed my students to get to know themselves better, their reactions show what they carry inside, and each class helps to rediscover and to heal. In short, English classes are a tool for empowerment, for bringing digital divides, and for self-discovery. This has involved recognizing myself in those who attend my classes, the need for a life plan, and that our cultural identity is our superpower. We identify priorities, evaluate memories, review decisions, improve habits and lifestyles, celebrate ourselves, strengthen our personalities, break down fears, break paradigms, build friendships, talk and act on ideas and dreams, and rediscover talents.

Therefore, although English is often considered the global language for business and it is widely spoken in many countries around the world by learning and becoming proficient in English, women may be able to take advantage of more job opportunities, both at home and abroad. English can also be a tool for women to access and participate in online communities and resources, including education, professional development, and social support networks. English can be a means of self-expression and empowerment for women who do not have the same level of freedom

or access to education and opportunities in their own language or culture. By learning English, women may be able to break down linguistic and cultural barriers and build connections with people from different backgrounds, which can lead to a greater understanding and collaboration. With these classroom experiences, English goes beyond the classroom and into life, it is an opportunity for female empowerment in many ways. Finally, learning English can be a way for women to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations, and to assert their intelligence, capabilities, and independence.

**It's YOU, who can change the world**

#### IV.- Critical thinking leading bullets

To foster critical thinking, collaboration, self-reflection, empowerment, and transformation in all academic settings, I highly recommend the following leading bullets:

- Working with and for achieving SDGs: The challenges higher education is facing today, (both pre-pandemic and beyond), have presented a roadmap where ICTs and the SDGs are seen as a strategy and opportunity for empowerment, and to enhance the quality of life for people worldwide. The literature reveals that universities worldwide are increasingly incorporating the SDGs into their educational innovation processes, although it is not clear how deeply they are involved in academic processes (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021). It is worth noting that although English is a universal language of knowledge, SDGs' efforts in higher education have only been addressed in some fields, such as international business, according to García-Feijoo et al. (2020) and Owusu-Agyeman (2020).
- Learn and teach about new technologies such as AI in education: As educators, guides, and models for our students, it is essential to analyze the role of emerging technologies in education, evaluating their advantages and disadvantages. For instance, we must explore how AI can facilitate

customized learning and real-time feedback, while being attentive to concerns like privacy and prejudice. Ultimately, as catalysts for transformation in our English classes, we must prioritize the content over the container.

- English as a tool for women empowerment: The academic community can collaborate and reflect on the ways in which learning English can empower women and individuals, while also acknowledging the potential benefits and obstacles associated with English language proficiency. Additionally, we can explore strategies for promoting English language learning opportunities within women's communities, and advocate for increased access to resources and support.
- Culture as a tool to vindicate identity: Recognizing the significance of culture in fostering empowerment and identity, we should explore ways to acknowledge and promote cultural diversity in our personal lives and communities. It includes the use of their native language to learn another one. Our cultural identity serves as a

strength! This can help us in advancing social inclusion and equality.

### Discussion questions

1. How might teachers incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and promote cultural understanding in the classroom while learning English to promote inclusion and gender equity?
2. In what ways might EFL teachers integrate discussions on gender identity and expression into our English language lessons to promote equity and inclusivity?
3. What strategies can EFL learners use to advocate for marginalized communities and support greater recognition and inclusion for these groups?
4. How might English language proficiency and the ability to communicate effectively in a globalized world empower individuals to promote social equity and address issues of inequality and injustice?

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# Down the Writing Center Rabbit Hole

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In Lewis Carroll's classic work of children's literature *Alice in Wonderland*, the titular character finds herself in a new world after venturing down a rabbit hole. Her time in Wonderland challenges her to reconsider her familiar, everyday life, and through each new encounter, she finds her voice and grows as a person. Upon entering the field of ELT, with a range of teaching contexts, research areas, and language teaching associations to choose from, one might feel a bit like Alice—unsure of which path to take. But throughout one's career journey, personal and professional discovery awaits. "In Carroll's story, Alice grows stronger the more she questions and experiences. New generations can look to Alice as a symbol for empowerment ... To 'be more Alice' is a daring invitation to imagine the impossible, express yourself and follow a thirst for knowledge" (Alice: Curiouser & Curiouser, 2021-2022). The following is the story of how following my curiosity led me to coordinate a writing center in Japan and achieve a lifelong dream of working in an international environment.

## I.- Background

Growing up in a rural area of the midwestern United States, I was an avid reader, traveling the world through books and dreaming of an international career in the future. From my limited experience, I did not know how exactly how I would achieve that goal, but during university, I discovered that I liked study-

ing languages and tutoring classmates. After graduation, my first job was in restaurant management which was a fast-paced and multilingual environment, with conversations between groups of employees in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish. Although I enjoyed certain aspects of this work, especially training new staff members, the restaurant industry was too stressful and thus, for me, unsustainable as a long-term career.

When faced with making a career change, I decided to return to school to pursue an MA in English with a specialization in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). I was accepted to an in-state program and awarded a graduate assistantship to teach first-year English composition courses. Although I had not anticipated this instructional role, I gradually became invested in teaching writing, and out of curiosity, I took several electives outside the TESL program, enrolling in Rhetoric and Composition classes, such as Writing Program Administration and Writing Across the Curriculum. Not long after graduation, I was looking for flexible employment and secured two part-time positions: one at a local community college where I taught English Composition courses and another at an education company where I consulted with students in an online writing lab. In both capacities, I worked with the general student population, and although it was rewarding, I knew my true passion was with English language learners, so I began applying for full-time teaching positions overseas.

Ultimately, I accepted a teaching position at a private foreign language university in Japan. A few years later, the university decided to start a writing center and looked for a candidate among the current teaching faculty to become the coordinator. I was interested because it aligned with my goal as a teacher: to support students in achieving their own language learning aims; furthermore, the job combined management, composition, and ELT—all areas in which I was interested. I did not hesitate to apply and was offered the position. Coordinating the writing center became a milestone achievement in my career as an ELT professional.

## II.- Empowerment and Leadership Development

A career in higher education in Japan is not without challenges, however. There are several factors which may hinder women who are interested in advancing their careers and taking on leadership positions. In 2022, Japan was ranked 116th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2022), and data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that Japan is well below the OECD average for women teaching staff at the tertiary level despite an increase of approximately 10% during the past decade, from 19% in 2010 to 28% in 2017 (OECD, 2019). Recent news shows modest improvements, with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) reporting the number of female university educators is at its highest level (26.7%) (cited in Kyodo News, 2022). In addition, the University of Tokyo has announced plans to hire women to the ranks of professor, assistant professor, and lecturer to bring their percentage to 25% by 2027 (Ueno, 2022), with other universities likely to follow their lead in the future to make up for the historic discrepancy in hiring rates. This disparity occurs among foreign teachers in Japan too, with foreign men occupying the majority (see Nagatomo, 2020). In addition, as a result of labor laws, many contracts, including those for foreign language instructors are only for a limited term, often five years.

Despite these challenges, my overall work experience as a foreign woman in Japan has been positive. Although the overarching plan for the writing center had already been decided by the university administration, the details of the day-to-day operation were left to me as the coordinator. In that way, the writing center existed somewhat outside the traditional hierarchy of the university, allowing for a greater degree of flexibility and innovation. In addition, writing center work was carried out primarily in English, with the staff helping students with writing assignments for language or content classes taught in English. As a result, leading as an international faculty member in this environment was an advantage, similar to that discussed by Mynard (2020).

Another challenge was the possible gendered perception of writing center work. For example, in the United States, it has been observed that "... writing centers are often socially constructed as feminine sites where something like the domestic, care-giving service of the academic community is carried out, and this may be true regardless of whether the work is undertaken by women or by men" (Trachsel, 1995, p. 27). For our new writing center in Japan, carving out its identity and situating it within the campus community were important considerations from the outset. To give some background on writing centers in Japan, they began operating at universities in the 2000s (Johnston et al., 2009) and have continued to be established across the country. In 2009, the Writing Centers Association of Japan (n.d.) held its first symposium, and now currently nearly 20 writing centers are listed on the organization's website. The Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (n.d.) also maintains a registry of language learning spaces, and while not exclusive to writing centers, it includes approximately ten listings for writing-related services, such as writing advice or support desks. From the information in these two directories, the services, staffing, languages used, and other points differ between centers, with each evolving according to suit institutional needs and available resources. Joining international professional associations and reading about writing centers around the world helped me to contextualize writing center work globally and locally.

The writing center was staffed primarily by undergraduate international students, and applications were accepted from any student studying abroad at the university, regardless of their field of study or the language of instruction at their home institution. Many tutors had previous experience or knowledge of writing centers, and they hailed from virtually every continent: North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Australia/Oceania. Thus, every appointment involved intercultural communication, and both the local student tutees and international student tutors learned from their interactions. In fact, a survey of peer tutor alumni showed that the two skills tutors perceived as most improved because of

their employment at the writing center were intercultural communication and the ability to analyze writing (Hillis, 2017). By reading students' writing assignments and asking questions, the tutors had opportunities to discuss topics that would not normally occur in daily conversation. At the beginning of every session, one tutor always asked, "What are you going to teach me about today?", a question that perfectly encapsulates the mutual benefits of tutoring.

From the day the writing center opened in the fall semester of 2012, one of the primary goals was to make it a welcoming place for students regardless of their English proficiency level. This would not have been possible without the support of English language teachers at the university who took the initiative to bring their classes for tours of the writing center, explain the benefits of peer tutoring, and follow up with their students. The writing center was successful based on the number of appointments, averaging around 1,000 per semester, and the staff received positive feedback from both teachers and students through both formal and informal channels.

Based on this success, after a couple of years and at the behest of the university, the Professional Services Center (PSC) was established within the writing center to help students with the overseas internship application process. Every year, a number of undergraduate students were applying for internships at leisure and resort facilities in the United States and needed to submit application documents in English. Several additional tutors were hired to staff the PSC, and they worked alongside faculty members in the writing center to create new instructional materials and workshops on topics such as writing resumes, answering interview questions, and job search etiquette. The local students who attended individual sessions and group workshops were successful in their efforts to secure internships abroad. Although it might seem outside the original scope, the addition of services is consistent with trends found in Delgrego's (2016) survey of writing centers in Japan. In this case, once the need was identified, the writing center could pivot relatively quickly to provide this service, unlike curriculum reform which could take years to implement.

As the writing center became more established on campus, various collaborations were formed with faculty members. One example of a collaborative effort was the Strangers Presentation Event initiated by Edwards (see Hale, 2021). During this full-day event, students delivered presentations in English at a classroom space located in the writing center. In this way, they gained practice speaking to an audience outside of the familiar classroom environment. The talks were open to the entire student body, and the room was often at full capacity. Audience members gave ratings and comments to each speaker, allowing each presenter to receive authentic feedback on their performance. In addition, international students and faculty members were invited to present in Japanese, and speakers of all levels were welcome.

Another example of collaboration was that the professors assigned to the writing center worked together to prepare presentations and articles for the university's faculty development program. In addition, presentations at language teaching association events and conferences were delivered, and in some cases current or former tutors participated as co-presenters. In this way, the staff members were also able to develop their own academic writing and public speaking skills. If I would have had the opportunity, I would have liked to offer writing consultation services for faculty or start writing groups for instructors, in hopes of extending support to those publishing their research findings or teaching ideas.

Unfortunately, despite its successes, the contribution of the writing center to the campus community was not well understood by some university leaders, and it was threatened with a decrease in the allotted resources. Through a professional organization, I consulted with a mentor in the United States to assist in the development of an appeal, but ultimately, nearing the end of my limited contract, I opted to take a position at a different university. The writing center continued under different leadership for a few years, but then it was permanently closed, and because of teacher turnover, it seems that little institutional memory of it remains. However, during the time it was open, the writing center made a valuable contribution to the campus community.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

On a personal level, coordinating the writing center helped me to develop as an ELT professional. Even though the writing center was established over a decade ago, and my experiences were gained while working under a limited term contract, I have been able to take these achievements with me and continue doing this type of work at other universities. My subsequent job involved course coordination and development in addition to managing the learning assistance center. At present, I have secured stable employment at a private university as a language instructor and supervisor at the self-access learning center.

This journey highlights several points that could be useful for women who want to thrive in the field of ELT. First, to help serve learners with diverse interests, lean on previous experiences, whether gained in academia or not, for example work experience, caregiving, or personal interests and hobbies. In the writing center, for many administrative tasks, especially interviewing and scheduling, I relied on my background in restaurant management. PSC staff members who had experiences working in hospitality and leisure were especially effective at coaching students who were applying for overseas internships in this field.

Apply for opportunities that are of interest, for example as job openings, conference presentations, and grant applications. Do not self-reject. Taking risks is an inevitable part of growth. Even if unsuccessful, there is a lot to be learned throughout the application process; also, any feedback received can be useful for improving future chances of success. In my case, if I would not have applied for the position of writing center coordinator, the trajectory of my career in ELT would have been much different.

Finally, and perhaps most important—stay curious. Continue to learn new things by becoming involved in language teaching associations, consulting with mentors, or collaborating with colleagues. Be like Alice and follow your interests—you never know what new adventure awaits!

### Critical Thinking

- Collaboration: Through collaborating with others, we can gain new perspectives and work together towards our shared goals.
- Empowering others: By giving students and others the space and support to share ideas and make decisions, we can support them in their empowerment journey.
- Reaching across borders: Whether connecting with a colleague in a different classroom, department, or university, reaching out to others can be an opportunity to develop mentoring relationships, critical friendships, and other professional partnerships.

### Discussion Questions

1. Experience gained outside of academia can sometimes be disregarded, yet it can be a powerful source of information for ELT teachers, whose students go on to use their language skills in a variety of fields. If you are involved in hiring educators, how could the process be more inclusive of real-world experience? As an ELT professional, do you have a unique experience outside education that might be applicable to your work?
2. Have you ever self-rejected because you thought you weren't qualified or that your work wasn't good enough? Upon reflection, are there steps you could take to prepare for and follow through with opportunities in the future? What strategies might work for you?
3. Whether a language classroom or a writing center, we want all learners to feel comfortable to participate. How can we cultivate welcoming space for learners?
4. How could you “be more like Alice”? What aspects of ELT are you curious about? How could you collaborate with others or become involved in language teaching associations to learn more about your areas of interest and develop leadership skills?

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# Following your inner compass

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## I. Background

I was born in Czechoslovakia behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. Unlike some of my school peers, I had yet to decide what professional direction to pursue. It only started unveiling itself during my late adolescence, shortly after the country came to freedom in 1989. I fell in love with ELT when teaching English to my friends for fun. I enjoyed creating lessons for our one-on-one tutoring sessions and thinking of ways to make my friends engage with the language. Consequently, I decided to seek a teaching degree, which was a big surprise to my parents.

Initially, my father expressed disagreement with my plans and discouraged me. Yet, I was rather persistent, for following what I enjoyed doing felt right. I finally knew what professional path I wanted to take. My grandfather was a former teacher, and until the end of his life, he expressed much appreciation for the profession. In the end, my father was the one who told me about a newly established teacher preparation program, helped me to apply, and I was admitted. My parents never thought I would study at a university or become a teacher. However, I did so with their support and was the first person in my family to receive undergraduate and graduate university degrees.

My full-time professional commitment as a lower secondary school English language teacher in the Czech Republic started in 1995. I survived the first year of teaching and developed confidence in the job. However, about three years into my teaching career, the school principal wanted me to expand my teaching credentials. Due to the nature of my original single-school subject major study program (Czech teachers usually have two), meeting the principal's requirement was almost impossible. In any case, an encounter with my former professor, originally from the US, resolved my dilemma. He strongly encouraged me to apply for studies in the USA, something I had never imagined doing. My attempt was another big surprise for my parents, but I was compelled to return to school and continue learning. I earned my parent's support again in the end.

So, after four exciting years in the language classroom with teenage learners, I left for the USA to continue my education. I spent seven years studying and working at The University of Memphis in Tennessee, where I received an M.A. and Ph.D. in English with a concentration in Applied Linguistics. The context, so different from what I knew from the Czech Republic, provided space for self-discovery. I had to leave what I was familiar with to find myself. I grew so much as a person and a professional during that period. Though I have further developed since then, the seven years empowered me to go confidently toward a contented and balanced life. Moreover, I discovered another passion beyond teaching English: teaching teachers how to teach English. I left the Czech Republic as an English teacher and returned as an English teacher educator.

In my seventh year in the USA, I faced the decision to either apply for an academic job in the United States or return to Czechia to build my professional career there. On the one hand, I appreciated the academic life and culture at American universities. The professional aspect of my life in the States was at its best. It offered intellectual satisfaction and reinforced my passion for discovery. I was motivated to continue my career in the context I was well acquainted with. On the other hand, I was drawn to returning to my

family, friends, the Czech Republic, and Europe. I was split between personal and professional paths. Knowing that one can pursue the ELT profession anywhere, I decided to return home and build my professional career there. Little did I know what I would be facing in the upcoming years. I had a strong, reverse culture shock. After a few years, I settled back into my native culture, and my personal life was re-established. Professionally, my return was much more challenging. My U.S. studies shaped my professional and academic values, behaviors, and beliefs. I developed as an academic in a higher education context that is culturally very different from the Czech one. Adjusting to the new educational realities was a bumpy process. Still, after almost twenty years in the higher education system in my home country, I consider myself an immigrant. I have acculturated into Czech academia but have yet to assimilate into the local academic culture fully. Don't get me wrong. I have great colleagues at my institution and countrywide. Still, here and there, especially when I experience a culture clash, I get homesick for "my native professional culture." Despite these nostalgic moments, I am personally and professionally happy in the Czech Republic. I have a job I love and never cease to learn in. I can shape Czech education by preparing future teachers of English as an international language. I collaborate with classroom teachers and other professionals to improve our education system. Due to technology, I can interact with colleagues from all over the world. I learn and interact professionally globally and work and live locally in the heart of Europe.

## II. Empowerment and leadership development

I have had multiple leadership positions and roles in my almost thirty years in the profession. However, my leadership path started long before I knew my professional career path. I liked summer camps and became a summer camp leader when I got too old to be there as a child. It was a natural next step. This principle of 'a natural next step' marks my leadership path; everything has always been another natural step. Although I never aspired for a leadership position, they naturally evolved from what I was doing, as illustrated further.

One way to engage with colleagues in professional learning activities is through a professional organization. TESOL International Association has been this space for me since 1999 when I joined as a graduate student. TESOL is a global professional association of around 13 000 members involved in English language education. My membership has always provided me with new professional learning opportunities and prospects to interact and network with colleagues from all over the world who share the same interests and passions. Being mentored as a graduate student by professors who were also members of the organization and served there in various leadership positions, I was advised to engage with the community as a volunteer. I started volunteering in the association four years after I became a member. I went from minor volunteer roles to roles with higher responsibilities. I continued giving my time to TESOL for four primary reasons: my 4 E's. I found enjoyment, engagement, excitement, and education in my service to the association. Those four elements I seek in everything I do. They are built into my inner compass that shows me my direction. This has been the case from my first volunteer leadership experience as a TESOL student e-list co-manager to my most recent one a TESOL president.

I think of my life in small steps. They take me to new experiences, roles, and situations. I do not think of these as achievements but as opportunities. I can stand on and use what I have learned but continue learning about myself, people, and the world. I am never drawn to the status of a position but to the work it involves and the possibilities it offers to impact the ELT profession or education - people positively. These were also the reasons why I expressed interest in serving as the TESOL International Association president.

I already had a three-year service experience on the TESOL Board of Directors before serving as the association's highest-ranking officer. Those three exciting years went by very fast. They offered the enjoyment of creating and shaping TESOL through collaboration, engagement with diverse colleagues, the excitement of initiating changes, and education about

the profession, leadership, the world, and myself. After rotating off the Board, I wanted many more such experiences and submitted my first application for the president-elect position in 2015. I took a natural next step. I made it through the different application process rounds and was selected for the election slate. I was thrilled and honored to be recognized for my leadership skills and experiences as a person that could lead the organization. I vividly recall the day before the results were announced. I sat down and brainstormed the pros and cons of winning or losing the election. My analysis showed me that either way would offer new opportunities, and I was at peace with either result. When I was told I had lost to my colleague, I had a moment of disappointment which was shortly replaced with gratefulness. I finished a few projects, including my first book *Creating visually effective materials for English learners*, and continued doing other exciting jobs.

Being encouraged by colleagues and mentors to reapply for the president-elect position, I did so the following year. I submitted my application, but after my interview, I learned I had not been selected for the slate. Interestingly enough, shortly after, I was approached to join the Summit on the Future of the TESOL Profession Steering Committee. What a treat! When one door closes, another one opens. From 2016 to 2017, I worked with fantastic colleagues worldwide to prepare a two-day summit in Athens, Greece, and associated online events. Around 200 professionals from 64 countries gathered in Athens to discuss four key themes for the future of the profession. The outcome of the summit – the Action Agenda for the Future of the TESOL Profession – provided direction for a positive future for TESOL professionals worldwide. I felt very privileged to be a part of the amazing endeavor the TESOL International Association and its partners put forward.

Meanwhile, people I trusted and appreciated encouraged me to apply for the president-elect position once more in 2017. The application process was enriching again. It forced me to think about my reasons for running and serving the association. Though it was my third time going through the process, I continued to learn. For example, I learned how difficult it is to

make a short three-minute video in which one presents themselves, which has come in handy many times since then. I was selected on the election slate a second time and lost the second time in the election. But, again, I accepted the loss with gratefulness for the lessons learned throughout the process. I admit it was a bit harder to lose the second time. I thought that was it for me. I was done with that path – that one was not for me. At least, that's what I thought at that time. So, I moved on to other ways to engage with the TESOL community.

Almost two years later, in March 2019, I attended the annual TESOL convention in Atlanta. I sat amid the sizeable international crowd of TESOL professionals at the opening plenary. I felt happy and grateful for the community whose values and visions resonate with me. Moreover, a random thought crossed my mind. I told myself I would try again to apply for the president-elect position. I had a profound positive feeling inside that was wrapped around that thought. I felt confirmation when a colleague asking me about my interest in running said: "In baseball, you are out after three strikes. You have only had two." She was correct; I only had two slate strikes.

I went through the whole nomination process again. I submitted my application. I did my interview. I recorded another video. I was selected to the slate, and to my big surprise, this time, in November 2019, I was elected to serve as TESOL's 56th president in 2021-2022. In the end, all the pieces came together at the right time. During an interview for TESOL 2022 Studio at the TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo in Pittsburgh, I was asked about some of the things I was most proud of as TESOL President. I responded that I prefer the word joys of the presidency when discussing my one year in the top leadership position. It was a joyful adventure that changed me and how I see the profession and the world. I do not perceive the presidency as an achievement but as a means to self-discovery in a unique role.

Everything that preceded my winning the TESOL election was there to prepare me for my presidency during some of the most challenging times for the association and the world caused by the COVID-19 pan-

demic. I know I was not ready the first time I expressed my interest. I wasn't even prepared the second time. I needed all the professional and personal experiences, including the summit, to learn and better understand the professional world and myself as a person and leader.

There were many people along the way who supported and inspired me, but my closest colleagues and mentors were cardinal to my success. They were great models of professionalism and leadership to me. I was able to witness their accomplishments and learn from them. They communicated trust in my skills and knowledge and cheered for me when needed. They highlighted the unique traits that I was often unaware of. They shared their feedback and observations that helped me develop. They provided guidance and advice when I asked. They gave me great gifts through their mentorship, which cannot be returned. I can only thank my mentors and take on mentoring my students and younger colleagues. I indeed have high standards to match. Though serving in the highest position in association leadership was very educational, and I further developed my leadership competencies, I recognize that learning never stops. To lead well, one must remain a student of leadership and open to new ways of leading.

### III. Looking forward into the future

Some friends say I have always been driven and knew my goals. I do not see it this way. I never knew what was suitable for me as I looked ahead. I did not build my professional career by having a vision or clear goals. The experiences that I have had have come from taking small steps. I have always been driven by knowing what allows me to excel and bring joy, satisfaction, and inspiration. I have sought these in everything I do. I have never had high aspirations but always looked for something new, fun, and different. Every new experience or opportunity triggered interest in something else. I have often asked myself: What next step can I take to continue doing what I like and enjoy? What role can I take next to use what I have learned and to grow simultaneously?

I am an empowered woman in ELT, knowing my strengths and limits. I know what work I enjoy and what makes me happy. I set my direction for my professional activities. I say «yes» to what resonates well with me. I invest my time and energy into what matters to me, what I care about, and what I find meaningful.

My message for women in ELT worldwide is similar to the message I would have for any human being. Learn about yourself through self-discovery. Learn to listen to the inner voice often overshadowed by the noisy world. Seek what matters to you the most, what gives you joy and fulfillment, what gives you energy and inspiration; seek where the best in you can grow, what brings out the best, where you feel yourself. Put aside expectations and norms, what your family or friends hope for you, and think about what makes you personally happy and content, where you blossom. Pursue your goals even despite obstacles that cross your path. Do what enchant and «tickles» you. Seek mentors that will guide and support you in your professional quest for your path. Decide for yourself; make conscious decisions.

