

3.1 Establishing context

Transcript

Slide 1

As you have read in the Introduction, the overall goal of this section is to consider your own context in terms of your teaching of English.

We have deliberately entitled this section “EstablishING Context” and not “Establish” context, as our goal is not only **to describe** the situation for English Teaching where you are, but also **to explore** opportunities for transforming your teaching to make it more ELF-aware and, ultimately, more ELF- inclusive.

Slide 2

This section, therefore, focuses on one’s own context and some of the taken-for-granted or “common sense” ways of understanding the English we use in teaching.

We will ask you to look more closely at your own context in order to, first, shed light on the common sense understanding of English and English teaching **where** you are, and, secondly, to ask questions about how this understanding and these “common sense truths” match the use of English you see around you.

Slide 3

The goal of this section is **to raise your awareness** and understanding of your own context.

Context is a vast concept and one that can include many different things.

For our purposes, we will limit our exploration of **context** to how English is used in the **society** where you live and teach, how **teachers and learners** both inside and outside of schools and classrooms use English, and – finally – how **English education** in your context relates to these uses.

Slide 4

To start these processes, we will start with an Activity.

Activity 1 asks you to reflect widely on the users, teachers and learners of English where you are or in your own context.

To do this activity, you will need to take a moment to consider certain questions. We will go through these questions on the next three slides. You will want to stop after each slide and to think about the questions and note down some answers for yourself. These notes will prepare you to do Activity 1.

Slide 5

In preparation for Activity 1, we would like you first to think about how English is **used** where you are. Here we mean any and everyone who may use English in your context.

Take some time to think about:

- **What are the main purposes for using English in society?**
- **Who are the main users of English** –are there **certain people who use English more or less than others?**
- Also, think about how **your age, job, gender, interests, family background,** or any other **factors** may influence who uses English the most?
- Finally, consider if users use **more oral or written English?** For example, is speaking or writing more commonly practiced or preferred?

Pause the presentation now and take some time to consider these questions. Really allow yourself to reflect but know that there is no one correct answer. Instead, you are exploring your own experience and thoughts about who uses English where you are.

As you do so, note down some of your thoughts under the heading “**Users**”.

Once you feel you have really explored who is using English in your context, move on to the next slide.

Slide 6

We will now go through the same process, but this time we will focus our attention on **teachers** of English.

Starting with yourself, consider how you **use English outside the classroom.** Consider what kind of language English is for **you outside of your teaching.**

Once you have done this, consider **how your teaching colleagues use English outside the classroom.** Also, think about how their experience of English may be similar or different to your own.

As you do this, consider if there are **certain teachers who use English more or less than others**. If some use English more than others, reflect on why this might be? Does it perhaps have anything to do with their **age, gender, interests, family background**, or any other **factors**?

Finally, consider if teachers use **more oral** or **more written English outside of the classroom**. In other words, outside of teaching, do teachers tend to use more written or spoken English?

As in the last slide, you should now pause the presentation and take some time to consider these questions. Really allow yourself to reflect on your experience and the experience of other teachers in your context. As you do so, note down your thoughts under the heading **“Teachers”** this time.

Once you feel you have really explored how teachers are using English in your context, move on to the next slide.

Slide 7

We now want to turn our attention to **learners** of English. Focusing on **learners** of English in your context, consider:

- how **learners use English outside the classroom**
- Ask yourself if there are **certain learners who use English more or less than others** and – if so – is this use affected by the learner’s **age, gender, interests, family background**, or any other factors.
- Also consider if **learners are using more oral or written English** outside the classroom.

Unlike the previous slides, we would like you also to imagine how these learners will use English **in the future**, for example when they are adults. Try to make predictions about what their needs for English will be. Consider whether it will be the same or different than it is today. If different, what type of changes would you predict?

As in previous slides, pause now and take a moment to really consider these questions. Allow yourself to reflect on your experience of learners today and what the future may hold for them.

Make sure to note down your thoughts, but this time under the heading **“Learners”**.

When you feel ready, you should collect all your notes on **users of English, teachers of English, and learners of English** and go to Activity 1 below.

Activity 1 asks you to summarize your reflections for general users, teachers, and learners in 5-7 sentences and to deliver these reflections online. Your responses provide you with an overview of your thinking about English **where you are**.

Once you have completed Activity 1, please move on to the next slide.

