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## Constraints and Realities of ELT/ESL Publishing

These days, schools all over the world receive books and materials from different publishers. Most of the teachers I know are visited up to three times annually by many publishing sales representatives. It is not unusual to hear them complaining about the time they "waste" (generally, their own free time) during these visits. As a consequence, it is not unusual that they don't fulfill the sales representatives' requests for time. On the other hand, publishing companies are expected to support and have a range of post-sale services such as replacing books, providing schools with extra materials, and so on. Additionally, in many countries, publishing companies are expected to organize activities, seminars, support events, conferences, and many other events that do not produce any revenue (as well as some excellent teacher training websites like <http://www.onestopenglish.com/>). Why do they do this? Are they pushed by the competition, or are there other reasons?

In many countries, an enticement may be offered to schools that introduce a new textbook in their classes. It is not unusual to get offers of electronic boards, laptops for teachers, and many more "freebies" (I once even heard a promise of sending children to summer courses in England). More reasonably, some publishers support educational activities and run free courses for teachers, in which they include specific presentations of new products along with non-commercial presentations.

For this Forum I contacted publishers to talk about these issues. In the end, I had the great pleasure to interview an editor and a Valencia Regional sales director, both of MacMillan Spain. Fiona Miller, the editor, travels across Spain and frequently to the United Kingdom observing classes, speaking to and advising teachers on how to improve their classes and get the best from their students. Manuel Grijalvo, a sales manager, has always believed that in order to reach the teachers and achieve great sales, it is necessary to invest in the teachers' education by sponsoring events like conferences, meetings, visits to schools, and more.

I would like to express my gratitude to the two of them for having granted TESL-EJ the time for the interviews.

Finally, TESL-EJ is preparing a special issue about teaching grammar for September 2007. This Forum section is very interested and open to non-academic but interesting proposals about grammar teaching in local contexts everywhere in the world (between 700-1100 words). We are hoping to have contributions from a broad range of countries and contexts. Contributions should be useful for other teachers; thus, advice and approaches to teaching grammar are highly welcomed. We look forward

to the international audience's contributions.

Again,

Thanks and all the best to Fiona and Manolo,

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### **Interviews transcripts**

In this TESL-EJ Forum I interviewed Fiona Miller and Manolo Grijalvo, who are highly regarded in Macmillan (formerly Heinemann) Spain for their personal skills and sales as well as for their professional and interpersonal relations with their customers. My goal was to understand their jobs and, more than anything else, their constraints. Since publishers' cooperation and research are absolutely necessary but rarely recognised by most practitioners, I wanted to get an insight of what they do and how teachers can establish better cooperation with their sales representatives and publishers.

#### **Manolo Grijalvo, MacMillan Valencia Regional Sales Director**

**For most of us, sales executives are very much people who are just interested in getting the most possible benefits but rarely interested in the customers. Who are your best clients and how do you work with them?**

If what you say were true about sales executives then their careers would not last long as given the present economic climate benefits take a long time to actually surface. The best customer is one who collaborates with you, who challenges you but also helps work with you to find solutions to what they want.

**What is the worst thing about being Head of the Macmillan office in Valencia?**

The work's never done, as soon as one problem is solved this often leads to others that need dealing with so you never quite feel as if you've finalised anything.

**Is teacher training an important activity in your office? Is it generally open to all the teachers in the region?**

Very important, we feel it is an essential part of our business and vocation and we always offer it to all teachers, both those who use us and those who don't as getting to know us is the best start to a good relationship with those in the classroom.

**How could publishers and teachers cooperate better?**

Talking, chatting, exchanging information. We already have a very good

system of communication established as this is essential for our job of bringing out the best materials for the reality of today's teaching.

**What other activities are generally (other than advertising) used to promote the product?**

Advertising in the world of education doesn't work, what does work is mouth to mouth promotion amongst teachers. If users speak well of our books we gain prestige which leads to more sales which leads to more investment in improving what we offer.

**What does an English teacher want the book to be like? Do you think most teachers use their books to their full potential?**

They want it to be informative, motivating and easy-to-use, however it is just a tool and the results will vary depending on the type of teacher who uses it. Our books and all the components that we provide with each book can always be used to the maximum potential of a given teaching situation as they are flexible to allow for many variables. This characteristic is one of the pillars of our success.