Although I only share bits of my professional life here, they illustrate its fundamental pillars. I have been fortunate to find work that inspires and enriches me. I have also been lucky to be surrounded by family, friends, and colleagues who support me. I create the professional path I take every day. Sometimes my mind tells me I should do this or that, but I check my inner compass to seek the direction for my next steps. It does not mean that I have always had it easy. I have been lost a few times on my path. I have had many ups and downs. I have shed many tears and shared many laughs. But then again, in retrospect, I would do everything the same. I feel fulfilled and content, for I continually reflect on what is essential in my life and actively work toward it.

I see opportunities everywhere. The only downside of this beautiful gift is that I want to pursue more ideas and directions than I can sometimes handle well. I have too many interests and creative

ideas that I would like to follow. I have had to learn to think twice or even three or four times before agreeing to a new commitment to have balance in life. No matter how much I enjoy and appreciate my chosen profession, I know it is only one aspect of my life.

### Critical thinking leading bullets

- Reflect on how you want to feel on your professional path: what feelings and why do you want to experience in your career?
- Identify professional activities that make you feel most alive and think of deep reasons for your positive feelings: what needs do you get fulfilled by those activities? How do they get fulfilled?
- Reflect on what matters to you and what you want for yourself personally and professionally: What do you want to say yes and no to? What

goals do you have and why? What will they bring you?

- Reflect on your unique traits, strengths, and resources that you could draw on to help you move forward in life toward your vision.

### Discussion questions

1. What can hinder people from fulfilling their goals? Explain.
2. How do you think living in a different country/culture can influence people?
3. What topics are easier for you to address in English than your native language? Why?

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# The butterfly journey

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## I. Background

My name is Gabriela Alhor Martínez, and I am from a tiny place in the Mexican southeast, I am from the royal city of San Cristobal de las Casas, I am from those streets that used to be cobblestone, where the sunrises were misty and the sunsets of fire. A magical place, between mountains and hills full of flora and fauna that connected us with mother earth. I was born there and grew up there until I was 18 years old. My small town was characterized by a high percentage of indigenous people. Therefore, I believe my multicultural awareness was well developed. Most of the indigenous people came from their fields to sell fresh fruits and vegetables and offered us their wonderful textile art descended from the Mayan culture, multichromatic weavings and embroideries that were of extraordinary beauty and that fortunately for those of us who are from this land we could wear with pride.

At home, we had no luxuries but a loving, empathetic, and very supportive family. We were four children, three women, and one man. Our life was very simple but very happy. We didn't need more than a sunny afternoon to enjoy life, to do homework, to help each other. The school was a wonderful place because I am sure that what I am today I owe in great part to my teachers and the solid ethical and moral foundations they taught us with their example. I went to public schools throughout my elementary and high school education. In my opinion, all the

schools in my town had a high level of education, and the teachers were loving, responsible, and committed to making us successful people. However, my curiosity about the world was very great and in 1986, when I finished high school, I begged my parents to allow me to study in the country's capital. A new life full of dreams was about to begin. My head was flying, and I imagined the life that a big city had in store for me. For my generation, leaving the village was a great achievement; not only because it represented an opportunity to develop professionally but also to get to know the world, a world that was far away from my provincial reality.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

Entering the university was my first great achievement, generally, the marginalized states of the country are characterized by low levels of education, however, I passed the entrance exam without any problem. I remember that waiting for the results was agonizing, some of my friends who had also wanted to enter other prestigious universities in the capital had been rejected, I remember that the news of those accepted to the university was published in a local newspaper, and since by that time, I was no longer in the city; I had to ask a friend to buy the newspaper and read the results over the phone. It was a great thrill to hear my name on the acceptance list, I was with my family and my two best friends, we all jumped and screamed with joy. I felt very happy and full of illusions to start something new and different that would mark my whole life. Everybody was excited and proud of me; I would be the first in the family to enter a big university.

My older siblings were studying in the small local campus of the state university, the one and only career offered there was law, which of course, was not my election. Arriving in a big city was the first immense challenge I had to face, taking a bus for more than 16 hours of travel and arriving and facing the hustle and bustle, the traffic, and the social culture so different from mine was a bit challenging, because being a migrant is also associated with naivety, need and ignorance. However, I was determined to succeed,

and I cope with this new life having the best attitude. Resilience applied to the migratory phenomenon is defined by Bustamante (2016) as the capacity to migrate, and to survive against any attack or threat, that is, to counteract the conditions of the vulnerability of transit, stay, or destination spaces. Such ability materializes theoretically as an inherent power in human beings to face adversity, firstly granted by nature and subsequently by exercise and agency becoming and based on human rights.

The first days at the university were fascinating, my classmates were very supportive, and since there were only a few of us coming from small provincial towns, they tried to protect us. The classes were extraordinary, from the beginning I fell in love with linguistics, and I always tried to give my best in every class, I started taking extra English classes to be able to face the challenge of studying for a degree in teaching foreign languages. One of my first contributions to the deconstruction of an erroneous perception of education in our country was to demonstrate to my fellow city dwellers that coming from a small province and having studied in public and somewhat modest schools was not synonymous with ignorance or smallness. The first contact with classist comments I had, was when in the first days of classes everyone introduced themselves and said what “*colegio*” they came from; I realized that the word “*colegio*” was associated with a higher social status and that simply saying school was like accepting social inferiority. I noticed that many tried to impress with the prestige of their “*colegios*”, however, in my conscience and perception it did not have much impact since my reality was different and I was a clear example of intelligence. As the days went by I realized that many classmates admired me and followed me because in some way I was the voice of those who felt discriminated against because they came from public schools and did not have the courage to raise their voices.

As time went by, I became more confident that I had made the right choice, I liked my career and I saw myself as a future translator. I was already in my fifth semester and my self-confidence and self-esteem were growing. When we had vacations I flew back

home, that safe space that nourished my soul, little by little I noticed how my friends saw me differently, they admired me and from the moment I arrived, they wanted to get together so that I could tell them everything about living in a big city. They asked me everything, about the people, the places, and the food and I think that little by little I became the symbol of the success of my group of friends. My family would tell me that they were proud that I was doing well and learning so much.

On vacations, my cousins sent their young children to me so that I could teach them English, and I liked it very much, I think that was the beginning of drawing my identity as a teacher. I even worked as a tourist guide, because my hometown is visited by a lot of international visitors. There I realized that speaking English was so important, people from the local government frequently asked me to interpret and translate many cultural or political events they had. That made me feel I had a higher status, not in the way I was superior but, in the way, that people recognized my education.

In the summer of 1989, I met the best teacher and mentor that life could have given me, teacher Lorena Otero, an American who came to live in Puebla and fell in love with Mexican culture. Her presence in my professional development was fundamental, she helped me to unveil my true vocation as a teacher, her classes were very interesting but the real reason for my deep love for her was her sensitivity to detect if any of her students were in trouble. She scanned us every day and if someone needed personal advice, academic counseling, or just someone to listen she was perfect. As Bettin (2021) stated, mentoring influences students' career choices, while providing a safe and nurturing environment to form their own professional identities. We developed a very strong friendship, a group of classmates and I used to help her take care of her father, a retired U.S. Navy man who, being a 95-year-old man, needed constant companionship. John was his name, and he didn't speak any Spanish, so for us it was an opportunity to learn the language from the need to communicate with a person who needed us. We used to spend entire afternoons with

him, ecstatic listening to his stories. Lorena took us on an unforgettable trip to the United States, we went to visit her son who had a ranch in Oregon, where we learned to communicate, we learned about sociolinguistics, pragmatics, but above all about the process of human communication.

My first contact with real students was when I did my social service, I gave English classes to workers of the audio and video department of the university. All of them were adults who were eager to learn. They were very interested in the lessons, so that pushed me to prepare interesting and useful classes for them. When I finished the time, they asked me to continue working with them. That situation boosted my motivation and my interest to be an English teacher. I was in the last semester of my career when I went to a high school that belonged to the university to do my professional practicum; there I worked with teenagers, full of energy and very receptive, for me a fresh teacher was perfect, the only problem was that most of the teachers which were male did not like my way of teaching, most of them were 20 or more years of experience teachers, and they were scandalized because I developed a friendship with my students, the students liked me and all of them wanted to have classes with me, I think the main reason was I was younger than the other teachers and they seemed to be old fashioned in their teaching methods. Even though some of those teachers were rude to me, I imagined they acted like that because I was far younger than them but also a woman. I managed to talk to them, and I tried to learn from their experience, especially on the topic of classroom management. I started to be more observational, and I tried to spend more time with them. Soon I discovered that some of them were afraid to speak English, they did not feel comfortable and obviously, they did not want me to notice that. I managed to invite them to open a conversation teachers club, and I started to create material to help them to feel more comfortable and to open their sentiments about their lack with me. I soon gained their confidence and we created a solid colleague's group. I helped them with their English level, and they helped me with other aspects of teaching, like empathy, respect, ethics, material development, and also evaluation.

When my practicum there finished, I was offered a position to be a former English teacher, so I immediately accepted, and I started working at the time I was finishing my career. By that time, I really felt motivated and successful, I was supported by the principal to start a change in the academy. We used to have a reading comprehension program, and there we started to construct a new program; a program that included the four skills. I asked the professional advice of my teachers and mentors; I started investigating the newest methods and the way to develop a program.

There were 8 high schools that made up the upper secondary level at BUAP and by that time I was already known and respected in the general academy. My colleagues trusted me and made me feel like their leader, even though I was much younger than them. They put their trust in me to carry out the work of the curriculum change. There were some detractors of this idea, however, I worked hard to change their minds, I realized that maintaining a focus on positive outcomes is far more difficult for these events, which often devolve into finger-pointing and blame-casting. Fortunately, we did a great job, and the authorities recognized my work. By that time, I was appointed teaching advisor, and then I made decisions on how to work in eight schools. The 4-skill program with a communicative approach was very well accepted and that served me as a career booster because I got the recognition of the community. I realized that I got excited about building something I could take pride in, something that helped me grow as an individual but also helped my colleagues to grow as groups. I wanted to know I was working for something greater than myself, and that I was contributing in a positive way. I reached the personal satisfaction of having fulfilled the promise to my parents and my friends to succeed in a place far away from my hometown.

New projects arrived and the idea of working on our own material for the 8 high schools began to take shape. I started to work with the advice of a Greek publisher and there we had the opportunity to travel to that country to have training courses in the realization, editing, and publication of our own

books. The main idea was to create a material that would suit our context and that would meet the expectations of our students. That trip marked my life and my interest in research began, there I realized that the classroom is a fertile field to talk about the problems of the teaching and learning process. We returned to Mexico, and I began to develop research projects. Very soon I realized that I needed to study more to have a more solid preparation to be able to argue my research. I think my professional development was most effective because it occurred in the context of my daily work. I realized that learning is part of the school day, I was engaged in growth rather than learning. School-based development helped me to analyze student achievement data during the school year to immediately identify learning problems, develop solutions, and promptly apply those solutions to address students' needs.

My path as a researcher began and my need to learn also grew, 16 years of work had already passed, and my experience was great. Then a very difficult political moment arose and forced me to change schools. It was a dark moment in my life, I felt that all the work I had done in high school was worthless. However, I moved to the School of Languages, and just when I got there, the call to enter the master's program in English teaching was open, I applied to enter and I was accepted, it was wonderful news during my sadness to leave my school and my beloved students.

I started a new stage in my professional development, already in the master's program I had good experiences in my development as a researcher, I could recognize the importance of having clear methodological concepts, and I learned that knowledge is much more enriching when it is shared, and I started a new path to become a researcher. I began to trust in myself, and I started going to congresses and present my studies in national and international forums, I also began to write and learn to translate the results of my research into publishable articles. Kaplan and Owings (2009) stated that teachers need continuing professional development to maintain and upgrade their skills and incorporate effective procedures. Teacher education must be seen as a gradual sequence of ex-

periences in professional growth that begins at the initial stage at the college and is followed by further in-service training cycles. There must be continuity and reinforcement of training and growth throughout the teacher's career. (p.25)

### III.- Looking forward into the future

All the experiences described above have given me enormous personal satisfaction, I have realized that today in the middle of my age I am resilient, willing to learn, and trying to share what I know to leave a good footprint on my dear students. I envision myself teaching; next year I will reach 30 years of teaching experience, and I will finish my doctorate, I imagine myself having my degree and sharing everything I have learned with my beloved future new teachers that I mentor. Trying not only to teach grammatical rules and mechanics of the language but also to help my students to change their brains, alter their perception of the world, and even make them understand their own mother tongue to facilitate their communication skills and understanding of the culture involved in the language as well as to help them to start in the fascinating world of research. I visualize myself and my students sharing the results of our investigations in international ELT forums.

Personally, I feel satisfied with my career, I still receive the love and admiration of my hometown friends, and even in my family I am a role model, my sisters' children frequently ask for advice, and they respect me professionally. I not only feel satisfied by my own achievements but also, feel I fulfilled others' dreams. I have always thought that my story is like the journey of the humble caterpillar that became a beautiful butterfly.

#### Critical Thinking leading bullets:

These bullets can help you reflect and relate your experiences to the ones told in the story:

- ◆ Migration – Identify some of the reasons for people to migrate.

- ♦ Personal realization- Explain the meaning of personal realization for you.
- ♦ Develop resilience -List some of the ways through which people persevere and succeed.
- ♦ Face hardship – Name some of the different challenges you have faced in life.
- Have you ever felt to be an immigrant in your own country?
- Have you ever been discriminated against by your social status?
- How have you constructed your resilience path?
- How important is professional growth for your own happiness or personal realization?

Discussion questions:

Answer and reflect on these questions relating your experiences to the ones told by the author of the story:

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# My Zig-Zag Journey

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## I.- Background

I am a proud Honduran, grateful to have been born in a country where challenges are many and opportunities to serve come often. I was privileged enough to have wonderful parents who believed investing in children's education reap benefits in the future and contribute to well-being. They worked hard and sacrificed a lot to send us to a bilingual school so we could learn to speak English and to pay additional classes so we could learn to speak German. When I was in the fourth grade my social studies teacher, Mr. Guillermo, asked us what we wanted to be when we grow up. When my turn to speak came I firmly stated I would be a doctor, a neurosurgeon to be exact. Mr. Guillermo looked at me and said, "I think you will be a teacher and a very good one". I smiled and said, "No, I don't think I want to be a teacher, my dream is to be a doctor." To that he responded with several examples on how I helped my classmates during weekends and after school as a tutor and how because of this support I was offering they were able to pass their tests and succeed academically. He explained that I made complicated things look easy and that this was the true art of being a teacher. He repeated that I would become a great teacher one day. I just smiled and reflected.

Seven years later I graduated from high school and happily enrolled in the undergraduate medical school program at the local public university in Tegu-

cigalpa and took several part time jobs as a translator to finance the little things like gas or books. It was something I could do to help my mom offset the expense of the university. When I was completing my fourth year of the undergraduate program my mom passed away. She had been enduring a chronic renal disease that finally took its toll in 1993 after a failed transplant because our health system could not provide her the needed medicines to keep her healthy after the transplant and they were too expensive for us to buy every week. My mom's passing, when I was about to turn 20, meant maturing speedily and taking over the obligations at home as I needed to support my family- retired 75-year-old father and grandmother, and my 16-year-old youngest brother. Interestingly all the jobs for which "I was qualified for" were teaching because I was proficient in English, and I say "qualified" because in terms of qualifications what I had was a high school diploma from a bilingual (English-Spanish) school, an uncompleted undergraduate degree that had nothing to do with teaching and a certified advanced level of English. In the 90s in Honduras to be a primary school teacher one needed a diploma from high school related to teaching or what was preferred, an undergraduate degree from the National Pedagogical University. However, in 1992 with the aforementioned qualifications I got my first job as an English teacher at the binational center in Tegucigalpa teaching in the evening and a second position during the day at a bilingual school as a pre-school teacher and assistant coordinator. For ten years I worked as a primary school teacher, an English teacher, a High School tutor, and an adult educator in different schools and language institutions. I suddenly, quickly? (...took me ten years, hehe) realized this is what I was meant to do so I enrolled at the Pedagogical University in Honduras and 3 years later I graduated with my bachelor's degree in TESOL. When I was close to completing my bachelor's program an opportunity opened to apply to a temporary job at the Language Center of an agricultural higher education university; one of their teachers had to go on an early maternity leave. One of my teachers at the University said I should apply, so I followed her advice. After three months and close to completing my temporary contract, a permanent position opened,

and it was offered to me. I was in awe, no degree yet, (graduation was 3 months away though), but I already had a job at a university! The reasoning from the then Director of General Curriculum, my previous experience and track record from the other institutions, the work he had seen during my three months there and the changes I was already implementing even under a temporary contract and with no higher education experience, but above all the level of collegiality I had been able to build among peers from a section that had been historically fractioned and divided into the foreign language proficient teachers and the Honduran teachers, with the added value of the rapport I had built with the learners who had been usually seen as difficult groups who did not want to learn English. All these competencies qualified me for the job.

As the teacher who was preparing to leave was giving me the run down on his groups of students and some suggestions and recommendations, he asked me if I had ever been to a TESOL International Association convention in the US and I said I had not. It is important to note, I had attended the conferences from the local affiliate, so I had a notion of TESOL, but not the full picture. He asked me if I wanted to submit a proposal and he clarified that it will most likely not be accepted as the acceptance rate was only 21%. I said that we should try as we already had a no, so we could work on a proposal to transform it into a yes! We discussed what we wanted the presentation to focus on, then we worked on a proposal. My first ever presentation at TESOL in Seattle in 2007 was *Student-Centered Instruction in Multicultural Contexts* in room A-107 at the Convention Center. I will never forget this Convention because: a) I was star struck when I got to meet Betty Azar, Diane Larsen-Freeman, Keith Folse; and many other authors whose books taught me the theoretical aspects of teaching and which I had been using in my teaching practice, b) I fell in love with TESOL, c) TESOL became the highlight of my year (I have never missed a convention!), d) TESOL allowed me to expand my wings personally and professionally, e) TESOL became my professional home, f) TESOL confirmed to me the value of service, and g) TESOL gave me the opportunity to serve not only teachers and learners in Honduras, but world-

wide. TESOL allowed me to bring more changes and innovation to the University and provided the back-up I needed to implement evidence-based techniques and improve the language center curriculum (Bane-gas, et.al., 2022), which was totally transformed and made to fit the context catering to our learners needs and interests when learning English. TESOL has been the place where I have met amazing colleagues with whom I have collaborated in multiple projects (leadership, women empowerment, mentorship programs, presenting at conferences, building teacher associations, building collegiality, research, etc.) and the place where I have made long-lasting friendships.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

My first 15 years of teaching, without experience, without a degree were marked by incredible teachers, especially women who took me under their wings and mentored me. This experience taught me the importance of sharing what one has learned and how this made it possible to create strong, professional support networks. Moreover, the value of sharing the knowledge to make each other stronger, empowered, inspired. Every time there was a new teacher, we would bring them into our informal mentorship group, share tips and tricks, give pointers, share documents, and facilitate and guide not only the onboarding process but accompany them in the journey of becoming the mentors for the next novice teacher in line. Lesson 1: It makes no sense to monopolize knowledge as it will not grow, when you share it will transcend and expand! Little did I know this was preparing me for the next 15 years of my teaching career in higher education and as a teacher trainer, but especially for my TESOL journey, which I will share about a bit further in this chapter.

These first years teaching in pre-school elementary and high-school, teaching youth and adults in language programs laid the foundation of who I would become as a teacher, as a professional and as a person. It allowed me to understand the education system in my country both in the private and public contexts, it allowed me to understand hiring dynamics, the challenges in terms of quality of education,

the inequities for learners, the gaps in access, the need of teachers, the need of students, the need of my country regarding education. It allowed me to learn how even within my country, teachers could be discriminated against Honduran peers because of their proficiency levels (not their color, their religion or race, not their nationality, but their level of proficiency!). Colleagues shared with me how they had applied to jobs at high ranked private bilingual schools and were turned away because “their accent wasn’t native enough”, because their accent “was too strongly marked”, because “they were not using the best vocabulary” and leaders from these institutions were afraid the children would learn those accents and those words and “they had a responsibility to parents who enrolled children at their schools”. Colleagues who had degrees in teaching were being turned down and instead replaced by people who were, like I had once been, one whose only qualification was English proficiency “with the desired accent” and I was distraught, I did not understand it. Maybe I was too young, too inexperienced, not academically seasoned yet, but this made no sense to me (it doesn’t make sense to me after 30 years of experience and multiple academic degrees!). Quickly I saw that I could change things and I felt I had the responsibility to do it. I had an advantage, and I would use it to serve others. Since I was usually in supervisory and coordination positions; when I knew institutions I worked at, had open positions or whenever I was part of the recruitment processes I would recommend/bring in teachers with strong potential and competencies and with “the not so desired accent”. I would provide employers the evidence of the teachers’ qualifications, their trajectories, their studies and all their competencies. I found that allowing authorities to focus on the important aspects of a candidate’s resume slowly created awareness on how mediocre it was to define individual’s qualification solely by their accents. Lesson 2: How to self-empower, but most importantly how to open the path to empower others.

Next, 2006 the year I went into higher education would bring me the next lessons on self-empowerment, empowering others, building communities of practice (Short et al., 2019), and will continue to

bring angels/mentors into my path. Jan 16 marks the next 18 years of my work as an educator with 12 years of great responsibility, regional collaboration, teacher training, attending and presenting at conferences. Six years of giving back what I have received by contributing to the quality of education of Honduras through US government million dollar projects to benefit 2.1 million learners in Honduras, as well as contributing to the professional growth of thousands of English and Spanish teachers in the country through varied teacher training initiatives while promoting partnerships with private sector, national and international NGOs, to make these efforts sustainable.

These years in Higher Education allowed me to develop multiple skills which included: a) leading teachers/staff, b) mentoring interns, c) leading tutor groups, d) developing social learning programs for students, e) supporting students to apply to internships abroad, f) support research and design curriculum frameworks and implementing them. Through my volunteer work with TESOL I learnt the value of communities, collaborative projects, sharing, sharing, sharing (yes, sharing a lot!) and learning together, that we are stronger together, that we don’t work in isolation and there is a high value in working as a team, that there is a lot to be done and that we can all contribute in different ways, that there is space to serve and that serving is rewarding and makes one feel happy!

I want to emphasize here the relevance of TESOL in empowering and letting us grow. TESOL through volunteerism gave me the space to grow at my own pace, to learn at my own pace, to learn from others and share with others, to collaborate no matter where you were in the world, to move ideas forward, to know there were others with your same level of crazy and energy! Precisely to learn that no idea was crazy enough not to make it possible. At TESOL I have been able to volunteer in “small things” like reviewing proposals (not small because this defines the program for the whole convention!), volunteering at the e-village and booths, leading an IS, collaborating with affiliates, and big things like being a member of the Board of Directors (where you learn that serving

is the key to change not the position you hold!). TE-SOL let my teaching practice thrive and become mature, I was able to give meaning to my degrees in the classroom by implementing effective, research-based strategies and methods with my students and then go back to the Convention to share my experience. All this work with TESOL led to the US Embassy asking me to organize the Honduran ELTA, and wow, I thank Carmen de Urcuyo for trusting me in this endeavor as it was/has been tiring, energizing, and empowering. During the first five years we mobilized thousands of teachers in Honduras providing quality professional development and constant support of their teaching practice. The COVID pandemic was no different as we focused one on one on their needs and supported them through best practices and support groups. The association is now in year 9, growing strong and bringing in projects for teachers to improve their proficiency, their confidence, leadership, presentation skills and competencies to design materials. This was another empowering milestone for me! My 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher words came back to me “You will be a teacher, and a good one!” I found him on Facebook and wrote to him and let him know I had become a teacher, and a good one. Lesson 3: When someone trusts you to do something get together with a team that will help you through! Nothing would have been possible without an amazing team supporting this 9-year work!

Six years ago, came the time to give back more extensively by working for USAID in Honduras. I was hired again, with not a lot of experience in project management but an extensive background in education. Once more the zigzag was preparing me for the next milestone! I got to learn about project management for education and how education shapes development. I remembered my parents and their reflections on how education shapes futures. I worked with an amazing team of 200 staff who worked hard day and night to make a difference in education. We did it! Over 500,000 students in Honduras benefited directly of the work I facilitated with this team on different areas related to reading and writing improvement, school-based violence prevention, material design, irregular migration prevention, and supply chain. The feeling: exhilarating! (USAID, 2018-2023).

Lesson 4: it feels amazing to give back, it is great to have a team to rely on, it is incredible to have people believe in you and look past your weaknesses and focus on your strengths!

### III.- Looking forward into the future

As I look back, I am grateful, 30 years as an educator have been amazing and rewarding. It has definitely been a zigzag journey, I did not follow a straight line but instead was given opportunities in different places at different stages of my life, each more rewarding than the one before, but with one common denominator people along the way rooting for me, giving me a chance, supporting me in the growth process, teaching me, sharing with me; people along the way inspiring me, encouraging me, not letting me fall; people along the way letting me root for others, letting me mentor and inspire, letting me encourage. Lesson 5: To receive and to give back, is the common trend. Rather than being discourage by the challenges finding ways to turn a negative into a positive, finding ways to build access for others, finding ways to pay it forward and keep the thread going.