Slide 8

You have now had the chance to reflect on **users, teachers and learners of English** in your own context and have shared these reflections with the course instructor.

We would now like to take a moment to expand further on the notion and idea of “context” as this is a central concept in this section. What **is** context?

A simple definition of context is that it refers to a **place** and a **time**. By orienting yourself and your situation in a place and a time, you position yourself in relation to English use and English education. We call this your **contextual positioning**.

In order to shed light on your **contextual positioning** for English teaching, we will explore 1) the special characteristics that describe English where you teach – this will reveal the unique nature of your **place**. We will also explore how the use of English and English teaching has evolved or changed **over time**. Considering how English teaching has changed is one way of better understanding your **contextual history** or where you find yourself and your teaching today.

Slide 9

A further expansion on the idea of **context** is that context is often **layered**. How the different layers of context interact is – in part – what makes context so **complex**.

Often, we can think of context as having three different layers.

- At the top, we have **the macro-level** or the most broad or widespread level. This level reflects the more widely accepted and shared ideas in society. These ideas - and our acceptance of them - have an impact on ideas and ways of thinking at the other levels context.

For example, if at the macro-level, it is accepted in society that English plays a central role in competing for global markets, this way of thinking can influence how institutions and individuals think and act.

- The **meso level** of context, on the other hand, is more narrow. At the meso level, we find social institutions, as well as organizations, that have a special

interest in English education. These could be, for example, Ministries of Education, school authorities, professional teaching organizations, language testing corporations, or any other organization or institution with a special interest in English Teaching.

At this level, certain institutions or organizations may influence or be influenced by ideas of English at both the macro or the micro level.

For example, if a testing corporation has a great degree of influence on the teaching of English in a certain context, the way the corporation thinks about English and English instruction can affect both more general thinking about English in society, as well as the thinking of individual teachers and learners of English.

- Finally, we have **the micro level**. **The micro level** is the most narrow level of context and refers to individual experience. Notice that schools and classrooms are at the lower end of the meso-level, while the experiences and thinking of individual teachers and learners create context at the micro level.

The important thing to know and understand about these different levels is that they **interact** and are **dependent upon** one another.

For example, the one level cannot exist without interaction with the other two.

The main point here is that ideas or how we think about **English** and **English teaching** are deeply embedded in contexts - from the most narrow context of our personal experience to the broader context of social institutions to the broadest level of generally accepted ways of thinking about English in society.

As a teacher in the classroom then, your way of thinking about English and English teaching is continually influenced by your personal experience, your being part of an institution, and your being part of a larger society. In this way, your teaching context is **layered**.

Your teaching context is also **complex**, as the different levels of context impact and affect one another in different ways at different times.

Slide 10

To help guide us through this complexity, we will use the metaphor of a lens - similar to the lens on a camera. We will use two different lenses to focus our attention.

First, we will look through a “wide lens” to look across the landscape of society and to create a picture of English and its uses where you teach. We will look at the special characteristics that describe the place where you teach English. Looking through this wide lens, we are interested in how English “works” or “what it does” in the wide landscape of the place where you are.

Next, we will look through a **retrospective lens**, where “retrospective” just means “looking back”. If you imagine yourself in a car, on a motorcycle, or even on a bicycle, we often have a small mirror that allows us to see what is behind us. Using this mirror, we will look back **in time** at the goals and teaching of English where you are in order to get a better picture of the English teaching of the past and how it is different from today.

Slide 11

As you are probably already aware, Activity 1 was an activity designed to get you to look at your own context through a wide lens and to consider English in society and in the experience of individual teachers and learners.

As we all become used to our own context over time, a good way to see our context more clearly is to compare what we see and experience with what others have seen and experienced.

For this reason, we would like you to return to Activity 1 and compare your responses to two other course participants. Once you have done this, note three things that you found particularly surprising or interesting, either about your context or the context of others.

These items shed light on what is **interesting, special or unique** about the context of English teaching in different places.

Slide 12

We will now take a minute to look back or look through a retrospective lens at English teaching. While there are many topics we could explore, our focus will be on the institutions of education that determine the purpose and goals of English teaching and the schools and teachers that do this teaching in the classroom.

Slide 13

Activity 2 looks back at the history of English teaching over time in your context.