**Spain has recently been introducing a policy of gratuities or "free books", how will this affect publisher?**

We will be very seriously affected; the sector will be forced into restructuring and what we will be able to offer will be restricted. We realise that this policy is very popular amongst parents and it is also a vote-winner; however there will be less finance for research and development and this will eventually impoverish new projects on offer from all publishers.

**How do you see the future of textbooks in Europe and Spain?**

The textbook is an essential tool in the classroom and while there may be financial and technological challenges ahead, we know that all developed societies need good, adapted, tried-and-tested textbooks specifically edited to meet their requirements. We are also aware that it is just a tool and we can never substitute the effort, motivation and work of the teacher and students, but if we all work together, everybody wins.

**Fiona Miller, MacMillan Spain Editor**

**How would you describe your work as an editor for Macmillan?**

I'm actually a field-editor, which means that my work centres on research and investigation as opposed to editing materials.

**What kind of personality or skills is demanded in an editor?**

In the case of a field-editor you need to be able to multi-task as we are involved in all projects from nursery school, through primary, secondary,

bachillerato (last two years in high school) up to adult learning. You need to be approachable as a large part of the work involves interviewing teachers and building up contacts and you need to be well-organised as the information you pick up has to be accurately fed back to the editors and publishers who might be working with little access to the market.

**Children are usually different from only twenty years ago. How have children changed in the last years and how have these changes affected book design? Are books really updated not only in contents but also in language acquisition and teaching?**

I can only answer for the last few years as prior to this I was teaching in a slightly different teaching situation. In Spain changes in book design take place relatively slowly as the market is quite traditional in their approach to teaching. We are very lucky in Spain however that some of the best ELT publishing stems from here and the books that are currently available are of an incredibly high quality and very up-to-date in terms of content. We are gradually seeing the effect of the common European Framework on language acquisition with the emphasis on learner autonomy and an awareness of the learning process becoming more prevalent in coursebooks.

**Many teachers claim that books are "cloned" constantly from one publisher to another. For many of us, it feels true but, in reality, is it true?**

Up to now there have been very prescriptive grammar contents for certain sectors of language learning, for example, secondary and bachillerato that were compulsory in a book at a certain level therefore there has been a certain homogeneity due to this. Also at present we have the best primary course on the market Bugs, and feedback from users is extremely positive therefore other publishers "borrow" the features that they know teachers like and want to see in the book.

**What are the most common problems for an editor that you think teachers should be aware of? How do you do your market research? How important are teachers in this research and how do you collect their opinions, needs and attitudes?**

I think the hardest thing for an editor is to know exactly how it feels to be in the teaching situation that teachers are in day after day and year after year, observing classes is always the most useful way of seeing the materials in action and knowing where improvements can be made, often, when we ask to see classes teachers feel vulnerable as if we are judging them which is not the case at all. Seeing students in their natural learning environment is the best way of knowing how best to help teachers.

Other research we carry out through piloting materials in schools, through interviews, by sending questionnaires and by organising focus groups to discuss materials for us. We also go to seminars and teachers' days to find out what teachers are interested in.

**Writers are supposed to be open and friendly, and many are practicing teachers. Is it difficult to deal with the writers?**

We do not deal directly with the writers as this is the role of the commissioning editor but we do attend author meetings to feedback on manuscripts to make sure they are suitable for the teaching situation here in Spain.

**What kind of recognition do you get in your company?**

I think the department I work in is really valued by the rest of the company. I think they are aware of the importance of having a department which ensures the books are right for the teachers and students in this country and this is what we do.

**What would you recommend to someone who potentially applies for a job as editor in the ELT/EFL/ESL sector?**

Well there are many different types of editor but for me the most important thing is to have a good insight of what the teachers and students are like in the environment you are printing for - spend some time in that market - teaching is the best way to discover what is needed. Without this knowledge you can publish the most fascinating book in the world but if it is not user-friendly then a lot of effort will go to waste. You also have to be quite meticulous in that you need to demand a lot of yourself and others. Finally, if you are determined and prepared to work very hard it can be a really rewarding job.

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