I am sure the future holds more inspirational moments for me, more moments of service, especially as I start a new stage as a researcher at the UW-Madison, School of Education, at WIDA housed within their Research Center. I know I will find amazing people in my new position (I have already found them!) who will let me contribute and grow, who will let me thrive, who will build on my strengths and facilitate my work, who will allow me to create and then be able to give back and mentor, encourage and facilitate the path for others. The cycle, of course begins again, now with 30 years of experience and with many amazing projects in store to continue learning, growing, but best of all sharing!

#### Critical Thinking leading bullets:

1. State the advantages and disadvantages of having multiple career experiences and not following a straight path in your professional growth. How does this shape you as a professional? How

does it shape you personally? Provide concrete examples and details in your answer.

2. The TESOL 6 Principles encourage building communities of practice. What are your thoughts? How would communities of practice look like in your context? How would you organize them and keep track of their work. Provide concrete examples and details in your answer.
3. How have you ever been empowered by others? How have you empowered others? How have you self-empowered? Is their value in empowerment? Why or Why not?
4. How do we build paths to allow others to grow? What would be key actions to use your leadership responsibly to let others grow? How would you influence your context to bridge access gaps and decrease inequities?
5. In this chapter the author mentioned she chose to take action to help and serve others, how can focusing on the positive aspects be beneficial to support others? How can privilege

be used to help others grow instead of taking advantage of it for one's personal gain?

### Discussion Questions:

1. What are key examples of self-empowerment and empowerment you find in this chapter?
2. Share with others a time when you were the encouraging voice for others to try something.
3. Explore the aspect of giving back as a trend in this chapter and share how is this important to build community, grow and share.
4. Think of people in the past who have supported you in your initiatives and projects. What did they have in common? What was the common actions/trends you can identify? How can you be supportive of those around you?
5. Go back in the chapter and check the 5 lessons the author has marked. What is your opinion? What are 5 lessons in your life that you feel have made you the person you are today?

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# A lesson learned

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## I.- Background

Memory is a tricky tool of the mind because sometimes it brings back unexpected remembrances when you least expect them, but it may also fail when you want to recall specific information when you require it. Another feature of memory that makes it a little tricky is that it changes and is not static. One event that in a specific moment could be considered sad may become, with time, a big lesson in life. A joyful experience of the past may transform into a lost relationship that may bring sadness to the present. Telling an experience implies a conscious effort to interpret what something means. In my case, I would like to say that there is a pair of events in my life that happened that I did not evaluate as something negative until I shared them with some colleagues who made me notice that I suffered from gender discrimination. Now I restated these flashbacks as a big lesson I learned that hopefully will prepare me to be more alert to protect other colleagues.

The events I am speaking about started in 2012; in that year I was already working at the English Teaching Bachelor program (ETBP) offered by the *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla* (BUAP). This University is the state's public University with the same name located in Mexico. As far as I know, there are few public universities in other Latin American countries, and Mexico is one of the few countries that still offer higher education as part of the government's services. The location of the city of Puebla attracts many students from

different locations every year. BUAP is in a central state of the country. Every year, the University welcomes around 22,000 students along its whole system, including high school, bachelor, master, and Ph.D. programs located in different parts of the state (BUAP, n.d.) The English Bachelor program based in the state's capital city receives around 300 students every year. This bachelor's program prepares students to become English teachers in the different scholar levels that compound the Mexican educational system.

I want to mention here that one of the challenges that the program faces is that when students arrive, they are not required to have a minimum level of proficiency in the English language to get a place in the program. Most students have an A1 level of English according to the European Framework. This situation implies that students must learn the language as they develop their teaching skills. Being hosted by the state university, this program gives candidates a great chance to become professionals without paying much money. Then many applicants are rejected because the number of candidates overpasses the number of students admitted.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

To support students during their academic trajectory, the ETBP holds a tutorial program that matches every student with a professor who keeps track of students' decisions and provides helpful information when required (*Facultad de Lenguas*, n.d.). By the year 2012, I used to be the coordinator of this program; by then I had already been working in the bachelor program for seven years, and I devoted most of my time to work. I had much energy and will to grow professionally at the University, I used to work from nine in the morning to nine or ten at night, but I did not care too much because I thought it was worth it. This devotion to my work attracted the attention of some professors, among them the school's next principal, who approached me and offered me the position of coordinator of the bachelor program to start at the beginning of the following year. When he offered me this opportunity, I felt glad, and he said he liked my working style and my capability to deal with professors. So, of course, I accepted the offer and continued working

as the Tutoring coordinator until the time to start the new position arrived.

As you know, life is full of surprises, and two events took place besides the excellent news about my future professional position. First, my youngest brother suffered a terrible accident at work, where he almost lost his left leg. He stayed in the hospital for three months and passed through seven surgeries. Furthermore, precisely during those challenging months, I realized I was pregnant after trying to get pregnant for almost four years. However, I still managed to continue working without neglecting my job.

The new position was about to start in January of the following year, so when the year 2012 was ending closer to finishing, I talked to my future boss to tell him I was pregnant so he knew that my condition had changed a little bit and hoped that would not affect his original offer. Unfortunately, he told me that he could not hold the position for me because I would be absent for a couple of months when the time to deliver my baby arrived. In exchange for the position he initially offered me, he invited me to join another department that required less time and was less demanding. Although I felt disappointed by his decision, at the same time, I thought it would be for the best, as I would have more time to take care of my baby. When the year 2013 started, I began working as the coordinator of the Planning and Evaluation department of the school. When I delivered my baby, I got absent for two months according to my labor rights attached to my contract. Then everything related to my job was accomplished, and my office was never neglected.

I managed my new role as a mom and working woman with the help of my family. I received good comments from my colleagues and my boss, who praised my work as coordinator of the assigned department. Everything looked good until 2015, when my second child was born. When the time of delivery arrived for the second time, I got absent for two months, but as I did the first time, I made all the needed arrangements to take care of the department in my absence and that everything was under control, but this time things changed. When I returned to my position after delivering my

baby, I went to my office to realize that I did not have the coordinator position anymore, but I never received a notification. I went to face my boss and asked for his reasons for his decision. I really couldn't understand what the problem was or why he never told me that he didn't want me to continue working as a coordinator. I asked him about my failures in my responsibilities, and he told me he had no negative comments about my job. In a perplexed state, I took my belongings from the office without understanding what had happened.

I continued working as a professor, teaching my classes, and doing my best at my job. Then at the end of 2016, the new director of the school offered me the position of coordinator of the bachelor program, and in 2017 I started working as the new bachelor program coordinator. And it was until that year while attending a series of conferences in an informal chat with some male colleagues, the events were mentioned again. They told me they did not understand why I left the Planning and Evaluation Department coordination if I was doing a great job. When I told them the series of events as I remembered them, they stared at me and told me that I suffered from gender discrimination. At the time, this idea had not crossed my mind. I had not even considered that gender discrimination had happened to me. However, little by little, I recapitulated the events, and two constant elements in those two moments were that I was always praised for the quality of my job, and secondly, I was denied a job position when I got pregnant. When I was pregnant the first time, my boss said he liked my job, but I could not devote enough time to the position he initially offered me. The second time he fired me in a very impolite manner without telling me officially until I faced him. He never gave a reason for his decision and kept saying he did not have anything against my performance. Until then, I realized and confirmed that I had experienced gender discrimination. Since then, it has been a slow process to understand how this type of discrimination works, and it has been difficult to admit it happened to me. I have never seen myself as a victim because I consider myself strong and independent, responsible for my own decisions and actions. But I also must accept that probably my personal construction of myself is why I was not prepared to identify a discrimination action. At present, I know that

“Gender discrimination means any exclusion or restriction made based on gender that creates barriers for girls, boys, women, and/or men in recognizing, enjoying, or exercising their full and equal human rights” (Save the Children, n.d.). I have realized that gender-based discrimination may take many forms and that denying a person a job position or holding him or her back from receiving any promotion based on gender is against the law and prohibited almost in all human rights treaties. I was unprepared when I faced this situation, and I never noticed the signs. It seems unbelievable that it was until male colleagues observed the picture from outside that made me realized what had happened. My perspective made me look for reasons in the wrong place; I was looking for reasons in myself instead of looking at other people’s positions and decisions. These events are in the past, and I never took legal action because some years had passed by the time I realized what had happened to me.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

In this text, I want to tell my experience because now I am more alert and more conscious about this behavior to warn my female colleagues and help to stop this unacceptable behavior coming from our working environments. Being a professional with a career and a job doesn’t mean we cannot fulfill the other areas of our life. Nowadays, being a working woman and a mother is a reality for millions of women worldwide. Being discriminated for becoming a mom should be out of the question. It is in our nature the great gift of creating life in ourselves; having a family is our right, and nobody should take it away from us.

There are no excuses for anyone to deny us, women, the right for professional growth when we have worked for it. I want to be a better person, which implies being better informed about my rights and other people’s rights. Every day I work with young adults, both women and men, so I want them to be aware of their rights and I tell them to analyze their roles and positions. I want them to reflect on their actions and become responsible for their behaviors. As a professor, I have this great opportunity to share my knowledge and experience with them and, at the same time, in an indirect way, with the

future generations my present students will work when they become teachers. Our job as teachers and professors gives us this great scenario to contribute to constructing a better society with better people.

I still work in the same school, and I have other responsibilities. I am an empowered woman because I am still growing personally and professionally. I am very grateful for working in a profession I love and having my family. Thanks to the support of my family, friends, and colleagues, I continue learning. After many challenges and pain, my brother recovered the function of his leg, he has scars and evidence of his accident that will go with him for the rest of his life, but he can walk on his own legs. I consider that I am a little like him, I will keep the memory of past events, but I am on my feet again, and I will continue walking, no matter what.

#### Critical thinking statements:

Use these statements to relate the author’s story and your own life:

- Persuasion of happiness is not an empty line but a life guide.
- A woman deserves to fulfill all aspects of her personal and professional development.
- A woman is more prepared to defend her rights when she is aware and educated.

#### Discussion Questions:

I would like to conclude this text by leaving you with the next questions in mind:  
How well do you know your rights?

Do you feel prepared to defend your rights under any circumstance?

What would you do if someone wants to stop your professional development?

Why do you think women worldwide still struggle to balance their working and personal life?

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# The Power of Reaching Out

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## I.- Background

Catherine and Jane are sitting on a dala-dala—a minibus that serves as the primary public transportation in Tanzania. It is noisy, every inch of space is taken, the ride is bumpy, but they are excited by the school visit they just made together. Jane tells Catherine about an activity which they had not used that would be fun to do the next time—a warm-up game from improvisational theatre. That evening, Catherine sends Jane a video on WhatsApp of her using the activity with her own children. The next day she uses it with her students. That is Catherine—as soon as she hears about a new way to do something, she is ready to try it and teach it. If she observes a need for her school or her community, she imagines solutions, and if she comes across someone who might help her in these solutions, she doesn't hesitate to ask.

Catherine James Njau is an English teacher who works in a rural government secondary school in Tanzania, located on the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro. Over the course of the 20 years she has taught there, she has been able to initiate a wide variety of projects to support youth and educational projects, despite living and working in a resource-poor environment. She has also implemented initiatives to provide support for English language teachers: she formed the Kilimanjaro regional

chapter of the Tanzanian English Language Teachers Association (TELTA), she created a WhatsApp group to allow English teachers to share ideas and resources, and she has organized workshops for teachers who had never been exposed to in-service training. When she started teaching, she had the requisite teaching certificate, but since then she has earned a Bachelor's degree and is currently working toward a Master's Degree in Management and Administration in Education Planning and Policy through the Open University of Tanzania. She has participated in international conferences in person and virtually and has become a beacon of inspiration for educators around the world.

Jane Petring is a retired English teacher with over 40 years of experience teaching classes, administering programs, writing, and editing textbooks, delivering presentations and facilitating workshops. She earned a BA and MA at Michigan State University in Linguistics and TESOL. She began her teaching career as a Peace Corps Volunteer, teaching English in Cote d'Ivoire and later spearheaded a USAID Women in Development project with rural women in Niger. Over the following 10 years she created curricula, taught, and administered programs in Niger, China, Croatia, the US and Canada. During her 24-year tenure as a permanent faculty member at Cégep Édouard-Montpetit near Montreal, Quebec she implemented innovative environmental-themed projects, wrote a dozen textbooks, adapted skills from improvisational theatre for teaching, taught a wide range of classes, led workshops and was a frequent presenter at regional and international conferences. Immediately after retiring in 2018, she accepted a US State Department Fellowship to teach Communication Skills at the College of African Wildlife in Tanzania and had the good fortune to meet and work closely with Catherine Njau on secondary projects.

Jane and Catherine first met at the International TESOL Convention in Chicago. Jane was the outgoing Materials Writers Interest Section Chair and Catherine had received US State Department support to deliver her presentation on *Empowering Tanzanian Students through Storytelling and Drama* as part of a panel of African women. When Jane was selected

to serve as a Fellow in the Kilimanjaro region, the two of them began making plans to collaborate.

The remainder of this article is written in the first person from Jane Petring's point of view.

## II.- Empowerment and Leadership Development

Helping students learn and succeed often requires more than innovative pedagogy. Over a decade ago, Catherine realized that many of the girls at her school were missing class about 4 days a month because of their monthly periods. She learned the girls had no one to talk to because the topic was taboo, and they lacked any feminine hygiene resources. This is a problem affecting girls in many developing countries, and particularly in Africa. Reusable sanitary pads have been shown to make a significant difference in girls' education (Hennegan, 2017). When Catherine first began talking to girls about menstruation and body changes, the boys felt resentful at being excluded which did not help the situation. She perceived a gap of understanding between parents and their children, between parents and teachers and between teachers and students. Subsequently, she spoke to girls and boys together, along with their teachers, which turned out to have very positive results. In 2011 she created Kuleana Youth Empowerment, an organization that educates girls and boys about life skills and provides the girls with reusable menstrual pads. She learned to make the pads herself and trained others to do the same so that they could be produced at a very low price. To date, approximately ten thousand girls have benefitted from this program. The members of Kuleana have had success approaching difficult topics using drama and songs to address gender and family issues, followed by discussion and opportunities for students to share what they know with their community.

Catherine recruited me to accompany her on her visits to local schools to discuss Life Skills and Feminine Hygiene with students and faculty members. The awareness I had developed in working with rural women in Niger decades prior suddenly came to the forefront and I very much appreciated this opportunity to dive into a meaningful project that not only empow-

ered girls and women but also helped to instill a sense of responsibility and support in boys and men.

The respect Catherine had garnered within the school system was evident. One day Catherine and I arrived at a school expecting to carry out a workshop for a class of 40 students. Upon arrival at the school, we met with the headmaster, who informed us that he had been so impressed by the last presentation, he did not want a single student to miss this opportunity. He had told all the teachers to have their students bring their chairs out to the central courtyard. When he accompanied us to the courtyard, 700 students were waiting under the shade of the acacia trees. This pattern was repeated several times.

Catherine looks for ways to empower village women as well as schoolgirls. I was able to accompany her to a small village in the Kilimanjaro region where we met with the primary and secondary students. We had planned to meet with the village women later to talk about issues related to personal health. To our delight, the men asked if they could join us. Catherine translated from Swahili into English wherever necessary. We talked about the value of a healthy balanced diet, of exercise and hygiene. We emphasized that the walking they do from home to the market, or the field is good for them and that the produce from the ground is much healthier than the expensive chips or junk food which are making its way into their daily consumption. We practiced modified yoga poses to stretch the body and benefit from mindful breathing. Catherine showed the women how to make soap which became an entrepreneurial opportunity for them when the women banded together to make soap they could sell to other women in neighboring villages. Having participated in this gathering, the men were very supportive of this undertaking.

By drawing on assistance and collaboration with others, Catherine and I have been able to attend and deliver presentations in person and virtually at international conferences, including TESOL, African ELTA and New York State TESOL. Catherine can share her projects and expand her network of contacts for future projects. She is adept at bringing people from

around the world into her fold and getting them personally involved whether it means contributing funds, sharing expertise, or editing and writing articles, such as this one. In so doing, she has created a ripple effect that ignites action and follow-through. As an example, girls were missing school because they lived too far away. There had been a girls' dormitory, but it had burned down and although funds were allocated to rebuild it, the funding was insufficient. The project was at a standstill. Catherine put out a call for funds to her international friends and with the \$2500 she raised, the dormitory was completed and both the girls' and boys' washrooms were renovated. In another instance, she was aware that students in her school were performing poorly on government exams, in part because the whole experience was so foreign to them. She requested funds from her contacts to purchase a large photocopy machine which allowed her to photocopy old versions of the exam that students could use for practice. She simulated the timed exam process several times with the students so that they would know how to study and what to expect. As a result, the scores on the government exam that year were significantly higher.

As part of her graduate studies in Management and Administration in Education Planning and Policy, Catherine learned about using Community-Based Approaches in Education which was a natural continuum of the work she had already been doing. The central tenet to these approaches is that communities have intrinsic educational assets and resources that educators can use to enhance learning experiences for students. She was quick to put what she was learning into action.

After initiating a broad spectrum of activities, Catherine reached out to me to see how she could organize her endeavors into a coherent presentation for an international audience. Four of the many activities she had tried stood out for me:

1. She got community members to help her students establish a community garden.
2. When the African English Language Teaching Association (ELTA) president visited Tanzania, she

invited him to come speak to her students about the value of public speaking, making a connection between an outside expert and the students in her classroom.

3. To involve her students in Citizen Action, she had them collect discarded plastic bottles and waste that they found along the road, sensitizing them and the community to use less plastic and strive for zero waste.
4. She adapted the soap-making exercise she had used with village women into a kind of ESP (English for Special Purposes) Chemistry-English course by having students learn about procedures and chemical processes.

Using community-based approaches engage students while helping them develop skills they can apply to real life situations. At the same time, teachers can build on their own knowledge and collaborate with teachers of different subject areas, as well as community members. Catherine sent me photos, rough descriptions of lessons with her students and information from her university course. She knew this was a topic that would be of interest to teachers in other countries but did not have a clear idea of how to synthesize and organize the ideas into a comprehensive presentation for language teaching. Once again, she was not afraid to ask for help. I spent a considerable amount of time sorting through the photos, course information and descriptions. After several Zoom and WhatsApp discussions, we were able to distill the various parts into a clear PowerPoint presentation and include suggestions for speaking and writing activities as well as assessment activities to promote language learning. This resulted in joint presentations for the NYS TESOL conference on *Shifting Teaching Paradigms*, and the 2022 Africa ELTA Virtual Conference.

### III.- Looking Forward

It is fascinating to see how one small project may expand to a bigger idea which piques the interest of someone far away for an international collaboration. Catherine's next idea was to have girls cultivate small

gardens in their schools to generate an income that they could use to buy fabric to sew their own menstrual pads. She posted her idea on Facebook which caught the interest of two faculty members, Dr. Heidi Ballard and Margaret (Peggy) Harte, at UC Davis, School of Education, in California, who have experience in developing environmental education that links communities, science and environmental action. They suggested that Catherine use the garden activity to teach Science. As Catherine teaches English and not Science, she let them know that she would need to make it a language learning activity. After five months of online discussions, these two professors were able to come to Tanzania and conduct workshops for five schools, with one language and one science teacher from each. The Tanzanian teachers learned about insect pollinators, what to plant to attract them, procedures to prepare the soil for the garden using manure, and how to compost organic material to enrich the soil and collaborated to combine science and language lessons. This project has been extended to five more schools and is likely to continue to propagate in other regions. By teaching English language skills together with a science lesson, one participant commented that gardening was feeding both their brains and their stomachs. It also provides an economic activity to enable girls to manufacture reusable sanitary pads and stay in school.

In 2023, Catherine was selected as a recipient for a six-week Fulbright Teaching Excellence and Achievement Award at California State University in Chico where she was able to delve deeper into topics related to gender and equality as well as leadership training. She was also invited to join a panel of speakers at the TESOL 2023 Convention in Portland, Oregon to talk about promoting social responsibility in content-based language programs from an international perspective.

### Critical Thinking

Like so many women around the world, Catherine struggles to find the time to juggle the many roles she plays as a mother, wife, daughter, teacher, TELTA leader, life skills coordinator and fund raiser. She

often finds herself working late at night and early in the morning. Internet connections are weak and sporadic and transportation access is limited. Fulfilling responsibilities and attaining goals is a struggle. Many women around the world face these challenges, often without recognition. At the same time, there are people, who are eager to contribute to projects that genuinely improve the lives of girls, boys, women, and men.

Working together, we arrived at these suggestions to help future leaders carry out the goals and objectives they strive for:

1. Stand up to be heard so that people can hear your ideas and help you reach your dreams. Look at the big picture of what you want to achieve and then break it down into small, achievable goals.
2. Take on small projects with love and respect so that people understand, feel compassion, respect your vision, and want to support it. Take the time to use descriptive language, create visuals, use role play, or some other format that is appropriate to convey your message. Be personable, always remembering the individual is at the core of each person's involvement.
3. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance. Create a network of colleagues and mentors that you can count on. Reach out to empower others. Be aware of each individual's particular skill set and the potential benefits collaborators will enjoy by joining you in your project
4. Follow up with benefactors by thanking them and sending pictures and/or short videos so they can see the results their donations produced. Keep them abreast of your activities and successes.

With this can-do attitude, language teachers are empowered to feel proud about their profession and improve opportunities for students and the community. They can also make the world a smaller place by bringing their world to the eyes and ears of people around the planet.

## Discussion Questions

1. After reading about Catherine Njau's initiatives, what qualities do you think are important in a leader to successfully put a project into action?
2. How can data collection in a project such as preparing and planting a garden help students improve their English proficiency?
3. What kind of project would improve student attendance and student engagement in your school? If there is a problem with student attendance or weak performance, ask questions to uncover the underlying reasons and essential needs to improve the situation. Imagine possible solutions and how students and faculty can be involved. If funds need to be raised, brainstorm ways to do this. How can you make this whole process a language learning exercise?
4. What project could your students/school undertake to raise awareness about environmental issues in the community? Have students conduct interviews with community members to find the degree of awareness and interest in the topic. Collect data, analyze it and create a visual graphic to illustrate the issue. Discuss activities that could help to change the situation and carry out the most practical one(s). Present your findings to the school or community.

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# Letters to Mrs. Marrero

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## I.- Background

I was born in Villalba, Puerto Rico, a small town in the mountainous center of the island. My family moved to Boston, Massachusetts, when I was two. At the age of three, I started attending a bilingual education head start program and continued learning English through bilingual education programs in Boston until second grade. This part of my life has been instrumental in many of my personal and professional decisions. After five years, my family moved back to Puerto Rico, and I finished elementary and secondary school in Villalba. When it was time to go to college, I had difficulty deciding what career to pursue. My dad always called me his *maestrita* (little teacher), but I refused this idea for years (Rodríguez-Arroyo, 2015). However, after tutoring students in English during my senior year in high school, I fell in love with teaching. I earned a degree in *Secondary English Education* from the *University of Puerto Rico Cayey* in 1999. After graduation, I began my professional career as an English Language Teacher (ELT) to seventh, eighth, and ninth graders in two schools in my hometown.

In 2001, I moved to Pennsylvania to pursue a master's in education (M.Ed.) in Bilingual/Multicultural Education (2002) and a Doctorate in Education (D.Ed.) in Curriculum and Instruction from Penn State University (2009). While working on my graduate degrees, I became a teacher educator. I taught courses on second language acquisition and language

teaching methods. I also supervised field experiences for future language teachers. These experiences led me to my current role of teaching and coordinating the *University of Nebraska at Omaha* (UNO) undergraduate and graduate English as a Second Language (ESL) and Bilingual teacher education programs. My students now call me Dr. Rodríguez-Arroyo or *doctora/profesora*. I am an Associate Professor of ESL & Bilingual Education Teacher Education at UNO.

## II.- Empowerment and Leadership Development

The journey from ELT to language teacher educator started with a remarkable woman, Mrs. Sara Marrero, my eighth and ninth-grade ELT. She is my inspiration and the perfect example of an empowered woman. I wrote the letter below in 2003 as I began my doctoral program, and I want to share it with you.

### *Letter #1 to Mrs. Marrero: Past*

Dear Mrs. Marrero,

Can you believe that thirteen years have passed since our first meeting? Yes, it was a hot day in August of 1990. After having such a great teacher like "Mr. Aguacate," I was unsure if I would have the same luck with the "new teacher," but then you started teaching us, and all my fears disappeared.

Many images come into my mind every time I remember you. For example, you were the teacher that taught me how to sing those unforgettable love songs from Chicago, Air Supply, etc. Up to these days, I store in my mind the lyrics of those songs, and when I hear them on the radio, I start singing them. I also had your image in mind when you came down the hall every morning to open our classroom. The boys of my class escorted you to the classroom, and those of us in front of the classroom would say, "Where is Mrs. Marrero?" We couldn't see you in the middle of those big boys! You looked so tiny among them. I would have never known then that I would also look short standing beside my students like you. In addition, there is no doubt in my mind that all the oral reports that you made us prepare

those two last years of junior high school prepared me for the rest of my life because up until today, I keep in mind that I cannot be afraid to talk English.

But the moments I have in my heart were when you ate lunch with me and talked about who I was and whom I would become. You told me that I could reach the stars if I wanted to and that we had many things in common. I felt so glad that MY TEACHER said I had some things that made her remember when she was my age. Do you still have in your heart those days?