Please note that where Activity 1 compared society’s need for English and individuals’ use of English today and in the future, this activity looks at **English teaching in time** focusing on comparing the past to now.

Slide 14

Before we begin, you will need to create a table similar to the one on this slide. One column will be entitled “Post World-War II” and the other column will be entitled the “21st century”.

The next two slides will give you guiding questions to help you reflect and fill-in this table on English teaching both **then** and **now**.

Slide 15

We will begin by thinking about the column on the left-hand side of your table – the one with the title “Post World War II”. Take a minute to imagine the year is 1960 in the setting where you are teaching today. Give some thought to who was using English at that time. What were they using English for and with whom? What was English education like then? What kind of goals did it have, and what did different actors want to achieve with English education in the 1960s?

Once you have had some time to think about this, consider the following questions in more detail:

How was English relevant for use in society in 1960?

Who was learning English in 1960, and for what purposes?

What was English education or teaching like?

Who were teachers of English, and what type of education or qualifications did they have?

What did the English classroom of 1960 look or sound like?

Finally, what types of instruments or tools were used to teach English in the 1960s?

Please take your time thinking about each of these and give each of these questions some in-depth thought. As you are thinking, note down key words, short phrases or statements in the column of your table with the title in Post-World War II.

Slide 16

We would now like to take a closer look at English teaching in the 21st century. This means not looking at what is far behind us in the past, but instead what is immediately surrounding us.

Consider who is using English where you are today and with whom. Using your reflections from Activity 1, think about the goals of English education today.

Consider each of the following questions in detail:

What are relevant uses of English in society in your context today?
Who is learning English and for what purposes?
What is English education or teaching like today?
Who are today's teachers of English, and what type of education do they have?
What does the English classroom of today look or sound like? What types of instruments or tools are used to teach English?

Again, please note down any key words, short phrases or statements related to these questions in the column of your table with the title the 21st century.

Slide 17

Once you have completed both sides of the table, review your notes and underline the most important key words, phrases or sentences. You will use these notes to participate in Activity 2 on the main page.

Activity 2 is a forum discussion. To participate, you should briefly summarize the changes you discovered in your own context. Make sure to include changes for:

- Users and learners of English
- The purpose of English teaching
- Learners' needs

Once you have posted your summary in the Forum, you should participating in the discussion by reading and responding to the contributions of two others.

You should go to the Forum Discussion in Activity 2 now and return after you have done this.

Slide 18

You have now completed a brief picture of English and English teaching in your context both before and now. The table you have created gives you an overview of how things have changed in your own context.

Thus far, Establishing Context has focused on looking more closely at your own context and the taken-for-granted ways of understanding English teaching **where and when you are**

This has been considered in relation to:

- place (what is special or unique about where I teach?), and
- time (what is special or unique about when I am teaching—for example, today as compared to the past?)

Slide 19

As we said in the beginning of this presentation, **context** is **complex** and **layered**. In this section, we have started to unpack and investigate your own context.

It is a good idea now to take a moment to consider what you have thought about your context so far. Most likely this process has set some thoughts in motion. If you would like, please go back to the Forum in Activity 2 and expand upon or enrich your responses.

Given what you have uncovered, some things to think further about in relation to your own teaching are:

How would you define “English” in your context?

What changes do you find, and what are the main causes behind these changes?

How do you see the situation for English developing in your context in the future?

What realities and potential challenges do you predict for users, teachers and learners of English over the next 20 to 50 years?

These are all quite large questions to consider, and yet the answers impact our everyday teaching. Even so, teachers seldom have time to think about and discuss them. For that reason, please give yourself enough time to really consider how they affect you and how you teach English in your context.

Slide 20

The goal of this section has been to help you raise your awareness of your own context. To do so, we have started a process of:

First, identifying characteristics unique to your local context

Second, understanding your past

Third, considering your present, and

Finally, imagining the future

Slide 21

In this section, we have started the process of establishing your context.

Part of Establishing this context is adapting a more narrow focus.

What follows then are sections on the **Instructional or Teaching context** and how this impacts what you may or may not be able to do in the classroom

AND

the section on **Learners of English** and the modern experience and needs for English language learning and learners today.

It can be very useful keep the notes you have created in this section when working with these sub-sections, because – as we know – these different aspects or layers of context are connected and influence one another.

This concludes the section on **Establishing Context**.