When I decided to become an English teacher like you, I had your image in my mind and told you so. I could see how proud you were of me at that moment. I wanted to be like you so badly, so I applied what I learned from you and others to my teaching. It worked! Moreover, I never imagined you would become my English supervisor when I started teaching. This was great because you supported me in my classroom when I needed you. You were also there for me when I decided to go to graduate school.

I want you to be there for more events in my life, but I don't know how much time God permits you to live with that horrible cancer that has lived in your body these last few years. Believe me, that was not good news for me to take! I still want to have you for other important moments in my life, like my doctoral graduation, wedding, motherhood, etc., and I pray every day for you to be there.

As I finish this letter, I feel blessed that I have been able to keep in touch with you for thirteen years, because you are the teacher that inspired me.

*Gracias, la quiere su estudiante de siempre,  
(Thank you, your forever student that loves you)  
Sandra*

After I wrote this letter, I cried for a long time. I wanted to send her the letter, but at the same time, I also wanted to see her personally before she died

from cancer. I was blessed that I was able to do this. I took a week off at the end of July 2003 and went with my father to Boston, where she was living, and I got to see her at the Puerto Rican Festival that was taking place there. We talked a lot, and as always, she encouraged me to continue my studies because she believed in me. Instead of giving her the letter, I told her about the contents because of her sickness, she had lost one of her eyes and part of her eyesight. She was also in a wheelchair and lost all her hair due to cancer treatment. As I said goodbye to her, something told me that this was the last time I would see her and that this was her final year of life. In October 2003, I got a call from my mom informing me that she had died. Even though it was sad for me, I know that her spirit will continue to be a great inspiration in my life. Therefore, I want to write Mrs. Marrero another letter and tell her what has happened since I saw her that summer of 2003.

#### *Letter #2 to Mrs. Marrero: Present*

Dear Mrs. Marrero,

This year is the 20th anniversary of your passing, and your presence in my life is still strong. I miss our talks, your advice, your strength, your humbleness, and how much you care about your students. Lately, I have been reflecting on my journey from being an English teacher to becoming a language teacher educator, and I want to share these reflections with you.

Do you remember how I was during that first year of teaching English? I went into teaching English full of hope and wanting to follow your example. But it was easier said than done when I stepped into the reality of teaching English to students who had never had a teacher like you that made them love the language. Beyond the students' motivation to learn English, the lack of teaching resources, and an oppressive power hierarchy everyone needed to follow, made my teaching a challenge. You supported me when I started losing my sparkle for teaching English, and I decided to apply to graduate school at Penn State. It is hard to ac-

cept it, but I realize now that I was looking for an escape from what I felt was my failure as a teacher; I had become one of those first-year teachers that couldn't survive in the field. I arrived at State College, a small town in Central Pennsylvania, bringing with me much frustration.

When I started teaching college students, I was unsure if I wanted to teach others how to teach when I was so frustrated with my teaching career. One of my favorite quotes describes this moment perfectly: "the time we know who we are might be the time we do not know who we are. The time we do not know who we are might be the time we know who we are" (He, 2003, p. 115). When I last saw you, I shared with you how I still couldn't believe I discovered my real work passion when I doubted myself as an English teacher. You were so proud of me and told me you planned to become a teacher educator before the cancer was discovered. I wanted to make sure I honor your memory in one way or the other.

During my time at Penn State, I learned that without knowing it, you were also a role model for me to become a language teacher educator. Whenever you visited my classroom, you made sure I felt supported, gave me advice to be a better teacher, and made sure you built up my confidence. Every time I sat in the back of the classroom watching my Penn State language teacher candidates, I wanted to make sure they knew I was not there to judge them and that they could count on my support. The more I observed teacher candidates, the more I learned to teach others how to teach languages, and it made me recover my love for teaching. Becoming a language teacher educator has been difficult, but I love it. I have doubted myself many times, but every time this happens, I remember you.

In 2009, I reached my goal of getting my doctorate. I know that if you were alive, you would have traveled to my graduation as you told me you wanted to do that. My parents, favorite aunt, and two of my best friends from Puerto Rico joined me. You should have seen how my dad cried when his

*maestrita* became a *doctorcita* (little doctor). It was a moment of celebration and a moment to make decisions. I decided to stay working two more years at Penn State as my dream was to return to Puerto Rico as a teacher educator, but that did not happen. After ten years in Pennsylvania, I accepted an ESL and bilingual teacher educator position at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). Could you believe it? A Boricua (Puerto Rican) in Nebraska! I discovered by chance that despite UNO being a predominantly white institution (PWI), Omaha is the largest and most diverse city in Nebraska. The BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) population represents 17% of the community and includes over a hundred ethnicities (Omaha Foundation, n.d.). As a result, at UNO, we have seen an increase in BIPOC students.

But even with this diversity, at the beginning of my academic journey at UNO, I felt I needed to "adapt" without complaints and leave my Puerto Rican identity behind (Rodriguez-Pearson & Rodriguez-Arroyo, 2020). That did not work, and I am glad. I am known at UNO as "the Puerto Rican professor who teaches teachers." You would have loved to hear this! Still, it is much pressure daily to be a role model, mentor, and surrogate, especially for my Latina teacher candidates, but I am glad I am here. These ladies are inspiring, and as one day you told me, they remind me of myself. They want to be ELT and bilingual education teachers who look like the community they plan to serve. Their families and communities have put their hopes and dreams on them, which is not an easy task. Every day I strive to make them feel welcome and know they have voices that should be heard. As Ladson-Billings say, it is not only essential to have more diverse teachers, but we also need diverse teacher educators "to demonstrate that our actions are consistent with our rhetoric" (2005, p. 231). You were that person for me, who always walked the talk, and I want to inspire others through my actions.

As I close this letter, the image of you laughing as you came toward your classroom surrounded by teenagers comes to mind. I always want to re-

member that even without your physical presence, you continue to inspire me to be the best educator, leader, and human being I can be. I commit never to stop believing in myself, and I promise to share this message with everyone who needs it to keep your memory alive.

*Su estudiante por siempre  
(Your student forever),  
Sandra*

### III.- Looking Forward to the Future

I want to share Mrs. Marrero's words with the ELT and bilingual teachers I help to prepare to empower them. Mrs. Marrero always believed in me and gave me the confidence to start my journey as an ELT and language teacher educator. Mrs. Marrero was the ELT leader in my life who embraced *liderazgo feminista* (feminist leadership), which "honors the uniqueness and the wholeness of every person and in the service to individuals and the collective" (Martínez et al., 2017, p. 46). I want future and current ELT and bilingual teachers to embrace their unique identities and learn from each other. There is strength in the collective when educators work together. This is why I commit to listening to the teachers I work with to learn from them, always remembering the words of Paulo Freire "whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever

learns teaches in the act of learning" (1998, p. 31). **Critical thinking leading bullets**

- The role of mentors, especially women in ELT, is instrumental in our journeys.
- Our unique identities are necessary; we cannot leave them behind when we become ELT professionals.
- We need to find strength in our collective voices by sharing our experiences.

### Discussion Questions

1. It is essential to look back to move forward. Who has inspired and empowered you as an ELT professional? If it was a woman, did it make a difference?
2. Have you ever felt moments of doubt as an ELT professional? What were these moments like, and how did you find the strength to continue?
3. How do you include your unique identity in your teaching? Why do you think you are not doing it if you don't?

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# My Checkered Career

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## I.- Background

One night at dinner when I was seven years old, I boldly announced, apropos of nothing my family could see, that I was going to be either the best teacher or the best waitress in the world. Looking back, I see why my family chuckled, surprised, but I remember vividly what had led to my suppertime proclamation. Earlier that day, my second-grade class had been working on what was then called the “borrowing” technique for subtraction and I simply was not getting it. Not even a bit. The teacher had posted a dozen problems on the board and asked twelve of us to come up and solve one. We could sit down when we were finished. As each of the students around me finished their calculations and returned to their desks, I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks, my breathing turning shallow and rapid, an anxious feeling forming in the pit of my stomach. After a few minutes I was alone up at the front board, flummoxed, with no clue how to approach this and feeling all eyes on me. By this point, my mind had gone blank, so no support my teacher offered helped because inside my head, I was screaming *I can't think!* After several tortured minutes more, my teacher finally allowed me to sit where I collapsed in utter humiliation. I asked myself on the long walk home why the teacher had not seen my distress and allowed me to sit sooner? I understood that she hadn't meant to be cruel, but it felt cruel. By suppertime, the budding teacher in me had envisioned several options she might instead have taken to help support me *and* keep me safe from such public humiliation and which ultimately led

to my grand statement that I would become the best teacher—or waitress—in the world.

Fast forward nine years to my junior year of high school when I held two jobs outside of school, one as a teacher's assistant in a third-grade class for a half day every day, and the other as a waitress in a popular Cantonese restaurant in my hometown. I never became anything resembling the best waitress, but it was a job I could get good enough at to help pay the bills all through high school and college and when I came home from a year of living abroad with six dollars in my pocket. The teaching assistant job brought me my first great teaching mentor and showed me I was at home in public schools. But I never forgot the feeling of standing up at that board, mind blank and unable to process the arithmetic and vowed to support every student who might be struggling to understand. Without knowing the term, that is when I committed to differentiating my teaching for the diverse sorts of learners who would cross the threshold of my classrooms.

Though I knew from a young age that teaching was my passion, I fully expected to be a public-school teacher, third or fourth grade, maybe kindergarten, for my entire career. But as we well know, life drops unexpected obstacles and opportunities into our paths compelling a shift in direction.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

Fast forward once again to the mid-1980s. I have graduated college and been teaching professionally for five years, working with young children, using my early childhood and elementary education degree I earned in Boston. There I helped determine school policy as a member of the board, mentored new colleagues, and took active part in local political activism as an advocate for young children. It was a dynamic time and I learned so much. I taught in a small preschool where all the teachers were well trained, and our director was another great mentor of my career.

It had never been my plan to teach preschool. But the exact year I graduated college, a series of budget cuts triggered 800 public school teachers to be

laid off in Boston; there was not a single job anywhere in the region. So, to pay the bills, I started looking for waitressing jobs to tide me over until I could figure out my next steps, and shockingly, for the first time ever, I couldn't find even one restaurant job. Several afternoons a week, I continued to go into the career center office to seek non-existent public school teaching positions, poring over ads, and scouring journals, hoping against odds that one might magically materialize. When my career counselor, whom I adored, discovered me looking at waitressing jobs, she gave me a very stern look and told me to sit down in her office, now. She said she knew I was not looking for preschool jobs, but she had a dear friend in Cambridge who was looking for new teachers and she reminded me the degree I had just earned qualified me well for both elementary and early childhood education. Before I even had the chance to consider this new idea, she was holding the telephone receiver and dialing.

"Hi, Lil? It's Helen. I have someone here in my office that I'd like you to talk to. Her name is Laura." And with that, she handed me the phone and said, "Here. Talk."

Though I thought I would stay at the preschool only a year, this job turned out to be so interesting and fulfilling, with such amazing international children and families, fabulous colleagues, my mentor director, and community of schools we were a part of, that I ended up staying five years. I became involved in administration, mentoring, and political activism with teachers from around Boston-Cambridge working to improve state policy for early childhood education.

I had always dreamed of doing a junior year abroad program in college, but then ultimately, did not have the opportunity, so after five years in preschool education, living abroad seemed like my next logical step because I wanted to gain more fluency in Spanish and spend a year living in another culture. I knew this would be a transformative experience I would carry with me my whole life. What I didn't anticipate is that living in Spain, I would find my *Ikigai*, that amazing Japanese concept that translates to a combination of *reason for being* and *working in one's*

*passion*. Basically, the concept goes like this: imagine a Venn Diagram. When you find what you love to do, what you are good at, and is something the world needs, at the center where all three categories overlap lies your *Ikigai*.

I was having coffee one day with an American friend when she asked me if I was interested in taking on some English language students. She had more private lesson work than she had time for and asked if I was interested. I had done some Spanish tutoring in high school and college but had never really thought about teaching English language before. But it sounded cool and a great way to earn some extra cash for travel and for the classes I was taking. Spain, in 1985, was going through monumental cultural changes. Schools were now teaching English instead of German and French and families were paying for lessons for their children to boost their skills in this emerging *lingua franca*. I met with my first family on a Wednesday night and by Thursday morning I knew my life was about to change. *This was it* I understood; this is what I need to be doing. My work with this family was so satisfying, finding what each of the three learners needed and watching their skills grow each week. This family had several friends who had friends who also sought private English lessons and suddenly, I was teaching five to six evenings a week with students of all levels.

What I also came to discover, was my great passion for my crazy English language and the fantastic challenge of helping people navigate their journey toward acquiring it.

Returning to the States the following year, I knew what I needed most was further training. I found what turned out to be my last waitressing job to refill the coffers and save up for more schooling in the state my husband was now studying. After working and saving for a year, I applied to an MA program at a public university near where we were living. I made an appointment to meet with the Department Chair in my first week of classes and was both nervous and excited as I waited in the office to speak with him about the program and my new specializa-

tion in EL education. Once again, I was about to have a transformative experience, this time, however, of an entirely different flavor.

“Well, you’ve had a very checkered career, haven’t you?” he said, dismissive, glancing up at me from my CV and personal statement with a look of profound skepticism. The insult reverberated throughout my entire body while everything reconfigured in my head and I felt sick to my stomach suddenly, devastated. I was *proud* of my past and how I had found teaching work despite challenges that were out of my control. I was proud of my time in Spain and finding a new but related professional passion to pursue. I was proud that I had the gumption to change schools as a junior transfer, moving to Boston to attend a specialized college of education. Whatever else we discussed that night was perfunctory, having to do with expectations of the program I could easily have read in the catalogue, but nothing to do with my ambition, hopes for the program or directions I might want to take in my education. This grumpy old-school professor had, in one rhetorical question, taken the wind out of my sails and all I remember walking out that office door that night was feeling *deflated*. It was dark as I walked back to my car for the thirty-minute drive back home. I was muttering to myself, trying not to look deranged as I crossed the boulevard.

But then something useful happened: on the long drive back home, I started to get kind of angry, and within a few kilometers I was downright furious. How dare he? I did what I had to do to keep teaching. That’s admirable, and there was nothing *checkered* about it. I opened my window and let out a powerful howl. I wasn’t going to let this stuck-in-the-past professor impose his *pasado* notions of a career or dictate my own feelings of accomplishment or color my future possibilities. With that howl I also realized this program was not the one for me. I finished out a couple of courses then immediately set about looking through catalogues for new MA programs to explore.

Fast forward yet again to Labor Day 1987. A classmate from one of my MA classes the semester before walked by my porch and said, “You’re a

teacher, right?” I nodded, then she told me the university EL program she was teaching in tested 200 more students than anticipated and they were in a scramble for teachers. She handed me her director’s card. The director picked up on the first ring, despite the holiday. We arranged for an interview the next day. In all honesty, I didn’t really expect to get this university position, thinking I had far too little experience, but the director and I spoke animatedly for nearly an hour. At the end of the conversation, she unexpectedly asked me, “So, is this a job you think you might like to have?” “Yes,” I nodded enthusiastically. “Great,” she said, handing me the red Azar book, “Here, you start tomorrow.” She gave me my course assignments, room numbers, the copier code, and a few other administrative details. The learning curve was steep, but the students were amazing and from twenty different countries, my colleagues wonderfully helpful and warm and the administration ran a tight, supportive ship. I taught in both the Intensive and Corporate Programs, commuting to other cities around New Jersey so most days I left the house by 6am and didn’t return home until nearly 11pm.

I adored every second of it.

Sad as it was to leave my university teaching position in New Jersey, school, life, and work in New York City remain to this day, my most dynamic and treasured time. An embarrassment of riches, as we say. Within two weeks I had more work than I knew what to do with and there were project and job offers, panel discussion invitations and work I had never imagined with fascinating teachers and learners from around the globe. Studying at Teachers College was *lo máximo*—the best, the program a perfect fit for me. Our classes were in the evenings so we could keep our day jobs. Almost immediately they hired me to supervise student teachers in the public schools, which was fabulous experience and gave me helpful tuition exemption. I know I didn’t sleep nearly enough in those years, but I was the Energizer Bunny, revved up and eager to take on more and more.

Checkered career? Yes, please!

Teachers College was a time where I could luxuriate in learning, taking deeper dives into new areas of education to explore. I was tapped early on for teacher training and found it the perfect balance for my English language teaching. They each fed the other, and I had so many incredibly inspiring mentors, teachers, and students.

From the late 1980s I found my *Ikigai* and considered myself incredibly blessed to have such meaningful work I adored. Everywhere I went, the students wowed me and taught me as much or more than I was teaching them. Working with international students I received a global education and learned the value of making the students the experts each day, to teach us all about the world from their unique perspectives. Perhaps my favorite job was working in a school for newly arrived refugees, immigrants, and political asylum candidates. One super-intensive class of twenty-five students, twenty-five hours a week, for six weeks. Two days off then testing and another six-week course with a new group. There, I met the most amazing people with incredible stories to tell, people whose lives had been disrupted and challenging and who took a leap of faith to begin a new life. A captain in the South Vietnamese Army who had spent years in a POW camp, re-meeting his children, now teens. The former police chief of Kabul before the Russian tanks rolled into the city in 1980. A violinist from Beijing who had spent years in a re-education camp. A Guatemalan farmer arrested for organizing protests. Russian Jews who had been prohibited from practicing their religion for nearly a century. People who had fled for their lives or walked away desperate to make a better life for their children and their families. A dream job I will never forget.

During this time my husband finished his doctorate and when he got a job offer teaching at a college in Maine, we made the very hard choice to leave our beloved NYC and move up north back to New England.

This started the period where I pursued projects other than teaching, including writing and after moving to San Francisco several years later, working for the NAMES Project where I used my sewing

skills to repair AIDS Memorial Quilt panels that had been out traveling the globe on exhibition. Happily, I also became a mom during those years. I pursued writing fiction and taking classes and when my son was seven, I was fortunate enough to be hired here at the University of Oregon, where I returned to teaching and remained for the rest of my career, teaching English language, and working with people studying to become language teachers. I developed a guided practicum for novice and experienced teachers for the Department of Linguistics, inspired by what I had taught at TC in New York. I became the Faculty Mentor and supervised the graduate teaching assistants. Courses I developed live on now past my retirement.

I am a lucky girl. I have had a lifetime of satisfying, stimulating work that has literally opened and shown me the world. I am blessed and grateful for the many wonderful opportunities I have had, and I work to pay that forward, to help support and train the next generation of teachers and future leaders.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

But thinking back, I ask my younger self, what if I had let that short-sighted, out-of-touch professor cow me and derail my confidence or worse, my plans, my options? What if I had become demoralized instead of enraged? I was taught to respect and listen to my elders. But it is important that we find that delicate balance between listening *intently* and respecting those voices of our genuine mentors, taking their feedback to heart, and knowing when to apply our critical thinking skills to spot someone who cannot serve as a mentor voice because they do not have our best interests at heart. We have to trust ourselves and know that we are on the right path, even when we stumble, and when circumstances throw obstacles our way, we make the best choices we can, and when the world knocks us down, we dust ourselves off and dig back in.

And we do not ever let others define us.

As I have been revisiting this professor's words that night in his office, I am sparked to tell younger teachers and students, "This may happen

to you too—life will throw you unexpected curves. People may stand in your way. Be brave enough to take on unexpected or new challenges, daunting as it might feel. Seek out your true mentors. Mentor others. Work hard.

And if the situation calls for it, have a checkered career! I have, and I hope it rocks your world as much as it has rocked mine.

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. What are the pros and cons of changing jobs, moving to new places and teaching in different contexts? What are ways to add variety to your professional endeavors if moving or changing jobs is not an option? Please explain your answer with details and examples.
2. John Quincy Adams is noted to have said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” Robin Sharma (n.d.) writes, “Leadership is not about a title or a designation. It’s about impact, influence, and inspiration. Impact involves getting results, influence is about spreading the passion you have for your work, and you have to inspire team-mates and customers.” Sharma is also quoted in a popular e-poster saying, “Leadership is not a title. It’s a behavior. Live it.”

Do you agree/disagree with the above statements? Explain your answer with detail and reasons. What are situations where you have been, or you might be a leader? Who have you looked to for leadership?

3. In her 2005 book *Creating a Mentoring Culture*, Lois J. Zachary states that “Mentoring is a journey, not a destination” (p. xxiii). What do you think she means by this? What does she mean by “journey?” By “destination?” After thinking/discussing, write some discussion questions for

your group or partners on the topic of mentoring.

4. How do we encourage self-confidence, independence, and respect in others? How do we avoid imposing our own assumptions and world views on those with whom we work?
5. In the story, the woman notes she became angry instead of devastated and that it was *useful*. Why might she feel this way? How can anger be “useful?”

### Discussion Questions

1. The professor in this story imposed his notion of “a career” on the young teacher sitting in his office. She left the program because she could, and she thought it her best choice. What are *other options* she might have explored? What would you do in that scenario?
2. Discuss a time or situation when you were required to make a life-change. What was it like? Was it your choice or was it imposed on you? Describe how you felt. What was positive about it? What was negative? Looking back, what would you do the same/different? Share stories with your partner/group.
3. Revisit the concept of *Ikigai* described in the story. Who are people you know (or know of) who have found their *Ikigai*? In what areas might you find yours? Where does your passion lie? Brainstorm with your group ideas for each other.
4. Think of mentors you have had in the past. What did you learn from them? What could you “pay forward” in mentoring someone else?

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# From the Land of the Pine Trees

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**B**eing a teacher is a rewarding, arduous job for which I am passionate about and full of love and enthusiasm. I will tell you a little about what it means to be a teacher in my town.

## I.- Background

When I think how I got to this place, I remember that it was because I won first place in a contest for teachers of English as a Second Language to work in public education in 2011. I was so excited to come to a special place and to be able to teach English classes and to this day. I think it was a great blessing to be here. In every context we can learn and grow. We give and we receive and that is what has happened to me in this place. Nothing that happens to us is random, everything has a purpose. I work in a village in a rural area in a place called Valle de Angeles, Francisco Morazán, Honduras. I teach high school students. The school where I work is small, simple, but at the same time incredible because you are surrounded by nature, the atmosphere is peaceful and so are my students. Humble, willing, hardworking, courageous. They always greet and smile. You really feel loved like a family.

## II.- Empowerment and Leadership Development

I came to a place where there is no internet, cell phone signal, in fact some students do not even have phones because they have limited economic resources. How-

ever, that has not stopped us from being able to teach even during the pandemic. Sometimes we do not have electricity. The working day is evening and at the end of the day there is almost no light in the classrooms because it starts to get dark. Classes end at 6pm; but do you know what the most beautiful thing about this is? that we do not stop and as an educational community we are willing to finish each day well, fulfilling the objectives of receiving knowledge. Again, my admiration and gratitude go to my students as they are always there, even during difficult times. At the end of classes, together we clean and order the place to leave it ready for the next day. We are currently taking steps to improve this situation by requesting help or donations.

As a teacher, each day, I enter the classroom with a greeting in a motivating tone of voice, calling for a great time. I am also a music teacher and I use music to have a successful class. Therefore, in my classroom there are always songs in English, games, and dynamics that I have learned through training, searching the web, and some created or adapted according to the level of my students. Also, I have practiced mindfulness and the students have liked it.

Sometimes we do a festival of songs in English, sung individually, in pairs or in trios. At times the whole class accompanies their classmates singing some parts of the song, generally the choir, and this makes them laugh and feel enthusiastic because we are not only singing and developing skills, but also strengthen friendship and building rapport. The students enjoy this activity because it is motivating for them. Other times we do a project called "My favorite artist" where the students talk about their favorite singer's biography, their favorite songs and make posters with photos and lyrics of the song. At the end, they sing the song for the rest of their classmates. I remember once they even did choreography. While a member of the group sang, the others danced, it was so much fun.

Being in a rural area, some students are shy, quiet, and speaking English is not easy at times, so I plan activities that help them lose their fear of using the language. One that has worked a lot for me is the

project of presenting “The most original sandwich”. The students make a poster with the name of the sandwich that is not common but original, they write the ingredients and add some images. They explain why they named their sandwich like that and how it was prepared. At the end they share and exchange sandwiches with the others. This is really motivating!

Other similar projects that I do are “My favorite animal or my favorite season of the year, or what I like to do the most on vacation.” Believe me! the students surprise me with everything they say, and this helps me to get to know them better and thus be able to help them. Not everything takes place inside the classroom, sometimes we go outside and sit on the grass, around the pine trees, there, we have the class. Do you know what advantage there is in being outside? that you can find joy in simplicity. It is good to make changes that are significant because students feel that they are taken into account, and that they can learn in different spaces.

- **The World of Firefighters**

Another environment that I came to know as a teacher was the world of firefighters. When I came to work at a school for firefighters, the environment was unknown to me. Every morning I would watch them in their training and my eyes would widen in surprise. What could I do there without ever having been a firefighter! In fact, once I put on the personal protective equipment that they wear, which by the way is very heavy! I was even looking at me using the hose. But do you know something? Even when you do not know the discipline and work environment at first, you can always help, you can always leave a meaningful grain of sand and that happened to me at that school. I began to be interested in what firefighters do, the service they provide, I read a lot to understand their world. My job was to teach English as a foreign language to them. There was no specific English program for firefighters, but I knew that I had a great responsibility, and I began to be interested in preparing a teaching program. I spent night after night preparing my teaching portfolio with a collection of useful materials such as wordsearches, poems, bingo games, crossword puz-

zles, readings, concepts, pictures, handouts, vocabulary, and everything related to firefighters.

My students and my authorities liked this very much because it was a new program that was taught based on what they did. In this way they felt motivated in their world which became part of mine. Every morning they loudly repeated their slogan in Spanish, so the first day of classes I told them in English. I have not forgotten it: “Discipline, honor, abnegation!” They even needed to learn how to answer a call if someone spoke to them in English in an emergency, since they attended the ambulance services, fires, and some accidents. Then, to make the learning more enjoyable and useful once we did some dramas. I divided my students into groups. For example, a role-play was about an ambulance service. One of them received a call requesting their services. We laughed a lot, and it was amazing how they designed an ambulance out of cardboard, and they would ride in it and make the sounds of an ambulance. It was fun, but also a lot of learning for me because this activity reflected how they put an injured person on a stretcher to take him in the ambulance and while they did this, there was a dialogue in English that they developed. Another role-play was about a call that the operator received about a house fire. They learned in English about their ranks, the equipment they used, and they even wrote an essay about why they wanted to be a firefighter. They gained learning, and I did it too. (De Smet et al., 2020)

- **Music is Heaven**

I am a Music and an English teacher. I grew up listening to my father singing daily children’s songs, music from the days of his youth, romantic music, and others. He played the requinto guitar, he was passionate about music, and he listened to the music of the great composers, so, classical music was also the order of the day. The music connected us and even when my father passed away some years ago, music still brings us closer, when I listen to music I feel that heaven is near.

I have transmitted this passion to my students as I encourage them to sing and develop their talents.

In some schools it is not common to have choirs, so with initiative and enthusiasm I have formed them, from kinder, elementary to high school. I like to take challenges and prepare choirs to sing at Christmas. We once won first place at a choir festival. That was incredible! We got a trophy. Later, I went to an institution for children with cancer and joined the children's choir with a small choir of these children too, who, although were sick, music gave them well-being. I think that as teachers, we are also human, and these activities humanize us because they are sublime.

- **My Graduating Students**

I have had the opportunity to play the role of an educational social work advisor which is a requirement for students who are in their last year of school and will soon graduate. Part of that social work is supporting an association which fights cancer. This is a health center called *Enma Romero de Callejas*. The students go to the streets, and with the support of the police and other authorities, they request money, which then, is donated to that institution. The students show solidarity and feel compassion and empathy for this noble cause. They come together giving talks on cancer prevention, exercise, and healthy food. They are very happy even though they spend hours and hours requesting donations.

Another social task that they do is to teach literacy. This is very good because they teach to read and write to those who do not know how to read or write in their community. As this is out of their time in school, they feel tired and that is where I urge them not to give up, but to finish their task and do it very well. Accompanying our students in those moments is valuable and the influence this has on them is relevant. We also support the environment. In 2022 there was a contest for ecological murals. All materials were recyclable. We won first place. We were so excited!

Once at the graduation ceremony, my students surprised me. They said a few words of gratitude to me and gave me a small gift and a card they

had made themselves. I felt so grateful for the gesture they had towards me. The fact that they had prepared this surprise was significant and I was able to say once again, it is worth being close to our students and making them feel that we care about them and that we wish them the best. Some said that when they finished their college degrees, they wanted to be as enthusiastic as I was. Maybe I am not an extraordinary person, but, for them, I was.

- **My goals and professional preparation**

One of my goals is to continuously train myself to update my knowledge. I find motivation when studying, I love to learn and develop myself because in this way I can serve better. Some colleagues have asked me why I study even when I can rest because I have many years of experience as a teacher. I believe that if you are active in the educational system, learning should never end.

During the pandemic, the way of teaching changed completely, and classes were virtual. We learned new tools and different platforms to teach. New training came, and it is still going on. I decided to participate in some teacher updating projects and I had opportunities to take some courses such as Simplicity in ELT, Home Studio for Virtual Teaching, Self-care for Teachers, Music Therapy, Mindfulness, Best Practices for English Teaching, International Conferences for Teachers of English, Online TESOL International Convention, Music and the Stories, Psychology of Art and Communication and OPEN Fostering Student Motivation and Engagement. Why do I mention this? Because the more professionally prepared we are, we do not only obtain knowledge, but also experiences that will help us when we apply them in the classroom. We can even multiply the effect by sharing that knowledge with other colleagues and thus, help our communities. Listening to the experiences of others makes us compare and reflect on what we are doing well and what we could change. That is the goal for me, to share what I am learning with others; especially those who are beginning their professional career or those who are ready to retire from the teaching work.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

- **Communication is the key**

I have always said that success in what we do depends a lot on communication. Talking with our bosses, students and parents about our plans and projects is of utmost importance. If we want to have support, we must talk about it. I try to make this known to my colleagues and my students and in my classroom, I provide opportunities for students to express themselves and thus mediate and make the best decisions in agreement with all who are involved. I learned that what is spoken, is also written. There is a phrase that I use that says that "Words are carried away by the wind" Speaking and writing what is discussed is part of communication. This has worked for me throughout my career.

- **My Favorite Person**

Can we serve others with great devotion and forget about ourselves? Although it is true many times it happens to us, but we must fight to find our own place. I go to my favorite person and give her, her own space, that's Me! Although I am dynamic, creative and a hard worker, sometimes I get sick and tired. I must also take care of my family and other responsibilities. That is why self-care is very important. As I am surrounded by pine trees, I go outside to breathe a little and try to be aware of what is around me, that wonderful nature that gives me moments of stillness and peace. I take a few minutes to meditate. Sometimes I read a book that is interesting to me, drink a cup of tea or I just think about the good times. If I do not give time to myself, I will hardly be able to move forward. I invite you to be aware of your favorite person. It is worth doing!

I conclude this chapter, by saying that I know, as a teacher that not everything is always easy. Especially, when we do not have textbooks at school, nor technological equipment to teach, neither didactic material, I have given a little more of my time and re-

sources, I have requested, invested, and run the extra mile so that my classes are different, and my students like them. We cannot always be successful and happy, sometimes we can make mistakes or fail, and disappointment and sadness might come, but if we look back and weigh all our work over the years, we can understand that our work has not been in vain. We have not just been in charge of a class; we have influenced the lives of thousands of people over time. Perhaps we have not become millionaires financially, but teachers are millionaires in the reward of helping generations to become good professionals, but more than that, good people who serve their community, country, and their families. This will make us feel satisfied with our work: teaching.

#### Critical Thinking - Leading Bullets

Use these Critical thinking and leading bullets to start acting:

- Analyze the varied contexts in which you can lead and how your talents contribute to this leadership.
- Consider your community as a means to empower you and others
- Evaluate your own talents and how you use them to serve others in your context

#### Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions in your classroom:

1. How could you develop your talents to empower others to lead?
2. What, in your opinion, is the influence of a role model influence in building leadership?
3. How can your actions and talent empower and encourage others to lead?

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# From teacher to language teaching professional: mapping the journey

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## I. Background

I have always been an English language teacher. I started teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Germany since my university days at a time when all you needed to get a job was to be a native speaker. Because I enjoyed teaching, and was able, at the time to use the knowledge from my studies (I was studying for a degree in philosophy, English philology, and linguistics), I never left the profession. At this point, I have been teaching for just under twenty years.

I work at a German public university where I have a permanent, full-time position as an English language instructor. At a time when stable academic jobs are few and far between, I am grateful to have this job which allows me, as a mother, to combine my teaching with the difficulties of managing childcare and school-age children. My employer, like many other public

universities in Germany, has family-friendly policies and there is a great acceptance that mothers in academia have a double burden of career and care.

For me now, my goals are to inspire the young people that I work with to be the best teachers that they can be. I want to prepare them to work in a system that is imperfect and less than ideal. So many of my students come into the teacher education program full of hope but then struggle for various reasons and drop out. Others complete the training program, only to find out that they were not cut out for teaching, or that the system is flawed. Ultimately, working in a flawed system myself, I want to be a model for my students and show them that there is so much more to teaching and you make the career that you want for yourself. This is where my leadership story begins.

## II. Empowerment and leadership development

Working in a public university in Germany is a unique experience for anyone who has not worked in the German higher education system. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on the unique situation of (foreign) language teachers. Language teaching is taught by instructors or sessional staff and instructors are usually employed on fixed-term contracts of two or three years, with the permanent positions few and far between. The casual teachers are contracted only by course and paid hourly.

For the outsider, another quirk in the German system is the lack of annual staff appraisals. Whether on permanent or temporary contracts, there is neither a performance review, formal feedback nor forward career planning. There is no requirement for professional development and instead, accountability for professional development lies solely in the teacher themselves. Teachers are hired on merit, through the skills and knowledge that they bring with them. This is the core of teacher professionalism in the German system. While the lack of professional development and any sort of formal evaluation and appraisal may appear to have a negative impact on empowerment, the knowledge expected of a teacher, the autonomy given to the teacher and the responsibilities placed on the teacher as a result, actually empowers teachers to engage for

themselves, if they so wish, in ongoing learning and development. Lifelong learning, seen as professional development, continuing education, and training, and with an emphasis on the acquisition of occupationally specific knowledge, is encouraged, though not forced or mandated.

In line with Germany's *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law), European and international human rights laws, Germany has a Gender Equality Policy and strives for gender equality in the workforce, and this is especially evident in higher education. Because women, rather than men, tend to have responsibilities of care towards their own children, or other family members, the family-friendly policies and infrastructure are especially attractive. All German universities have an equal opportunities office which offer advice as well as support for female academics in all stages of their career, whether a student who is recently started studying, a doctoral candidate or a professor. Offers include mentoring, career advice, and workshop – all of which help the female teaching professional develop herself, and her own professional development program. There may be advice on childcare, or even childcare itself – which can include regular, full-time, or part-time care, or care during the school holidays since the universities do not necessarily operate on the same schedules as the schools. Knowing that childcare is available lessens the burden on the female academic and allows them to work and study without disruption.

Working in this German system can be challenging for those who operate and develop better in a system that has a more regulated and transparent support, where the responsibility for staff development lies with the employer. In fact, it may appear that the German system recognizes, as suggested by Knowles (English, 2005) that the learning processes of adults are simply quite different from those of children. According to Knowles, adults tended to be more self-directed in their learning and it is the adult learners themselves who should identify their learning needs, and how they would prefer to acquire that knowledge. The challenge for an educator in the German system then, is to identify their own learning needs and how they can further educate themselves.

Yet while adults can be self-directed in their learning and learning needs, they would more often need someone more knowledgeable to guide them on their learning journey. This absence of a guide could well be a stumbling block for an educator in Germany, more so for the female educator, who may have to make decisions that factor in her familial situation and responsibilities.

The struggle I have is two-fold. On the one hand, this lack of mandated professional development is at times an easy way out when something on offer such as a course or workshop does not fit in with the schedule of my family, or for some other reason. The second struggle is the challenge of finding courses or training that are not only affordable, relevant and accredited but also, in English. While there is a lot of further training on offer at German universities, and many of these courses are online, self-paced, of excellent quality and for university employees, free of charge, these courses are usually offered in German, and for many English teachers, this is often the cop out – I personally usually reject a course because I feel the cognitive challenge of doing it in a language that is not my first language is too much effort. And again, as it is not a requirement, the only loss is to me.

As a female English language teacher, an added burden is childcare or being away from the family if I were to travel away for a course. While the community I live in has been extremely supportive and has rallied around when needed, the challenges I face come from within myself – getting out of my comfort zone, not being pushed to do better and the absence of any form of extrinsic motivation to evaluate myself or perform better. Neighbors and caregivers who jump in to help when needed often question the need or want to engage in so much professional development, when such activities are not even a requirement for promotion, when there are no prospects of promotion even, and take up so much time outside regular work hours.

The question then is, and the focus of this narrative too, is why bother? With the challenges described and the context of such employment, why would anyone go out of their comfort zone and spend

precious time after work, in the evenings and at the weekends for something that can be deemed unnecessary from a structural point of view? For a mother too, who will never relive the childhood years of her children, what is the incentive to engage in such further education and training? Mothers in Germany, who have the luxury of a permanent full-time university position, are privileged with affordable child-care, employee benefits such as the ability to return to work after maternity leave, and reduced hours until their children are out of compulsory schooling. There is no danger of improper termination, and one simply goes up the pay scale automatically every few years. There is no promotion to a different, more prestigious position, and one can simply wait out the years in the job. Therefore, this job security coupled with the absence of an appraisal system with a line manager, can be viewed as a challenge but perhaps by some, as a bonus as it makes their work life very comfortable.

The challenge for me is simply knowing that I have everything, that I am set for life and that I do not have to do anything for it, since whatever I do will not get me a better position or better pay. Whatever I choose to do, as a self-directed adult learner, I do on my own time, and usually at my own expenses. At the end, such challenges are solved only through personal motivations and the need to achieve greater things 'for oneself'. This need, as well as the recognition that I do not know everything and can always learn more, is the driving force behind my own self-directed learning and my sense of empowerment as a female English language teacher in Germany.

Thus, I decided I needed to upskill and identified an area of my teaching that could be improved. I involved my own students in my own projects in the absolute absence of funding or departmental support. If these failed, I would write them off as experiences gained, and if they succeeded, they were the joint successes of my students and me. Second, I joined my local teaching association to see how it could help me identify my learning needs.

In the first instance, the success of my projects with my students has greatly empowered me as a

woman in ELT. Teaching on a teacher education program, with most of my students going on to become teachers of English in German state schools, I wanted to provide them with some practical classroom and teaching experience. I wanted to move from providing my students with input and content and assessing them on this content to giving them a richer learning experience which may result in better retention of knowledge and transfer of skills in the future. Because I had learnt a lot through the practical teaching component in my own teacher training, I wanted to give my own students a similar opportunity to learn, to gain experience and to reflect. I approached a local secondary school which was close to our university campus and offered to run an English club for their pupils, with my students taking the lead. The idea was received with great enthusiasm and the first run of the project saw the teacher candidates work with almost forty school pupils in small groups, engaging them in language games and creative craft activities. The teacher candidates gained valuable insight into working in a secondary school, and at the same time, were able to transfer the knowledge obtained in class into actual classroom practice. As a group, we received much positive feedback from the school and the pupils who had participated. The project was modified during the Corona-pandemic years where much of schooling and teaching had been moved online. Because of limited access to our partner school, I arranged for my students to work with Palestinian teachers as part of the Hands Up Project, a non-profit organization which has a network of volunteers all around the world working with young people in Palestine. For me, reading the final course reflections from my teacher candidates, getting anecdotal feedback from our school partner as well as sharing in the successes of the Hands Up Project, are all achievements which have empowered and emboldened me to do more. More importantly, my own students, and projects partners were supportive, guided me and encouraged me to be the best I could be.

Another source of support for me were my communities of practice. Becoming a member of my local teaching association has helped me develop professionally in other areas. Though the association is

small in comparison to other regional associations, like any other teaching association, it gives its members a sense of community and as Wheeler (2018) puts it, '*plays a vital role in building camaraderie among language teachers*'. Despite the access I had to further education and training within my own university, my teaching association was my true community of practice. My service at regional level showed me what I was capable of, and where my interests were. I wanted to do something for language teachers in Germany as I shared their experiences of working here and I understood their struggles and how stagnant one can get when there is no push to do more. Through my service in my local association, I found my way into the two largest teaching associations – IATEFL and TESOL.

According to Tercero (2018) communities of practice such as teaching association rely on the energy provided by a strong leadership, the engagement of volunteers and members within that community as well as the ability to regularly assess the community and evolve and develop in line with the needs of its members' needs. The leadership experience that I have been able to gain through working with more senior partners, the positive feedback I have received from my own members and the constant dialogues that arise among members on how to move the association forward have been achievements I never would have garnered if I had not taken my own career in my own hands. As an English language teacher, I am a member of a specialized profession, and in the words of Aronson (2020), 'as a member of a profession, you are more empowered than you are as an individual professional', highlighting that professional development should not be limited to taking courses, doing training and gaining further qualifications. Aronson (2020) also suggests that engaging with your teaching association could help you gain the public recognition deserving of an ELT profession. With public recognition comes empowerment.

At a time when permanent full-time jobs in academia are hard to come by, having a job such as mine with no strings attached is a luxury. However, what sort of model would I be to my children,

or to the young people I work with, if I were to rest on my laurels and continue my teaching, day in and day out, until retirement? Empowerment also does not only come from leadership, knowledge and skill acquisition, and the ability to manage family and career. While being able to juggle the double burden of family and career, makes me an empowered woman in ELT, the biggest empowerment for me has truly been gained through my teaching association.

The successes of my teaching projects have given me the confidence to engage actively in my local teaching association. My activities in my local association have in turn, reinforced my commitment to my profession and through the successes here, I was inspired to participate more actively in other associations. My biggest achievement is most certainly the teaching award that I won three years after I decided to take responsibility for my own professional development. As there were no standards for teachers in my context, I wanted to see if the professional standards as set out by TESOL International Association could be applied to my own person. Further, I wanted to debunk the notion that English language teachers in German universities were mere language teachers, rather than professionals who actually do belong to one of the oldest professions in the world. As I read the rubric for the criteria of the award, I was more convinced than ever, that I met most, if not all, the criteria that were being assessed and I had the evidence to prove it. I remember sharing with my own students and a colleague that I was planning to apply for the award. The students were very supportive, and it was through their support that I realized that no matter what the outcome was, they respected me not only for who I was but also for all that we had experienced together. Interestingly, my students were also impressed as such an accolade did not exist in Germany – or none that we knew of, not for teachers. The mere notion of teaching being rewarded was unique to them. Winning the award was also a success for the university, and to their credit, they did not take credit for it. The achievement was recognized as my own and something I had deserved through my work with my students and my engagement with my wider community.

### III. Looking forward into the future

I have certainly learnt that the road less traveled is not an easy one. Many English language teachers in Germany are stuck in a difficult situation. Unless you are in academia, the job is not attractive. Further teaching qualifications beyond the initial teacher training are not easily available in Germany, and training that is offered is usually in German. If you are not comfortable with German, then you may never undertake further training in this country. On the other hand, for a mother, the employment situation is a comfortable one, and one that I could have certainly taken if I had wanted to. All these roads are those that ELT professionals in Germany, and women and mothers take – the easy, convenient paths.

Nonetheless, I decided on the road less traveled as it kept me interested in my job. English language teaching is not stagnant but evolves as our learners evolve and as we gain new insights into teaching methodologies and tools that work with the learners of today. I knew that my success was the success of my students, my teacher candidates. If they failed, then it was because I had failed them. It was a difficult road because I had no map. There was no guide because there was no need to go anywhere.

Moving forward, I want to continue on this journey. I wanted to show my children and my students that an English teacher isn't 'just' an English teacher but a knowledgeable and skillful professional. My activities as a leader in my association has helped shaped me professionally and allowed me to gain so much in terms of skills and knowledge.

My advice to women who want to thrive in ELT, especially to those working in a context similar to mine, you need to create your own roadmap, something which Coombe (2020) calls a Personal Strategic Plan. With such a plan, you will be able to both balance the double burden of career and life, as well as plan for continuous improvement. But how do we identify what it is we want to do? For English teachers, you could start by joining your local teaching association,

perhaps as an observer first. Being in a community of practice is an amazing source of inspiration and will help you plan your journey. Alternatively, you could reflect on your own teaching practices and identify small areas where you could undertake some kind of project to improve your teaching and job satisfaction. These projects may encourage you to undertake action research or partake in further training to upskill yourself.

#### Critical thinking bullets

1. What is one thing you would really like to do for your own growth as a teacher? How could you achieve or embark on this?
2. Do you see language teaching as a job, or a career? Give reasons for your answer.
3. How does your context and your role as an educator in your community empower you?
4. In what ways could you contribute to your local teaching association, if you have one?

#### Discussion questions

1. What are some challenges women educators face in your context? To what extent are these challenges universal?
2. Despite greater acceptance of women going to work and having a career, many women still carry a double burden of responsibilities at home and in the workplace. Why is it still so difficult for women in education to get recognition for their accomplishments in the workplace and/or the value of professional development?
3. In the absence of a formal system of professional development, self-directed learning seems to be the best way forward for those having to juggle their career with other responsibilities. What other ways can you think of?

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# English language teaching: challenges faced and solved, Tanzania context

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## I.- Background

I am Irene Maganga, an English language teacher based in Tanzania, East Africa, in a region called Ruvuma and a town called Songea. The region is found in the southern part of the country. The natives are the Ngoni and Yao tribes. I work in a government secondary school, we call them ward schools, the school is a mixed gender school, having both boys and girls. I teach teenage students aged 13-17 years old. I have been teaching for 9 years now.

As any other school in my area, we have the same issues. Apart from minimal resources which everyone complains about, we also have a lot of students in our schools; the student population can be around 2000 students with 500 students in one grade level. I consider myself lucky to have taught 80-90 students per grade all these years. There are other teachers who have 100-500 students in one grade. Large classes are one of the biggest challenges teachers face in Tanzania. Many children are enrolled in primary schools, which means more students in secondary schools too.

## II.- Empowerment and Leadership Challenges

In Tanzania the government favors education for female students. In fact, our schools have more female students than male students. Recently all students who dropped out of school due to teenage pregnan-

cy were allowed to return to school to continue with their studies. The government has set some strategies for them to return and continue with their studies without being harassed or feeling embarrassed. Before 2022 teenage pregnancy ended the education dreams of many girls in our communities. Getting pregnant marked the end of the education road for many girls with poor backgrounds. Now we believe that being given a second chance will help them continue with their studies and fulfill their life dreams. This will also help them raise better families.

Although the government has no problems with girl child education. the parents and the surrounding community have a problem with girls being educated. We still have parents who believe that educating a girl child is a disadvantage to their families. They believe that girls would grow up, get married and become strangers to their own families. They believe that they would use a lot of money educating a girl and as a result the girl would get married and her new family together with her husband's family would enjoy the benefits of her education. She would take care of other people instead of the family that she grew up in. These parents tend to tell the girls to find ways to get their basic needs and school needs. Hence. girls face different challenges including early pregnancy or rape.

When I started to work in 2013, as a young female teacher, enthusiastic and full of life dreams, my main goal was. and still is, to help my students transform into better citizens. Seeing these students learn, adapt to new environments, tackle their challenges, and grow to become responsible adults in their communities is what brings joy into my life. When I decided to become a teacher, I knew that I had a great responsibility of nurturing these kids to become great citizens that would help others in their community and the country at large. People who use the knowledge given to them to communicate their ideas to the world, confident people that believe in themselves, think critically, and look for ways to solve the problems in their families and communities without waiting for help from other people.

As a normal English language teacher, the challenges that I face I believe are similar to other teachers around the world. In our schools we have few books, few teaching materials, large number of students, we also have shortage of classes/buildings and no technological tools. When one has a problem, they must find ways to solve the problem. So, I always look for ways to solve my problems and help my students learn. There are times that I need to teach using a video, I use my own laptop to show some videos to my students. I group my students and give them time to watch the video and understand. When I go to the other group, I make sure that the group that has already watched the video has work to do, they discuss a question given to them in their group and after all groups have done the same, they will present their findings to the other members of the classroom. Whenever I want to teach using photo or picture, I look for photos and journals that I could use to teach, I sometimes print some pictures and make copies to make sure that every student gets a copy, or a pair can share a copy. In addition to that I tend to take my students outside the classroom for them to have a real-life usage of the language they are learning in class. Taking my students outside the classroom environment help them think, relax, speak to each other, ask questions, and use the everyday language through the verbs that they know in their own native language.

When planning for my lessons I must be creative and think outside the box on how and what tools I will use to teach my students. I understand that as a teacher I must do all that I can to help my students learn the language. I prepare all the tools a head of time, I make sure that they are enough for all students in the class. I also plan how my students will seat during each lesson. I prepare activities ahead of time just to make sure that everything goes as planned. Thus, being creative is the key to any successful class.

In Tanzania, students use Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in primary school and later they change into English language when they join secondary school. English becomes the language of instruction in secondary schools. All other subjects except language subjects like Kiswahili and French are being

taught in English. I would not say it is easy to teach English to these students. It is hard but as a teacher I am geared towards fighting all the challenges that come with their learning and at the end achieve the goal that I set for myself. Students sometimes don't have an idea of why they must use English in all other subjects, they have questions as to why other subjects are not taught in English. It is the duty of a teacher like me to help them answer these questions using everyday things. We use simple things they use at home to help them understand why it is important for them to learn and use a new language in secondary school.

Being an English language teacher, having to deal with helping my students learn a new language made me find ways to make sure that I give my students what they really need: knowledge. After college I thought I had it all in me. I thought that I had all the knowledge and tools that I can use to teach my students. That I have enough materials at my disposal to help my students learn and acquire the knowledge. However, when I came into the real teaching tasks, I felt like I lack a lot. Whenever I taught a class very few students understood what I was trying to explain to them. I needed to make sure that all my students understand what I wanted to communicate to them. I wanted my students to use the language I was teaching them. I started to look for ways to help my students, that is when I learned about professional development in teacher associations. I joined some teachers' associations to try to find ways to help my students. This became one way to solve my challenges. I started joining webinars, conferences, and trainings both online and face to face. Through these webinars and conferences, I got to learn different teaching methodologies, classroom activities for all the language skills, and different ways to teach different students. I always choose some of the strategies that I am sure will fit in my context and use them in my classroom. I am using different teaching methodologies in my classes thanks to webinars, trainings, online courses, and conferences. These methodologies help to spice up my lessons and help different students to learn and use the language that I am teaching.

Through teachers' associations, I have become a confident and empowered teacher. Empowered in a

feeling that makes me connect with different women and ELT professionals around the world and find solutions to my challenges. I got a chance to be mentored by the best female ELT professionals out there. In my search for solutions to my very own challenges I became a mentee to a mentoring program of Africa ELTA, my mentor was and still is from Honduras, Grazzia Mendoza. I learned a lot of lessons from her. She shared different activities and projects from her corner of the world. I used some of the knowledge I got from her to my classrooms, and some worked well. I owe her a great deal. I also got to learn a lot from the program coordinator and organizer Amira Salama. She was always there for me whenever I needed help during the program. She became what I call a silent mentor, she mentored me without even noticing what she was doing and for that I owe her a lot.

Through the program I became a presenter, I presented in webinars and conferences both online and face to face. In all these I shared my experience, challenges, and classroom activities. The aim being to help myself and help others who are facing what I am facing in my environment. They say a problem shared is a problem half solved. I am always sharing my challenges with others believing that they are passing through the same challenges, so we find answerers together. Or they passed through the same challenges and found ways to solve the challenges. In both situations answers will be found. All the answers I got I put them into practice and check if they will work in my context. This is the power of sharing.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

I want English language teachers to remember that English is more than a subject. It is a means to achieve goals by almost all other professionals. All others must go through the hands of the teacher to grow up and become someone in life. Almost all other professionals have been taught by an English teacher somewhere somehow. This shows how English language teachers are important and that they have an important role to play in everyone's life. I understand that being an EFL/ESL teacher isn't easy, it comes with great responsibility, I encourage everyone to be toler-

ant, confident, flexible, and most importantly creative so as to achieve the goals set.

I also encourage female EFL/ESL teachers to stand firm, be confident and always have faith that one day this world will see the great work they are doing and give them the respect they deserve. Every hard work needs to be applauded and recognised. As a woman, I recognise all the hard work done by these female teachers, all their tireless efforts and time spent to make sure that they do their job effectively.

I once told my colleagues that being a teacher means a lot more than what the surface shows. (Copeland, et.al., March 2022). Being a teacher means you are a friend to your students. They can confide in you, tell you all their worries and problems hoping that you will feel what they are feeling and offer solutions. You are a nurse when they get injuries, you will always be there to comfort them, give them first aid and medicines, if necessary, make sure they are ok before leaving the school to go back home. You are a doctor when they are sick, you take care of them, assure them that they will be alright no matter the circumstances. You are a counselor to help them not lose their sanity as teenagers, whenever they go astray you will find ways to help them get back into track. Being a teacher is more than teaching and being an EFL/ESL teacher is more than being a subject teacher.

### Critical Thinking Leading Bullets

- Identify the contextual challenges in your own area and how are they similar/different to the ones in this narrative.
- Explain some observations from your context and how they related to this narrative.
- Compare similar/different actions you could undertake in your community or region.

### Discussion Questions

1. If you were in a similar position, what would you do differently/similarly?

2. What are some actions in your context that you have taken to empower/lead others?
3. Could you provide an example of a similar/different project that could be done in your context?

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# Endorsing Change through Real Meaning-Making

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## I.- Background

Colombia has long been described as the place where magical realism converges. Its cosmopolitan nature makes this country, its regions and people, unique and diverse. We are a hard-working culture with long lasting family traditions that have helped nurture the socioeconomical difficulties that have traced our past. With a fast growth over the last decades, both in globalized economies and cultures, the country has embraced change. Educational contexts have little by little transitioned from being static structures, to endorse developments that impact the quality of education. Children, youths, and adults have been at the core of such transformation, responding more critically to their realities, than ever before.

Although we have been for centuries amid highly traditional and patriarchal organizations that have controlled power structures and its deriving relations, there has been significant progress on the promotion of gender equality that preserve human rights. However, the road is still to be paved, since violence and aggression against women keeps being present in many forms, still looking at them as the “historically disadvantaged” ones. Nowadays, in Co-

lombia, women’s voices are soundly heard, and they occupy more positions of authority than in the past, allowing for the generation of policy and action that may ensure their wellbeing, fostering new spaces for career and educational growth, and generating new avenues for human rights regulations. Although the gender divide is still big, I can attest that some degree of evolution has been made, and our younger generations are witnessing women who lead and work towards their empowerment and equity, recognizing their past and building a better present and futures.

Across Colombia, there is a high representation of women playing administrative and managerial roles in educational settings, ranging from school principals and academic and administrative coordinators to university rectors, such as in the case of Universidad Nacional de Colombia, the largest and the best public university in Colombia, which for the first time in their history, elected a full professor and a Pharmacist and PhD in Science as their Rector.

In the ELT world, women have played an important role and teacher education programs have always fostered their personal and professional growth. A high percent of women is admitted to ELT teacher education programs, and in accordance with the statistics provided by OECD in 2019, most educators in early childhood education are women. I am a Bachelor in Spanish English from *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* (Bogotá), and I remember that we were a big women’s crowd studying our program. This was also applicable to my further education years during which, I pursued a Specialization in Applied Linguistics to the Teaching of English (from *La Gran Colombia University*, Colombia) and a PhD in English Philology from *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)* at Madrid, Spain.

In my professional trajectory, starting from my school English teacher years (1997), I believe that women in my field have played a prime role over the years. I have been surrounded by talented, creative, and hard-working individuals who have helped our profession and field grow. I have particularly had three great mentors in my career, very powerful and

beautiful women who have not only made impact in our region, in our ELT field, but also in our lives, becoming not only models and sources of inspiration, but also great colleagues and friends. 80 percent of my friends are immersed in the ELT field, and they are also powerful women who make the profession shine! I have played many roles in my personal and professional trajectory, moving from an English teacher and Head of English Department at two highly recognized schools in Bogotá and Cundinamarca, associate professor, researcher, Director of Master programs in ELT (Universidad de La Sabana), Director of the Research group (LALETUS) examiner teacher trainer, and very recently appointed Director of Outreach and Engagement at the School of Communication at the same university. I also serve as a National Accreditation evaluator for the CNA (*Consejo Nacional de Acreditación*), and work at *Universidad de Antioquia* as a guest professor and thesis director. I collaborate actively with other higher education institutions in my country (and abroad) in diverse roles, ranging from evaluation to advisory, committee review board member, and conference speaker. Lastly, I am an active member of diverse academic associations (International Association for Blended Learning -IABL), TESOL Colombia, ASOCOPI (the National Association of English Teachers), and LATINCALL, among others.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

I currently work at a great institution, with an incredible human and organizational power to transform and evolve. *Universidad de La Sabana*, founded in 1979 is one of the youngest universities in Colombia with as to date, has globally gained recognition for its academic excellence, innovation, technology, and internationalization impact. There, I have always found room to innovate and work collaboratively with great academic teams, and I have also engaged in an active sport life, being the captain of the indoor soccer team for almost a decade and participating actively in championships and activities associated to culture and sports. I have had the liberty to transform the curriculum and bring new ideas to the table, taking action in curriculum design, design, development and evaluation of programs that aim at catering the needs of contemporary

learners, while tracing a route with my colleagues and teams to strive for solid capacity-building.

I have had a vigorous life as an educator. I am a passionate professor and researcher, and my academic life has always been surrounded with life-changing opportunities to innovate my practice and endorse reflection, change and resilience. My small but beautiful family is highly active in academic endeavors honoring the beautiful and perennial legacy from Mum (especially). My goals as a teacher have been of a multifold nature. On the one hand, it has always been my intention to generate impact in our educational communities. While at Sabana, I have mostly taught at the master's level and my students have always been in-service teachers since it has been an admission requirement to our programs. It has been wonderful to accompany them over their years, witnessing their transformation from novice researchers to expert ones, and working hard to improve their professional skills and their personal lives. Co-constructing stories with them has been highly meaningful and rewarding. Although, many will agree with me that pursuing postgraduate education while being full time teachers at schools/academic institutions and being part of a family (in its many representations) is a daunting mission, they have successfully achieved it, and they are now in the very many areas of our country (and abroad) fostering better opportunities for children and youths.

On the other hand, I have always been intrigued to engage in academic associations and organizations in which as English teachers and educators we can share our knowledge and build influential networking. I fondly believe in the power of collaboration to build a solid human force and have the possibility to fuse educational instruction with knowledge generation and dissemination to voice our expertise and have an open door to learn every day. That is why, I have always nurtured spaces for academic dialogue with many educators, who are now my friends all over the globe.

I cannot say that I have had many challenges as a female ELT teacher. I have been fortunate to engage in teams who have a deep respect for diversity,

for women's active engagement, and have always welcomed my ideas and opinions. However, I must say that I am self-confident, positive, and resilient being, with a very extrovert personality, who has always shared her views in all participating circles, and who has a hard time not expressing my views when I feel contentment and/or disagreement for a given situation.

I only recall in my early years as a conference speaker and teacher trainer visiting schools in Colombia and finding teachers, who had a hard time engaging in my dialogue and sessions, mostly because of their embedded stereotypes in which a young female educator pursuing a PhD could share a different, perhaps more updated version of the contemporary trends in the ELT world. It happened to be in a highly traditional schools that had very few opportunities to enact teacher development.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

Being a leader in my field in Colombia has allowed me to grow as a human being and as a professional, as a mother of a wonderful son who is been educated in Colombia in his Bachelor trajectory as a pharmacist. My voice has been heard through my educational practice, my articles, conferences, daily academic and friendly encounters with my students, peers, and teams. I have always believed in the power of self-efficacy to be a better human and educator, and I strongly believe in my fellows' capacities and talents to overcome challenges and give birth to new ideas and projects while working together. Working in this field has meant to be constantly open to opportunities, to assign new meanings to my role, to be able to challenge and being flexible about my system of thinking and action to adapt to the needs of an ever-changing society and community, without losing my personal essence. Being a leader in this field has allowed to build bridges across borders, and to support my fellows and younger generations of students, friends, and relatives to walk in more paved roads. The key to be an influential individual in your community, whichever it is relies on a mighty inner self, and an open-door human, who can reflect and constantly learn from experiences and

defies, voicing the ways in which risings to new opportunities can be shaped and treasured for a lifetime. Be grateful and honor your present and your past experiences, be mindful, emphatic, and resilient. Take every step as a gain, whichever may it be.

Yet, many stories remain to be written, and I hope to have the vigor and energy to have enough ink to write them, to inspire and be inspired by others, while I pause and reflect, learn and capitalize along the path.

### Critical thinking leading bullets

- How can we expand women's actions to help each other? Think of possible mentorship, and networking opportunities at your disposal. Write a list.
- In your opinion, what are some of the key attributes of a good female leader? Do you perceive having similar traits?
- How would you want to make impact in your community? Think of small step actions that help you make decisions and enact change. Make a list.
- What motivates you to encourage and support other women?

### Discussion questions

1. How could multicultural education help us bridge the literacy gaps to advocate for women's empowerment, gender equality and equity in the classroom?
2. How could teacher educators build human capital able to endorse the fast-growing advent of emergent technologies while preserving high quality in education?
3. What needs to change in the ELT curriculum to ensure equity in an ever-changing era?

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# Becoming an empowered plurilingual scholar through academic literacy practices

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## Introduction

In the field of applied linguistics and language education, researchers and language pedagogues are increasingly examining the ways to empower individuals from marginalized linguistic and cultural groups (Payant & Galante, 2022). To discuss empowerment, however, it is important to first discuss the notion of power and power inequities as they relate to language and language varieties (Pennycook, 2021). Languages are an important form of symbolic capital, and this form of capital, because it is never evenly distributed in society, is an instrument of power (Bourdieu, 1998). Some languages have greater prestige because they are considered the legitimate languages or dominant varieties (Bigot & Papen, 2013; Kubota, 2022; Payant & Kim, in press), and individuals who are given or who have access to those languages tend to have more power in society (e.g., greater employment opportunities).

We are all aware that English is a global language, a language of power, and those who behold this power defend it with English-only policies or with implicit practices that empower a smaller number of individuals (e.g., hiring native speakers only or speaker of the standard variety). Yet, for many, this language can only become part of their language repertoire through access to formal education. In the realm of academia, English is the *international* language and countless scholars develop their academic literacies in English, and in turn, adopt a monolingual stance (Payant & Belcher, 2019). For years, I was a monolingual scholar and was not critical enough of the fact that I had access to this resource and was not contributing knowledge to other discourse communities.

In this personal narrative, I share with you my process of becoming an empowered plurilingual scholar and discuss how I ground my practice in praxis: I engage in committed reflection and action to shape and transform the world (Kubota, 2022) by enacting my plurilingual identity in these traditionally monolingual academic spaces. By promoting the development of plurilingual research and engaging in a plurilingual research agenda, I am participating in challenging current oppressive monolingual structures in the field of applied linguistics and education and actively contributing to social change.

## I.- Background

Canada is a country that is recognized globally as an official *bilingual* country. Although it would be more accurate to describe it as a plurilingual country since people use many languages in diverse interactional contexts. There are numerous opportunities to learn, study, or work in Canada's two official languages, French or English, throughout Canada. I was raised in a plurilingual community in Ontario, Canada. There, I had access to education in my home language (French) and was also surrounded by the English language. There, I first learned English primarily through naturalistic social interactions at a young age and eventually with formal English courses (e.g., English language arts) throughout my K-12 education.

Growing up as a minority French speaker in Ontario, Canada, I had always been aware that these two languages had a different social status in my community. English was the dominant language in the community. In Ontario, the current percentage of residents who have French as their first language is only 3.4% (Statistics Canada, 2022). Although French was the home and school language, English permeated every aspect of our lives. English was the language with the greatest symbolic power. This influenced how I engaged with my language repertoire across contexts and English became my preferred language for most social activities. I eventually opted to pursue my studies in English-medium universities (University of British Columbia, BA; Georgia State University, PhD) and English-medium programs (Universidad de las Americas Puebla, MA). And although I still considered French to be my first language, English had become my first and only language for research and publication purposes. During this stage of my academic career, I developed a research agenda primarily with learners of French, English, and Spanish focusing on how they drew on their knowledge of French, English, and Spanish as they completed a series of pedagogical tasks. While this research and teaching program may have seemed to reflect a plurilingual agenda, upon reflection, it was superficial in nature. Indeed, all of the academic activities were informed by colonial practices of the western world, or the global North: studying, reading, presenting at English-medium conferences, publishing, and writing grant applications, all in English. My academic practices reenforced colonial practices and the monolingual bias that is so prevalent in education, namely, the belief that the norm in society is to speak one language and that bi-/multilinguals are the exception (Kachru, 1994; May, 2019).

In 2015, everything changed. I was a faculty member in a small land grant institution in Idaho, a small state in the Pacific Northwest and attended a conference in Ontario, Canada that was co-hosted

by the Association Canadienne de linguistique appliquée/Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics (ACLA/CAAL) and the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL)<sup>1</sup>. During this French-English-medium conference, I discovered the work of Francophone scholars who shared their work in French, a practice that I had never observed at previous AAAL conferences. This conference created a space for plurilingual scholars to engage in a community of practice with shared goals, namely, to contribute quality and cutting-edge research in French. I consider this event to be a major turning point in my scholarly life. Through a gradual process of publishing in French, participating in professional associations that promote plurilingual practices, and advocating for scholars to develop a plurilingual publication agenda, I am now part of new communities of plurilingual scholars. Today, I consider myself to be an empowered plurilingual scholar who has the potential to contribute to real changes in academia.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

### Challenging my personal monolingual stance

I left the United States in 2017, after securing a faculty position in a teacher education program in Quebec, Canada. In the province of Quebec, French is the sole official language of government, education, and business. For the majority of Canadian-born citizens living in this province, English is learned through school-based programs (English is introduced in grade 1). To ensure quality instruction in the English language, the department of language education at my current institution is entirely dedicated to first and second/additional language (AL) teacher education. At the undergraduate level, most of the AL teacher candidates are seeking their K-12 teacher certification to work as French or English AL teachers in a franco-dominant Canadian province<sup>2</sup>. In this institution, the official language of instruction and administration is French. In the French teacher education

1 I wrote about my initial reflections regarding developing a plurilingual publishing agenda in Payant, C., & Belcher, D. D. (2019). The trajectory of a multilingual academic: Striving for academic literacy and publication success in a mother tongue. *Critical Multilingualism Studies*, 7(1), 11-31.

2 It is important to note that the province has a high number of children who speak languages other than French or English at home.

program, all courses are in French; however, in the English program, some courses are in English. At the graduate level, several students are in-service teachers, primarily of French as an additional language, yet, as I will discuss below, they regularly read published research in English. As such, in this plurilingual context, students are required to engage in plurilingual academic practices daily. However, these students do not necessarily have advanced academic literacies in all their languages. This realisation has had a major impact on my positionality towards English, on English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP), and on the value of additional languages in academia. It is imperative to address the monolingual bias in the field, while also exploring ways to empower emerging scholars who wish to engage using their entire plurilingual repertoire.

Today, I actively reflect on the status of the languages that comprise my academic language repertoire (French, English, Spanish) and the fluid boundaries between these languages in my daily interactions. Engaging in discussions with colleagues who work in diverse educational settings and conducting research on academic writing development with plurilingual learners have been instrumental in challenging my ideologies and practices. They have deepened my own understanding of the ways in which context can influence an individual educator's language practices: educational contexts (e.g., faculty meetings, classroom practices, research talk, interactions with students and colleagues) and social contexts (e.g., interactions with family and friends).

For more than a decade, I had adopted a monolingual stance and contributed to the hegemony of English in the world of publishing. However, I am much more critical of the dominance of English in academia and, as a result, I am engaged in collective empowerment, that is the collective action to change oppressive social structures at the local or higher levels of our society (Rowlands, 1995). Specifically, I adopt and promote a plurilingual stance which challenges the monolingual bias in education. This stance includes teaching, mentoring, researching, presenting, and publishing in languages other than English

and engaging in professional associations to advocate for inclusive practices.

### III.- Looking into the future

By critically engaging in discussions and practices that challenge language inequities and the hegemony of English in the field of language education and applied linguistics, I am beginning to appreciate the transformative power of these actions and believe in the perennity of the benefits. Below, examples of these actions are provided.

#### Contributing to the development of francophone and plurilingual scholars

When developing course syllabi, readings have always included rigorous and cutting-edge research published in top-tier English-medium journals as I believe these support students' developing content knowledge. While working in the United States in an MA TESOL program, I did not consider this to be problematic. When I transitioned to teaching in my new context, I continued this practice. Graduate students were expected to read and comprehend research written primarily in English but then to write research papers in French. They were expected to do this with limited academic literacy in English (Payant & Bell, 2023). The challenges of developing academic literacy in one language, let alone two languages, are significant. With time, I became more critical of these practices and began to identify more research published in French-medium journals, thus significantly transforming my syllabi reading lists making them plurilingual. This practice introduces future scholars to research published in French, often conducted with learners of a minority language (i.e., French) in a minority context (e.g., Canada). This practice further empowers aspiring plurilingual scholars by providing a model that it can be done and has been done and by also creating a space to engage in discussions about the place of all languages in research and the predominant role the English language continues to play. It allows us to question institutional monolingual biases and empowers students to participate in activities that further challenge the monolingual and

potential discriminatory and gatekeeping practices in academia.

### Engaging in practices that promote plurilingual literacy practices

In academia, English-medium journals have higher prestige, and many scholars will continue to prioritise English-only publication agendas. Yet, there is a burgeoning community of plurilingual scholars around the globe engaging in plurilingual publishing practices (Corcoran & Englander, 2021; Curry & Lillis, 2019). In 2019, I was invited to serve as a guest co-editor for a special issue for a French-medium journal. This was another truly pivotal event that empowered me to connect my beliefs and my actions, namely, situate my plurilingual practice in praxis. Although I accepted this task with both excitement and nervousness, I am now one of the co-editors-in-chief and have a deeper understanding of the underlying issues and complexities surrounding publication processes. I originally saw this as a strategy to contribute to increasing the number of publications that would be accessible to my own graduate students. Today, I understand how this journal benefits students from several French-medium and plurilingual universities who share a common interest in the learning and teaching of French as an AL. It also contributes to the creation of a stronger community of practice connecting practitioners and researchers dedicated to the development of scientific knowledge in languages other than English. Together, we actively contribute to the creation of a space for emerging and experienced researchers to access academic resources in French, discover local research that has local and global pedagogical implications, and challenge the hegemony of English in the field of language education and applied linguistics.

In 2023, I strive to model plurilingual literacy practices by also doing work in Spanish (e.g., conference presentations and workshops). Developing a plurilingual publication agenda has truly been, for me, a path towards experiencing greater satisfaction in my work and allowing me to feel more empowered by embracing my full linguistic identity, one which includes *mon identité franco-ontarienne* (Payant, 2022).

### Final thoughts

As applied linguists and language educators, we often work with students who are developing their academic literacies in a new language. Through education and our own experiences, we have a good understanding of some of the challenges they face in this process; however, it is important to experience the process and the emotions associated with *becoming plurilingual*. It is useful to actively reflect on our process of academic socialisation and engage in practices that challenge inequities. By engaging in praxis, that is critical reflection and action for transformation, I try to improve my own practices so that I may be a better model for my students and peers. I began this chapter by discussing praxis, which is both a process of engaging in critical reflection and of action for transformation. In my current community of practice, I am empowered to challenge certain biases and practices. As a result, I will continue to enact my plurilingual scholar identity and mentor future scholars to engage in critical reflection that challenge power inequities in their personal and professional lives.

### Critical thinking lens

All educators, regardless of genders, must engage in critical reflections about their own paths, to consider what facilitates or inhibits the process of becoming empowered women.

- Language identity is not a stable construct; rather, as we engage in social interactions in and with linguistically diverse individuals, we gain a deeper understanding of the ways our identities are shaped and (re)constructed. Produce a visual landscape that includes the colors, the symbols, the people, and the contexts that have influenced your identity, as a teacher and as a language user (Melo-Pfeifer, 2017; Melo-Pfeifer & Payant, 2022).
- As future and current educators in additional language learning and teaching, you will likely use two (or more) languages on a regular basis. In many educational contexts, teachers and students must abide by language policies that forbid the

use of additional languages such that they are told to leave their knowledge of their other languages outside the classroom. Discuss the ways in which the language policies in your current educational contexts may be restrictive or empowering in reinforcing or challenging monolingual language policies.

- The supremacy of one language or a variety over another reflects a standard language ideology. Ideologies are beliefs that are not always grounded in theory or empirical evidence. To critically reflect on language ideologies in your educational context, consider the ways in which being an English language teacher potentially reproduces the ideology that English is better than other languages.

### Discussion questions

To guide you in your process of reflection, below are some questions that focus on various dimensions of language identity, empowerment, and literacies.

1. Describe your language repertoire.
  - 1.1. Which languages did you include and why are these languages important to you?
  - 1.2. Did you omit any languages and what motivated this choice?
  - 1.2.1. Did your own language (in)securities with your languages influence this choice?
2. How does English language education in your educational context promote equality, inclusion, and diversity of your students' language repertoire?
3. How do you define literacies and how do you continue to develop your plurilingual academic literacies today?
4. In what ways do your teaching practices value plurilingual and plurimodal forms of knowledge?

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# Just More Work: Carving a Path for Research, Publication, and Materials Development

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## I.- Background

### Educational and Professional Journey

“Education takes me places because it took me all the way from the countryside of Vietnam to the U.S. and now to the world.” This is what I often say when introducing myself to others. It is also because education has been such an important aspect of who I am. The desire to excel and to go all the way in my educational journey was what motivated me as a learner in 12 years of school, 4 years of college, and 6 years of graduate studies (MA and doctorate). It is what pushed me to pursue a doctorate while working full-time as the director of the English Language Program at Chatham University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. When I completed my EdD in TESOL from Anaheim Univer-

sity under the supervision of Dr. Rod Ellis, a world-renowned applied linguist and scholar, I was often asked whether my doctorate helped me to have a promotion or a higher salary. I would respond, “No. It just gives me more work.” Learning and working have been certainly dominating my life. Indeed, my learner identity lingered with me so long that, after I defended my dissertation in early 2017, I immediately took a Chinese class to fill my time. My father jokingly asked, “When will you stop learning and start earning more money?”

My work history involves teaching three years in Vietnam before coming to the U.S. to pursue an MA in TESL at the Pennsylvania State University. I was fortunate to receive a teaching assistantship during my MA, which gave me the very first experience of teaching international students in the U.S. When I completed my MA, I returned to Vietnam to work for a year or so before coming back to the U.S. to get married. I often say, “Education brought me to the U.S., but marriage made me stay.” When I came back, I started looking for teaching opportunities. I found a part-time job at Chatham University and another one at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in Pittsburgh in 2011. At Chatham, I taught ESL courses to international students, something I still do, while at CMU I helped international teaching assistants work on their English so that they could be more effective instructors. After two semesters at Chatham University, I was recommended for the coordinator position of the English Language Program for international students at the university. I applied, got an interview with the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and was hired for the position. Looking back, I feel I was very fortunate to have the position because there are not many full-time ESL jobs at U.S. universities. I was in the right place, at the right time, and maybe showing the right skills and attitude.

I was thrown into a management position with many responsibilities, including teaching, advising, supervising, managing, and offering needed support and services to international students. I remember my first day at work involved taking home some dirty linens to launder so that they would be ready for new students! The challenges of a growing program thanks to the influx of Saudi students during my early years as the co-

ordinator pushed my organizational skills to my limit and gave me opportunities to truly interact with the world: through my students, many international partners that I have been working with, and conference and work travels. It's a position that has given me joys and also hurt. I use "hurt" without any blame because work has been such an intimate part of my life that "hurt" is something I expect sometimes.

It's the position where I've faced questions such as "Are you teaching Chinese?" "Are you teaching English to Chinese students" from those I introduced myself to. Perhaps there's something "strange" about the fact that I'm in it. I've been labeled "aggressive" and "emotional." I've heard comments such as "She's just an ESL teacher" or "You're not an academic. You're not in an academic department. Research is not part of your job." This is because my program teaches English to non-degree seeking students (e.g. exchange students who study abroad for one to three semesters) and is housed in the Office of International Affairs rather than in an academic department. Many comments, I suspect, have more to do with my gender, my non-native English speaker status, and my ethnicity rather than who I really am – experiences that have been reported in research into native speakerism, race and ethnicity in education, and language and gender (Holliday, 2006; Park, 2015; Tannen, 1996). These comments have affected me deeply but also helped me to realize my place in the academic ladder and the academic world. It has also opened my eyes to the kinds of barriers for advancement that were once invisible to me when I first came to the U.S. and enjoyed the freedom of being on my own in a culture that is more individualistic than mine. This realization, however, does not stop me from doing more outside of my full-time job. I have found ways to carve a small path to academic activities that I enjoy, including research, publication, and materials development.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

### My Path to Research

My path to research started with my dissertation on learner engagement in performing tasks, which resulted in a journal article with Language Teach-

ing Research. One finding of the project is that when learners perform a task that they prefer, they produce more language, negotiate meaning and form more often, and express more positive subjective responses to the task. These together show a higher level of engagement. I then continued to research the relationship between choice and task engagement with Sachiko Nakamura and Hayo Reinders. Thanks to the project, we have a journal article published in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, a top journal in the field, and a chapter in the book *Student Engagement in the Language Classroom*. We found that tasks with less constrained choice encourage a higher level of engagement among learners. Another project that I conducted with a colleague at Chatham University examined international students' experiences and strategy use, leading to a publication in the *Journal of International Students*. One finding, among others, is that speaking opportunities give students mixed emotions, including pride, joy, shame, and embarrassment, which highlight the affective aspect of speaking activities inside and outside the classroom. These research findings have informed much of my later work in materials development. In addition, with these publications, I have occasionally been invited to review research articles, which keeps me engaged in reading academic research and being a member of a research community. I am humbled and excited by the fact that there's more research into learner engagement and that my research, once published, has impact in the field.

My most recent research project is with my college friend and colleague, Dr. Hoa Nguyen from Teachers College, Columbia University. We have been examining various teaching techniques in the Zoom-based classroom, including output-prompting techniques, input manipulation techniques, multimedia learning, and gamification. This project has been so engaging and satisfying in that we met weekly for a few years, analyzing data and reading literature. It has also given us the opportunities to present at AAAL (American Association for Applied Linguistics) and TESOL to share preliminary findings and brought us closer as friends and mothers of young girls. Our research findings highlight the need for teaching tech-

niques, learning activities, and materials that take into consideration principles of second language acquisition, such as meaningful input, output, and corrective feedback instead of focusing on the bells and whistles that some ed-tech platforms offer.

Overall, research, as I mentioned earlier, is not part of my day job, but by reading research, joining a research community (such as the Research Methods in Applied Linguistics Facebook group), and collaborating with colleagues, I manage to carve out part of my time for research. I will never be as prolific as those who work in an environment that requires and supports research (as documented in a paper Way et al., 2019), but I enjoy the intellectual stimulation that it brings and its usefulness in my other endeavors.

### Path to Authorship

Being an author does not have to be something fancy, but to be an author, we must write and write regularly. My path to authorship started with a small contribution to the book *New Ways of Teaching Adults* by Hayo Reinders and Marilyn Lewis. It is an interactive crossword puzzle in which students have to work in pairs and explain the words that they have to solve the puzzle together. I was also invited to write an essay to the book *Gần Nhu Là Nhà* (Almost Home), which is a collection of personal essays by Vietnamese students and professionals living overseas like me. In the essay, I write about my integration journey in the U.S. while commenting on experience of a minority and a “stranger” in the U.S. I was invited simply because I sometimes shared my thoughts on Facebook, which drew the attention of an editor of the book. Small contributions have led to bigger projects, such as my co-authored book *Studying in English: Strategies for Success in Higher Education* with Hayo Reinders and Marilyn Lewis. We share strategies to improve English to students who want to pursue a degree taught in English either in their home country or abroad. We are now thinking of turn the book into shorter lessons in the audio format to make it more accessible to the younger generations who favor bite-sized lessons. As a side note, Hayo Reinders was my former professor at Anaheim University, who perhaps saw

my competence and collaborative spirit and invited me to collaborate more.

The arrival of my now-four-year-old daughter inspired me engage with language and language development in a entirely new light. Having her brought me so much joy and love that I started to write creatively. There was so much feeling in being a new mother that I couldn’t contain and I started to write poems, which I hadn’t written at all in my life before. Perhaps they are not really poems according to certain standards, but as a language teacher, I enjoyed putting words down on paper, flipping them, turning them, and working them to death. My first poem for my daughter was titled *Translanguaging: Hallie’s First Words*, which features her first words in English and Vietnamese. This poem is being made into a bilingual English-Vietnamese picture book to be distributed for free for over a thousand Vietnamese families in the U.S. and other countries by the non-profit organization *Stories of Vietnam*, which is dedicated to supporting families in maintaining their Vietnamese language and culture through bilingual books.

The very first picture book that I published, however, is *Tug of Words*, which portrays my multi-racial family, teaches young children simple opposite concepts, and helps them to discover the differences and similarities in all of us. Through this book, I ventured into self-publishing, which means I am the publisher of the book by covering the cost and selling the book myself. This process has been empowering to me, and I’m thinking of self-publishing the next children’s book (tentatively titled *Four Seasons Together*) and a booklet on *IELTS Speaking*. (*IELTS* stands for International English Language Testing System and is a popular English test that students take as proof of their English proficiency for admission into universities). Honestly, the revenues from my books haven’t covered my expenses, but I enjoy writing, creating, and seeing the final product come into being. I have to say that I’m mostly doing this for love and enjoyment. However, I have also learned that if you want to go anywhere with self-publishing, you need to have a catalog of books on the market. I am trying to produce more and see where this path is taking me.

## Path to Materials Development

Finally, I have to mention the work that I've been doing for Eduling, an organization that I set up to offer more English language services materials to learners from any location. Through Eduling, I've created over 100 YouTube videos for the Eduling channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@eduling>), dozens of blog posts for Eduling (<https://www.eduling.org/news>), and recently a mobile app called Eduling Speak (<https://www.eduling.org/speak>) to connect learners to talk in pairs using communicative tasks. The app is a culmination of my research in task-based language teaching, experience in creating materials for language learning, and a "just do it" attitude. It is also a passion project in that I've been working on it obsessively with a team of IT developers for over a year now. Working on certain projects with some level of obsession is perhaps how I get things done.

The app has more than 550 tasks of all types to engage learners in listening, reading, and speaking through tasks. There are picture-based tasks, crossword puzzles, scrambled sentences, speeches, interviews, and more. I've developed most of the tasks, but teachers and students from various countries have also contributed diverse content to the app. Currently, I'm working on a series of what I call Eduling Tiny Lessons for the app. Students listen to three-to-five-minute lessons on vocabulary, culture, conversation strategies, IELTS strategies, and pronunciation. I am also writing a series of Dictogloss tasks that tell a story about an international student in the U.S. named Mia. Although I don't have an ESL textbook that is published globally, I can call myself a materials writer because of all these lessons and activities that I write and create. I believe that all teachers are materials creators because of the work we do to bring materials to life in the classroom for our students. I strongly believe that it is important to create materials that are familiar and relevant to the students we are teaching (Phung, 2017). What I am doing differently is that I start to share more albeit through non-traditional channels.

## III.- Looking forward into the future

### Final Comment

As a final comment, I would like to encourage everyone to do more of what makes them happy. I would also like to share what I learned about the concept of happiness in a Ted talk by Martin Seligman, usually credited as the father of positive psychology (also see Seligman, 2002). Happiness has the three dimensions of living a pleasant life, an engaged life, and a meaningful life. Having a good meal, watching children play, or walking on the beach on a beautiful day give us pleasures. When you use your strengths to work on a challenge that is achievable and are absorbed in it, you may experience what is called flow, an optimal state of engagement, and feel a sense of exaltation and joy. I have been certainly engaged in my work, which gives me satisfaction and comfort in something that I always have for myself (work). To me, it is liberating to think of my identity as not intertwined with my daughter, my husband, or my family although they are, of course, important to me. My identity is what I always have for myself, and work is such a big part of it.

Meaning and a bigger purpose, however, are something I am still searching for. Sometimes, I feel it is because I sometimes focus so much on the moment and going through the motions of life and work that I do not see the bigger picture. Being connected with teachers, colleagues, and human beings will, I believe, give me a sense of bigger purpose.

### Discussion questions

1. What activities give you a sense of meaning and purpose?
2. What barriers have you experienced in your career path?
3. What issues in English language teaching that you think can be better solved by working together?

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# Finding your niche and striking out on your own

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## I.- Background

For the past 25 years, almost half my life, all my work has had some connection to the English language and English language teaching. And for too many of those years, I have struggled with self-confidence, with what we all know today as ‘imposter syndrome’, that feeling that I do not really deserve what I have achieved. In my work, I encounter incredible women all the time – great teachers, speakers, thinkers, innovators – and it took me a long time to realize that another person’s excellence does not nullify my own. I know that might sound silly or obvious, but it’s a lesson that, at least for me, was hard to learn. This story, my story, is about learning that lesson. It is about how I came to find space for my own success in a field full of smart, successful people and managed to strike out on my own to create my own niche, a professional place made by me and for me.

I have had the great fortune of being able to craft my own career path, a path that has led me to a satisfying and varied professional life in just the place I want to live. I currently wear several hats – I own a small translation agency, I am a translator and editor of academic texts, I teach academic and research

writing at numerous universities in my region of Spain, I am a teacher trainer and teacher continuing professional development (CPD) facilitator, and I am an instructor of translation. I honestly love every single one of these roles, and although it is sometimes difficult to fit them all in, I would not give any of them up. Each of these areas of specialization started with a big first step outside of my comfort zone and into a place populated by wonderful people who helped me gain my footing.

## II.- Empowerment and leadership development

I could write an entire book about all the people who helped me become the English language teacher that I am today, but this chapter is about striking out on my own, so I am going to start somewhere in the middle of the story. A few years after I moved to Spain, I was approached by a couple of teachers and translators I was acquainted with through the immigrant community in the region I lived. They were looking to start a cooperative of language teachers and translators and invited me to join them as the coordinator of the English language program. In Spain, cooperatives are legal entities made up of a group of people who own equal parts in a business established for the purpose of offering goods or services. There is no one ‘boss’, all the tasks are divided among the members, and everyone earns approximately the same amount of money. Imagine you work for a private language school. The owner of the school offers business English courses to the companies in the area at a rate of, let’s say just as an example, 50 euros per hour. Well, the owner has to spend that 50 euros to cover all the overhead (rent, insurance, utilities, accounting, marketing or materials) and to pay his or her own salary and the salaries of any other non-earning employees. And the teacher, who is the person who actually does the work and who actually gives value to the service, ends up getting a relatively small proportion of that fee. In a cooperative without a physical school like ours, the teacher gets the 50 euros almost in its entirety. Also, the teacher has a real say in how the business should be run, whether the cooperative should seek new clients or consolidate the client base they currently have, what materials to use and how to use

them, when she wants to work and when she cannot, how much to charge or how to share any profits. She participates in literally every single decision. Now that's empowering.

Coordinating the English program for the cooperative was not my first supervisory role, but it was the first time I was able to make a difference in what I and my colleagues did and how we did it. The cooperative started out very small with just a handful of teachers and only one full-time translator, but it was huge to us. We had the freedom to try new ways of working, new teaching ideas, new ways to attract clients, and new territories to expand into – all decided through consultation, cooperation, and consensus. With that kind of support, taking steps into uncharted territory is much less daunting. And into uncharted territory we went! With me at the helm, we developed English for specific purposes courses for the different departments of multinational companies and pitched them to human resources departments (and very often sold them); we ran numerous, huge general and specific English courses for the employees of a local theme park, owned at the time by Universal Studios; we offered courses in what we would call community colleges in the US; we created executive courses for one-to-one classes with industry leaders; we recruited and trained teachers to keep up with our expanding business, and many, many other things that none of us had ever done before. And it was scary and intimidating and not always successful, but it was ours, and I felt (rightly so) that no matter what the result, the cooperative and my group of colleagues and friends would carry on and continue to generate ideas and act on them.

Although I was bolstered and encouraged by a team of extremely talented and tireless ELT professionals, I consider the work I did at the cooperative the first time I really struck out on my own and started becoming the architect of my own career. I loved working with the cooperative, and I stayed in that job for many years, but as any seasoned teacher will know, even in the best, most supportive of contexts, teachers can burn out. After nearly ten years coordinating the program and teaching business English all

over our region, I decided to make a lateral move towards the world of translation. I earned a Master's in Translation and Localization from my local university and slowly took over the role of translation coordinator for the cooperative. And then I struck out on my own again. As a translator in the cooperative, I earned considerably less than I had as a teacher, and I wanted to earn more and build a new business of my own. At that time in my life, I had been entrusted with responsibility several times and had enjoyed a certain degree of success, so I felt rather confident that I could start my own business. I also knew that if I failed, I could do something else. And that is an important lesson I learned in the cooperative. Not everything works, but there's always something else to try.

So, I started my own translation agency. The cooperative decided that if I left, they would stop offering translation as a service and that I could take over all their existing translation clients. As I had been coordinating the translation side of the cooperative, I already had a relationship with the clients, and I moved into my own business rather seamlessly. That was in 2008. I worked very, very hard for five solid years, and then I found myself sorely missing the classroom – missing my students, missing trying new things, and missing the satisfaction that teaching so often brings. I accepted a teaching job in 2013 at the University of Oregon and returned to live in the United States after 15 years abroad. I learned a lot during my time in the States, but the biggest take-away was this: the grass is always greener on the other side. I missed everything about my life in Spain, and I went back after just one year.

Life went on at my translation agency, which was run by my assistant while I was in Oregon, but I still wanted to get back in the classroom. On a whim. I applied for an English Language Fellowship with the US Department of State's English Language Programs in 2015 and was accepted. I moved to Peru for two years and I started venturing farther and farther outside my comfort zone, pushing myself to try things I had always wanted to do. I was responsible for providing teacher professional development on a scale that was new to me. And I had to work at it.

I read and studied, listened, and learned, and the knowledge I acquired through that hard work gave me that initial confidence I needed to step into that role. That's when I really began to understand that I wanted to focus on teacher training and professional development in the next phase of my career. And that experience in Peru was so enriching in so many other ways as well. I saw that I could make a difference, not only in teacher effectiveness, but also in teacher job satisfaction. I saw teachers blossom, sometimes after having been in the profession for decades, into professionals excited to try new things in their classrooms, professionals excited to offer their students more engaging, meaningful instruction. And that satisfaction was delightfully contagious. I knew this was something I wanted to do.

After Peru, I worked as an English Language Specialist in Tajikistan a few different times, which led to another position at Webster University in Uzbekistan, which in turn got me involved with the TESOL International Association's role in Uzbekistan's ambitious English Speaking Nation initiative and other projects. These were all positions in which I worked under others, but I was also afforded a huge amount of freedom within the parameters of these projects – freedom, again, to try new things and new ways of working and use my creativity to ensure the success of my students and of the programs I was working in.

Thanks to my dedicated colleagues, my translation agency remained in business during all this time, so I always had a job to come back to. It was during one of these times when I was 'just' working as an editor and translator that I decided to tune in to a webinar offered by a professional translator association I am a member of. The webinar was about expanding your services to include research writing training, and I was interested because it sounded like a great way to combine two of the roles I love most: academic editing and teaching.

This is the most recent time I struck out on my own. It turns out that the webinar presenter wanted to change careers and was looking for someone to take

over some of her courses. I contacted her privately and she put me in touch with several universities and university departments. I developed new courses and pitched them to the people responsible for scheduling complementary courses for PhD students, and I sold them! This is such a striking example of the power of networking. I had been a member of that professional association for years, but, for one reason or another, I had never attended any of the workshops they offered before that one. I said at the beginning of this chapter that this field is full of smart, successful people, and these are just the people we need to meet and talk to, even if it is only to share a comment or a laugh. The experiences of women like yourself are invaluable. They show you what is possible with a little effort (or a lot) and make you realize that it is all possible.

My research writing courses are for non-native speakers of English who want to (or must) submit their work in English for publication to international journals. Most of my students are doing truly groundbreaking research in fields as diverse as genetics, biomedicine, law, and history. On our first day of class, I always ask my students to practice an elevator pitch to describe their research very briefly to at least three or four other people in the group. I am always amazed by how deep their knowledge is and how passionate they are about their area of study. One of my major goals as their teacher is to allow them to talk and write about that passion in English so they can share it with the rest of the world.

That goal is especially important for my female students. Although the number of PhDs awarded to women and men in Spain is rather equal (52% awarded to women in 2018, EC SHE Figures, 2021), many studies have revealed that international scientific journals publish significantly fewer articles authored by women than by men (Bendels et al., 2018; Mun & Akinyemi, 2020, among others). There are a lot of reasons for this that are beyond my control – institutional barriers, household and care responsibilities, bias on the part of the journals themselves, to name just a few – but what I can do is to help boost the confidence of these women, as so many people have done for me, to make sure they know their worth, to help

them feel sure of themselves when writing and speaking in English so they can share their brilliance as the lead author (and lead is a key word here) of research papers published for the entire scientific community to see.

I think my role as a teacher trainer and CPD facilitator is also powerful for the women I work with. In many cultures, women are raised to take a back-seat to men, and even to hold their own creativity in check to allow their male counterparts to shine a little brighter. I don't think any of them would admit this, and most of them don't even realize that they're doing it, but I've seen it happen again and again and again. After lots of soft but persistent encouragement, when I see the women in my groups gradually opening up and unapologetically proposing completely out-of-the-box ideas, I feel I have accomplished a major goal. Everyone has a voice, and every voice deserves to be heard.

One of the aspects I was asked to reflect on in this chapter was the obstacles I've faced as a woman in ELT and how I have managed to overcome them. I thought about that for a long time and came to realize that the biggest and most persistent obstacle I have faced has been self-doubt. And it stands in the way of many, many talented, passionate professionals. People like to say that you can do anything you set your mind to, but I don't think that it is necessarily true. I think a more accurate statement might be the other way around, that you can set your mind to do anything. Striking out on your own, jumping in and taking on new challenges does not always result in success, but it does require a confident mindset, and that mindset can go a long way towards contributing to a sense of personal and professional satisfaction that working for others can't give you.

### III.- Looking forward into the future

The next big step I would like to take along my career path is to get my feet wet in research. I'm not affiliated with a single university; I don't need to 'publish or perish'. I am simply interested in expanding my horizons and pushing myself to find out more about the things I am interested in beyond merely collecting

anecdotal evidence. I want to investigate the effects of English language teacher professional development on teacher happiness and growth. I'm lucky to work with colleagues for whom this is also an interesting subject and who can provide support and guidance to contribute to its success. So, that is what I have planned for my immediate future, to set out in a slightly different direction, but one chosen by me and purely for me.

### Critical thinking leading bullets

- Compare the different degrees of self-determination and agency women have in relation to work in your country or community.
- Analyze the effects of the advent of the 'gig economy' on women and their work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Develop a business plan for striking out on your own (or with some colleagues) and starting a business that would both earn money and make you happy.

### Discussion questions

1. The author talks about striking out on her own in three different ways: as part of a cooperative, as a business owner, and as an individual freelancer. What are the advantages and disadvantages to each of these ways of working? Which one appeals to you most?
2. The author describes several different but related jobs she's held over the course of her career. If you wanted to complement your teaching career with another area of specialization, what would it be?
3. Have you heard the term 'imposter syndrome' before? Do you think it is something most people experience at some point in their lives? Do you think women are more susceptible to feelings of self-doubt than men in your culture?

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# Epilogue

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**W**hen Araceli Salas and Grazzia Mendoza, the editors of this volume, approached me to write this epilogue, I felt humbled. I also felt lost because I thought...and still think...that there is little for me to add. I was also aware of my identity as a man, and the privileges attached to this dimension of who I am. I am also aware that many of the issues discussed in the previous pages are due to men behaving in ways which are just disgraceful. Fortunately, deconstructing and unsettling heteropatriarchy is here to stay, and this is just the beginning. Let me now give this epilogue a try.

This volume has been a collection of stories. But not any easy-to-forget-stories. At least not to those, as Maya Angelou (1978) would call, “phenomenal” women who are

teacher educators/immigrants/mothers/teachers/researchers/travelers

who felt resilient, empowered, and bold enough

## TO WRITE THEM

as a testimony of what they have been through and how strong they have emerged. I navigated each story as a road, a journey, because this is what they are. Their point of departure is their lived experiences with language teaching in many forms, colours, shapes, and textures. Their destination is clear; it is an empowering future built on the reflective accounts of personal and collective pasts.

As I read these stories, I particularly mulled over the “Looking forward into the future” section of each chapter because this is where I could find the seeds to feedforward, to expand, to grow, to invite, to provoke, to move on. And I noted down the ingredients shared by the contributors for a recipe of unstoppable growth and transformation:

- Resilience to reflect and move forward
- Voices, ones which are loud and clear, ones which shall not be silenced
- Leadership, built by creating communities based on solidarity, interpersonal relationships and powerful collaborations
- Wellbeing, as a reminder of the importance of caring of their own health, which included attention to emotionality, even when it involves addressing trauma

- Respect, not only for others but also for themselves as a way to celebrate achievements and, at a deeper and more unsettling level, sorority to defy patriarchal systems of power that have systemically discriminated against women
- Projective professionalism to imagine empowered selves interested in doing research, keeping on learning, leading, propagating good practices, pushing boundaries, turning tables, and making equity a central feature of educational practices

These ingredients are inherent to the lives of the women brought together in this volume. I should note that such ingredients have been carefully weighed and mixed to elaborate thought-provoking narratives of empowerment. Now, the question is: What do we do with them? How do we go from here? I would like to articulate three ways of moving forward, which are not groundbreaking, but these are the ones I could think of.

First, the chapters could be analysed to further understand how writing could be a catalyst and a springboard to negotiate experiences and identities. These women's biographies, pretty much like in Colombani's (2020) novel, are interwoven to make a fabric that can help bring hope, protection, warmth, and encouragement to other women, or anyone in general. Perhaps, these stories could be further examined by adopting Barkhuizen's (2016) three-level approach to story: (1) story: each contributor's personal emotions and thoughts, (2) Story: each contributor's interaction with institutional members such as school principals, line managers, or people in a position of power/authority (not always interchangeable), and (3) STORY: the broader socio-political context in which the contributors' stories took place. In this regard, I see a line of inquiry, and this book could be its genesis within the areas of cultural studies, feminist theory, and (language) education.

Second, the volume could be included as an empowering and provoking pedagogical resource in the authors' professional practices as well as in a whole variety of settings. What do I mean by this? I mean that the volume could become core reading in courses on language teaching, professional development, educational leadership, language learning development, academic writing, and so on, that any language educator is involved in. By suggesting this, I seek to emphasise that the volume could achieve more sustainable impact by being embedded in language teaching and language teacher education curricula so that future pre-service as well as in-service teachers benefit from the stories put together. From a pedagogical standpoint, not only does the volume provide compelling cases; it also offers an intercultural, English as an international language approach as the authors come from different sociocultural backgrounds, inhabit overlapping geographical and cultural territories, and narrate practices that seem to be rooted in issues that are the product of cultural constructions. Therefore, the volume could be incorporated in undergraduate as well as postgraduate language teaching programmes. However, its potential does not end there. For example, imagine setting up a reading group that acts as a form of continuing professional development initiative. Imagine suggesting this volume as reading material. Imagine encouraging those in the group to write something along the same lines or engage in telling their stories through other genres and multimodal means. Imagine enabling the group to write in any language they want so that what started as a collection of narratives on women in English language teaching could extend into language education from a broader and more encompassing perspective to embrace, for example, minoritised languages.

Last, the volume could also be promoted through mini-conferences, be them in-person, online, hybrid, webinars, podcasts, etc., to ignite other fires everywhere so that more women can find inspiration and support to act, mentor, challenge, fight back, lead, engage, and grow individually and collectively. Such way of

disseminating the work done here could be either self-led and initiated or in partnership with others. I can think of teacher associations, but not just the big ones (e.g., TESOL, IATEFL). In fact, as these stories reveal, working from the bottom up could be just as transformational, genuine, and sustainable. I imagine initiatives carried out with local teacher associations, small groups of educators who share the same passion, resilience, and challenges. I imagine working with non-governmental organisations driven by a feminist ethos, but also with those which take an intersectionality approach (Crenshaw, 1989; Gillborn, 2015) to recognise how different categories (e.g., race, faith, educational background, nationality, sexual orientation) of our identities may become sites of privilege or discrimination.

I would like to go by saying that exciting times are coming. And what makes them exciting? As the women included in this volume have unequivocally shown, these times are of enacting equity, enacting a better world not by waiting for others to do something, but by taking the first step ourselves.

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# Editors



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Araceli Salas has a PhD in Language Science and an MA in ELT. Dr. Salas is a researcher at *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*, Mexico, where she teaches in the B.A. and M.A. ELT programs. Dr. Salas serves as the editor-in-chief of *Lenguas en Contexto* and associate-editor of the MEXTESOL Journal. Dr. Salas has published several articles and book chapters in the ELT field. and she has been a speaker in local and international events. Her research interests include teacher-education, mentoring research, discourse analysis and Leadership in ELT.

Araceli Salas tiene un doctorado en Ciencias del Lenguaje y una maestría en ELT. Dra. Salas es investigadora de la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, México, donde enseña en la licenciatura y programas de maestría en Enseñanza de inglés. Dra. Salas es también editora-en-jefe de *Lenguas en Contexto* y editor asociado de la Revista MEXTESOL. La Dra. Salas ha publicado varios artículos y capítulos de libros en el campo de la Enseñanza de inglés y ha sido conferencista en foros locales e internacionales. Sus intereses de investigación incluyen la formación docente, la investigación en enseñanza de lenguas, análisis del discurso y Liderazgo en ELT.



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Grazzia Mendoza is a researcher the at UW-Madison/SoE/WCER/WIDA and a former Education Specialist at USAID Honduras, where she managed and designed education projects to support the Ministry of Education. She holds a M.Ed. in international education and a M.A. in TESOL. US State Department Alumna recognized for her projects for teacher professional development and by TESOL International Association through the Virginia French Allen and Outstanding Advocate Awards.

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# Collaborators



## *Foreword* Annie Altamirano

Annie Altamirano graduated as a teacher of English at ISP “Juan XXII” de Bahía Blanca, Argentina and holds an MA in ELT and Applied Linguistics, University of London. She is an international speaker, trainer and author based in Spain and has given teacher-training workshops in Europe, Asia and Latin America. For many years she served as a Cambridge English Language Assessment presenter and a mentor with the Cambridge Teacher Support Service. As author, she has published extensively with all major international publishers. She is currently the vice-president of TESOL-SPAIN.

*Annie Altamirano se graduó como profesora de inglés en el ISP “Juan XXII” de Bahía Blanca, Argentina, y es Magister en Enseñanza de Inglés y Lingüística Aplicada por la Universidad de Londres. Con un amplio trabajo como docente durante más de 20 años, se ha desempeñado también como Cambridge Oral Examiner y formadora para Cambridge University Press & Assessment. A esto suma su trayectoria como autora con las más importantes editoriales internacionales. Ha impartido talleres y cursos de formación en distintos países de Latinoamérica, Europa y Asia. Actualmente reside en España desde donde realiza su labor profesional como formadora independiente. Es también vicepresidente de TESOL-SPAIN.*



## *Epilogue* Darío Luis Banegas

Darío Luis Banegas, originally from Argentina, is Lecturer in Language Education at the University of Edinburgh. He is deputy head of Post-graduate Research. Darío leads courses and projects on curriculum development and social justice. He is actively involved in initiatives in South America and elsewhere. He has published and presented at conferences for over two decades.

*Darío Luis Banegas, originario de Argentina es profesor en educación en lenguas en la Universidad de Edimburgo. Es vice-director de investigación doctoral, y lidera cursos y proyectos en torno al desarrollo curricular y la justicia social. Está activamente involucrado en iniciativas en Sudamérica y en otros contextos. Ha publicado y presentado en conferencias por más de dos décadas.*

# Authors



Alia Hadid  
Syria/USA

Alia Hadid is an Assistant Professor of TESOL at Rhode Island College. Living in various countries and learning multiple languages has made her sensitive to other cultures and language learners' needs. Her life and experiences have led her to pursue a career in teaching. In her research, she focuses on the experiences of language learners, especially those from refugee backgrounds. Her other research interests include language learner identity and online language learning. Currently, she serves as the Chair Elect for TESOL'S Refugee Interest Section. Dr. Hadid aspires to create optimal learning environments and provide equitable learning opportunities to all involved.

علياء حديد هي أستاذ مساعد في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية لغير الناطقين بها في كلية رود آيلاند. سكنت علياء في عدة دول وتعلمت عدة لغات مما جعلها متفهمة لحضارات أخرى و الاحتياجات متعلمي اللغة. دفعتها حياتها و خبراتها لتحري حياة مهنية في مجال التعليم. و هي تركز في أبحاثها على تجارب متعلمي اللغة و خاصة اللاجئين و من ضمن اهتماماتها الأخرى البحث في هوية متعلمي اللغة و تعليم اللغة عبر الانترنت. و هي حالياً الرئيس القادم في القسم المعنى بشؤون اللاجئين التابع لمؤتمر TESOL. دكتورة حديد تطمح لأن تخلق أجواء تعليمية متميزة و لأن توفر فرص تعليمية عادلة للجميع.



Anabell Rodriguez  
El Salvador

Ms. Anabell Rodriguez is a Salvadoran educator, leader and Fulbrighter who has devoted her work to three big areas: English Language Teaching, Curriculum Design and Project Management. She has worked as an educator for more than 20 years at different levels of the educational system. She has advised schools and universities in several countries in Latin America. As a curriculum designer, she has worked in the design of several courses, university programs and nationwide curriculum. As a Project Manager, she has developed social impact projects in different areas of El Salvador. Her projects are focused on the implementation of effective language teaching and girl and women empowerment. One of her greatest achievements has been to lead the US Alumni Association as their president from 2021-2023.

Anabell Rodríguez es una educadora salvadoreña, líder y becaria Fulbright que se ha dedicado a tres grandes áreas: la enseñanza del idioma inglés, el diseño curricular y la gestión de proyectos. Ella cuenta con una experiencia profesional en el área de educación de más de 20 años en diferentes niveles del sistema educativo. Ha asesorado a escuelas, colegios y universidades en varios países de América Latina. En el área de diseño curricular, ha trabajado en el diseño de varios cursos, programas universitarios y planes de estudio a nivel nacional. Como jefe de proyectos, ha desarrollado proyectos de impacto social en diferentes áreas de El Salvador. Sus proyectos se centran en la implementación de una enseñanza efectiva del inglés, habilidades para la vida, y el empoderamiento de niñas y mujeres. Uno de sus mayores logros ha sido ser la presidenta de la Asociación de Becarios de Estados Unidos de 2021-2023.



Blanca Adriana Téllez Méndez  
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Blanca Adriana Téllez Méndez holds a master's degree on Language Sciences. She is a teaching educator at the *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*, where she teaches Discourse Analysis, English as a Foreign Language, and Linguistics courses. She has been involved in academic and administrative projects. Her research interests include curriculum design, discourse analysis particularly from systemic linguistics theory and more recently legitimacy code theory. She has been Tutorial Coordinator, Planning and Evaluation Department Coordinator, and Bachelor Teaching English Language program coordinator at BUAP.

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Caroline Payant  
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Caroline Payant est professeure au Département de didactique des langues de l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Her research focuses on the mobilization of the linguistic resources of plurilingual learners in different communication and learning contexts as well as on linguistic insecurity and discrimination in educational contexts. Elle est la 2e vice-présidente de l'Association Québécoise des enseignant.es de français langue seconde (AQEFLS) et de l'Association canadienne de linguistique appliquée (ACLA). Depuis 2020, elle est co-rédactrice en chef de la Revue de l'AQEFLS.



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Catherine James Njau teaches at Mboni Secondary School in Tanzania, is a regional TELTA coordinator, founder of Kuleana, and currently serving on TESOL's Affiliate Network Professional Council while working on a master's degree in management and administration in Education Planning and Policy at the Open University of Tanzania



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Dawn Lucovich is Immediate Past President of The Japan Association for Language Teaching (全国語学教育学会; JALT), a member of the TESOL International Association Nominating Committee, and an Assistant Professor at The University of Nagano. She previously served on the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Conference Task Force, as well as President of the JALT Tokyo and Nagano Chapters, coordinator of the JALT Writers' Peer Support Group (online writing center), and research grants co-chair for the JALT Vocabulary SIG. She has most recently co-authored a chapter on critical friendships among leaders (in press). Her other research interests include discourse communities, linguistic landscapes, and leadership skill formation.



**Gabriela Alhor Martínez**  
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Gabriela Alhor Martínez holds an ELT master's degree from *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*. Gaby has been involved in education for more than 30 years. During all these years she has discovered that her students have always been her driving force. She has contributed in the areas of linguistics and language teaching. Her primary research interests are on Applied Linguistics, Professional development, Language teacher identities, women empowerment, gender and inclusion.

*Gabriela Alhor Martínez tiene una maestría en enseñanza del Inglés, por la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. Ha trabajado por más de 30 años en la Educación donde ha descubierto que su inspiración reside en sus propios estudiantes. Sus principales intereses académicos y de investigación son la lingüística aplicada, el desarrollo profesional, la identidad de los profesores de Inglés, empoderamiento femenino, perspectiva de género e inclusión.*



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Gabriela Kleckova chairs the Department of English at the Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia in Plzen, the Czech Republic, where she also teaches second language teacher education courses to preservice and in-service teachers. Her professional interests include teacher education, innovation in education, and leadership. For TESOL's 50th anniversary, she was named one of 30 emerging leaders shaping the future of the profession. Gabriela Kleckova served as TESOL International Association president for 2021-2022.



Harshini Lalwani



Stael Ruffinelli

**Harshini Lalwani**  
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Harshini Lalwani is an ESL consultant providing services to schools and institutions in Paraguay. She trains for Trinity College London's Teacher training courses. She has been a senior teacher, moderator, and an IELTS examiner for the British Council. Harshini serves actively as a board member of the PARATESOL organization and works closely with the Instituto Stael Ruffinelli de Ortiz- English.



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Ilka Kostka is a teaching professor at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. She teaches a range of English language courses to undergraduate and graduate international students and is passionate about developing student-centered approaches to teaching English in academic settings. She has taught English in the United States and in China.



**Irene Maganga**  
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Irene Maganga is a secondary school English language teacher in Tanzania, East Africa. She is currently the Professional Development Coordinator of the Tanzanian English Language Teachers' Association (TELTA) and the Assistant Professional Development Coordinator of Africa ELTA. Irene is a teacher trainer and presenter who has presented at several webinars, trainings and conferences from 2020 to date.

*Irene Maganga ni mwalimu wa lugha ya Kiingereza kwa shule za sekondari nchini Tanzania, Afrika Mashariki. Irene ni mratibu wa ukuzaji wa taaluma za walimu wa lugha ya Kiingereza kwenye chama cha walimu wa lugha ya Kiingereza nchini Tanzania (TELTA), vilevile ni naibu mratibu wa ukuzaji wa taaluma za walimu wa lugha ya Kiingereza kwenye chama cha walimu wa lugha ya Kiingereza Barani Afrika (Africa ELTA). Pia, ni mkufunzi wa walimu na mwasilishaji aliyewasilisha katika mikutano, mafunzo na warsha mbalimbali tangu 2020 hadi sasa.*



**Jane Petring**  
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Jane Petring is an English Language Specialist who has taught, administered and written textbooks for ESL/EFL programs for over 40 years. She holds a B.A. and M.A. in Linguistics and TESOL from Michigan State University, served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in West Africa, a Fulbright lecturer in Croatia and a US State Department Fellow in Tanzania. She taught at Cégep Édouard-Montpetit near Montréal, Québec for 24 years and was awarded the AQPC (Association québécoise de pédagogie collégiale) Mention d'honneur for teaching excellence.



**Kathleen Brown**  
USA/Japan

Kathleen Brown has been active in Japan since 1986. Finishing a B.A. degree in Japanese Studies, she headed off to Japan “for a year” and is still here in 2023. While working full-time and raising 3 children, Kathleen finished her M.Ed. and Ed.D. and is currently a professor at Kurume University. Her research is in curriculum development and assessment, but one of her main highlights has been working with female colleagues and encouraging women to mentor and support each other.



**Khanh-Duc Kuttig**  
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Khanh-Duc Kuttig has an MA in TESOL and teaches pre-service teachers at the University of Siegen in Germany. She is involved in IATEFL’s Teacher Training and Education SIG, TESOL’s Teacher Educator Interest Section and is Incoming Chair of TESOL’s Professional Development Professional Council. Her biggest achievement to date is the Teacher of Year award which she won in 2021. She is currently a doctoral student at the Heidelberg University of Education, where she is creating a corpus of teacher classroom language.



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Tanzania

Kessia Kiwia is a multi-talented individual, currently working as a primary school teacher in Dar Es Salaam at Twiga Primary School and as a TELTA national events coordinator, the local and international presenter at different conferences, trainings, and workshops. She is also pursuing her master’s degree at Agha Khan University. She has a passion for education and has been actively involved in promoting quality education in her community. In addition, she is also experienced in event planning and has organized successful events. With her dedication and commitment, Kessia is making a positive impact in both her professional and academic pursuits.

*Kessia Kiwia ni mtu mwenye vipaji vingi, kwa sasa anafanya kazi kama mwalimu wa shule ya msingi jijini Dar Es Salaam katika shule ya msingi Twiga na mratibu wa matukio ya TELTA, pia ni mfundishaji wa ndani na wa kimataifa katika mikutano mbalimbali, mafunzo na warsha. Pia anasomea shahada ya uzamili katika Chuo Kikuu cha Agha Khan. Ana shauku kwa elimu na amekuwa akishiriki kikamilifu katika kukuza elimu bora katika jamii yake. Kwa kuongeza, pia ana uzoefu katika upangaji wa hafla na ameandaa hafla zilizofanikiwa. Kwa bidii na kujitolea kwake, Kessia anaongeza mchango chanya katika mafanikio yake kitaaluma na kazi.*

**Laura Holland**

USA

Laura G. Holland (M.A. TESOL, Teachers College, Columbia University) has taught English language and teacher training since the 1980s. At the University of Oregon where she recently retired after fifteen years, she was also Faculty Mentor and Teaching Assistant Supervisor. Additionally, she is the external reviewer for several language institutes in northern Peru and continues to work freelance teaching and providing professional development training around the globe both in-person and online.

**Leila Rosa**

USA/Cape Verde

Leila Rosa, PhD, has been a teacher educator for over 25 years. She is an affiliated faculty member with the Institute of Cape Verdean Studies at Bridgewater State University. In addition, she dedicates much of her time consulting with districts in the area of special education eligibility for multilingual learners.

**Liliya Makovskaya**

Uzbekistan

Liliya Makovskaya is a senior lecturer of Academic English in the Global Education Department of Westminster International University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She has several years of experience in teacher training and material design. Liliya has been involved in several joint research projects with international organizations. Her research interests lie in assessment, second language writing, feedback, academic vocabulary, discourse analysis and higher education.



**Liliana Cuesta Medina**  
Colombia

Liliana Cuesta Medina is an Associate Professor, Director of the Master's programs in English Language Teaching at the School of Education, and Director of Outreach and Engagement at the School of Communication, Universidad de La Sabana (Colombia). She holds a PhD in English Philology from UNED, Spain. Her main research areas include teacher and online education, CALL, CLIL, collaborative online international learning (COIL) and self-regulation. Liliana is highly active in academic and sports life. She publishes in recognized journals and delivers conferences worldwide.

*Liliana Cuesta Medina es Profesora Asociada, Directora de los programas de Maestría en Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés de la Facultad de Educación y Directora de Proyección y Relacionamiento de la Facultad de Comunicación de la Universidad de La Sabana (Colombia). Es Doctora en Filología Inglesa por la UNED, España. Sus principales áreas de investigación incluyen formación docente, educación virtual CALL, CLIL, aprendizaje colaborativo internacional en línea (COIL) y autorregulación. Liliana es una persona activa en la vida académica y deportiva. Escritora y conferencista en diferentes medios globales.*



**Linh Phung**  
Vietnam/USA

Linh Phung is Director of Chatham University English Language Program and Founder of Eduling International. She has published about task-based language teaching and international education. She recently released a children's book called *Tug of Words*, an IELTS test preparation book titled *IELTS Speaking Part 2: Model Speeches, Strategies, and Practice Activities* and the *Eduling Speak* app to connect learners to talk during communicative tasks.



**Lisa Mann**  
USA/Spain

Lisa Mann has enjoyed a long career as a language services provider. She has taught English in a wide variety of contexts to students of different levels of proficiency and a great diversity of needs, trained pre-service teachers and provided continual professional development for in-service ELT professionals, taught translation studies and research writing at the undergraduate and graduate level, and worked as a translator and author's editor.



**Luisa Isabel Chávez Ríos**  
Honduras

Music Education Teacher, graduated from the National School of Music and Bachelor of English Teaching graduated from the National Pedagogical University “Francisco Morazán”. She studied a master’s degree in Didactics and Musical Pedagogy in the Technological University of Mexico. She has 31 years of service in teaching, and she has worked in public and private bilingual schools teaching music, artistic language and English at preschool, elementary and secondary levels. She has also worked with distance university education at UPN-PREUFOD and CASUED-UNAH. She is currently completing a diploma in music therapy and training in socio-emotional learning and mindfulness.

*Profesora de Educación Musical, egresada de la Escuela Nacional de Música y Licenciada en la Enseñanza del Inglés, egresada de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional “Francisco Morazán”. Estudió una maestría en Didáctica y Pedagogía Musical en la Universidad Tecnológica de México. Tiene 31 años de servicio en la docencia, ha trabajado en escuelas de educación pública y en escuelas bilingües privadas, enseñando música, lenguaje artístico e inglés en los niveles de preescolar, primaria y secundaria. También ha trabajado con educación universitaria a distancia en la UPN- PREUFOD y CASUED-UNAH. Actualmente está realizando un diplomado en musicoterapia y capacitación en aprendizaje socioemocional y atención plena.*



**Mary Hillis**  
USA/Japan

Mary Hillis is an English language instructor at Ritsumeikan University (Kyoto, Japan) where she also consults with students at the self-access learning center, Beyond Borders Plaza. An active member of TESOL and the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT), her research interests are literature in language teaching and writing centers.



**Melodie Cook**  
USA/Japan

Melodie Cook is a professor at the University of Niigata Prefecture in Niigata, Japan. UNP is a relatively small but growing prefectural university with several faculties: the Faculty of International Studies and Regional Development, the Faculty of International Economics, and the Faculty of Human Life Sciences (Early Childhood Education/Nutrition). There is also a graduate school offering master’s degree Programs in International Studies and Regional Development and Nutrition.



Nadia Idri  
Algeria

Despite struggling with the chronic illness of ankylosing spondylitis for almost two decades, Prof. Nadia Idri is an empowered woman who has not let her condition define her. Instead, she has used her experience to inspire others and advocate for greater awareness and understanding. Nadia's determination and resilience serve as a powerful reminder that with the right mindset and support, we can overcome even the toughest of challenges and achieve our goals. She is a true inspiration to anyone who has faced adversity and refused to give up on their dreams". Nadia, 2023.

على الرغم من معاناتها من المرض المزمن المتمثل في التهاب الفقار التصلبي لما يقرب من عقدين من الزمن ، فإن البروفيسور نادية إيدري امرأة متمكنة لم تدع حالتها تحدد هويتها. بدلاً من ذلك، استخدمت تجربتها لإلهام الآخرين والدعوة إلى مزيد من الوعي والفهم. إن تصميم نادية ومرؤتها بمثابة تذكير قوي بأنه بالعقلية الصحيحة والدعم الصحيح، يمكننا التغلب حتى على أصعب التحديات وتحقيق أهدافنا. إنها مصدر إلهام حقيقي لأي شخص واجه محنّة ورفض نادية عن أحالمه. " نادية 2023.

*Xas akken tbedd magal aṭṭan-is yellan d imezgi azal n eecrin yiseggasen  
aya iwumi qqaren "Spondylarthritis ankylosante". Lameena taselmadt  
Massa Idri Nadia d tafulmant ur yeğgin ara iman-is ad tt-yeyleb waṭṭan  
, imi tseqdec tirmit-ines iwakken ad tili d amedya i wiyaḍ akken ad ten-id  
tessaki yef tegzi n lehlak-a . S tebyest d tmegleyt meqqren i tesea Massa  
Nadia tesmektay-ay-d d akken s tnefsit yelhan akked d tallelt nezmer ad  
nbedd mgal uguren d yiɛewwiqen akken diyen i nezmer ad nawed yer  
yiswan-nney .*

*Massa Idri d amedya n tahregt meqqren i wiyaḍ yellan am nettat ilmend  
n wuguren d umxix i qublen di tudert-nsen akked wid ur nefki ara afus yef  
tirga-nsen . Nadia 2023*



Rachel Toncelli  
USA

Rachel Toncelli, EdD, has been a language educator for over 25 years. In addition to teaching language in Europe and the USA, she also worked as a TESOL teacher educator. She currently teaches ESOL at Northeastern University in Boston and is an educational consultant for K-12 districts in the USA.



**Sandra Rodríguez-Arroyo**  
Puerto Rico

Sandra Rodríguez-Arroyo is an Associate Professor of ESL/Bilingual Education teacher education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her teaching and research interests include ESL and Bilingual Teacher Education; educational opportunities for multilingual learners (MLs); translanguaging perspectives, asset-based service-learning experiences with diverse learners and families; recruitment and retention of BIPOC teachers; and Latina faculty testimonios. Dr. Rodríguez-Arroyo also coordinates Metro Area Teachers of English Language Learners (MATELLS), a professional network that provides learning and collaboration opportunities for ELT professionals.



**Susan Hillyard**  
UK/Argentina

Susan has a B.Ed. (Hons.) degree from Warwick University in the UK. She has played many roles in her fifty year career: Teacher, Head of Dept., Teacher Trainer, Conference Speaker, Workshop Facilitator, Materials Writer, Researcher, On-line tutor, TIE consultant for The Performers and Webinar Presenter. Presently she is founder and Director of SHELTA, Susan Hillyard's English Language Teachers' Academy and a freelance consultant on EMI for 4 top universities in South China. Her interests lie in Inclusion, Drama for ELT, Spoken English, Global Issues, World Englishes, Teacher Development and Trainer Training.



**Tuba Arabaci Atlamaz**  
Türkiye

She received her degrees in the field of teaching foreign languages: B.A. from Bogazici University (2009), M.A. (2014) and Ed.D. (2018) from Rutgers University, USA. In 2018, she joined Abdullah Gül University, Kayseri, Türkiye, and started teaching various departmental and non-departmental courses. Since 2020, she has also been offering various ELT courses in Erciyes University and Istanbul Medeniyet University. Her research interests are teacher leadership, multicultural education, professional development, community-based service-learning, pre-service teacher education, sociolinguistics, and language assessment.

*Tuba Arabaci-Atlamaz, eğitim derecelerini İngiliz Dili Eğitimi alanında sırasıyla Türkiye'de Boğaziçi Üniversitesi (B.A., 2009) ve Amerika'da Rutgers Üniversitesi'nden (MA, 2014; Ed.D., 2018) aldı. 2018 yılında Kayseri, Türkiye'de bulunan Abdullah Gül Üniversitesinde alan ve alan dışı dersler vermeye başladı. Bunun yanı sıra, 2020'den itibaren Erciyes Üniversitesi ve İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesinde misafir akademisyen olarak çeşitli dersler vermeye de devam etmektedir. Çalışma alanları öğretmen liderliği, çok kültürlü eğitim, mesleki gelişim, topluma dayalı topluma hizmet eğitimi, aday öğretmen eğitimi, toplumdilbilim ve dilde ölçme ve değerlendirmedir.*



**Yeraldine Aldana**  
*Colombia*

Yeraldine Aldana is a Colombian woman, Christian, bilingual, and language teacher educator. Associate teacher at Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. She holds a master's in applied linguistics of Spanish as a foreign language, and she is a PhD candidate in education. She has developed research educational work on critical interculturality, bilingualisms, decoloniality and peace construction in which preservice and in-service language teachers, along with armed conflict combatants and victims have been involved.

*Yeraldine Aldana es una mujer colombiana, cristiana, bilingüe y formadora de maestros de inglés. Profesora asociada en la Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. Cuenta con una maestría en lingüística aplicada del español como lengua extranjera y es candidata a doctora en educación. Sus trabajos de investigación se han desarrollado en el marco de las temáticas de la interculturalidad, los bilingüismos, la decolonialidad y la construcción de paz. Tanto maestros en formación como en servicio, junto con excombatientes y víctimas del conflicto han sido partícipes de este esfuerzo colectivo.*

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