

Forum for Fair Employment

Spring 2011 Newsletter

<http://karen.stanley.people.cpsc.edu/FFE>

**Visit our booth at
TESOL 2011!**

(Near the bag pick-up)

ESL and “Good” Teachers

Jack Longmate

For the ESL professional, the strong worldwide demand is offset by the lack of professional standards, which results in the erosion of workplace conditions that high demand should produce. That is the message of an excerpt from “ESL employment in the doldrums?” <<http://www.usingenglish.com/speaking-out/esl-employment.html>>:

I've seen a lot of negativity about the state of the ESL employment recently. In theory, everything should be fine—there's a huge demand, six hundred million ESL students in China alone, the position of English in international communication has no serious challenger, and globalisation and the growth of the internet are likely to maintain this position for the foreseeable future.

However, sites like [English School Watch](#) are littered with posts marked 'warning', 'beware' and 'scam'. It seems that hundreds of schools fail to keep promises, underpay, lie about accommodation, etc. ...

In an industry where standards have often been neglected in the drive for money, where people a long way from home have few rights, there have always been cowboy schools, ranging from the ghastly chains pumping out their own drab, grey method as a way of selling courses and their materials, to the sharks out to rip customers and teachers off.

If that is not enough by itself to worry about, another concern is what might seem to be an epidemic of circular reasoning and oversimplification in the public discussions about education. An example of this simplicity is Michelle Rhee, who is considered a hero in some quarters for the apparent improvement she was responsible for instituting in the Washington, D.C. public schools in her role as chancellor there. Rhee was well known for her authoritarian management style, which entailed closing schools and dismissing personnel, often with questionable due process. In executing her responsibilities, she seems to have a black-and-white view of the world, and she conceives of teachers as being either good or bad. In a [Newsweek](#) article (Dec 13, 2010, p. 39), Rhee reflects upon her time in DC and confesses to having failed to discriminate between good and bad teachers, saying:

I did a particularly bad job letting the many good teachers know that I considered them to be the most important part of the (education) equation. I should have said to the effective teachers, “you don't have anything to worry about. My job is to make your life better, offer you more support, and pay you more.” I totally fell down on doing that. As a result, my comments about ineffective teachers were often perceived as an attack on all teachers.”

In failing to recognize good and bad teachers, Rhee is in good company. Bill Gates, who has become involved in

public education over the last few years, discriminated between good and bad teachers in a Newsweek (Dec 20, 2010) interview: “You know, a quarter of our teachers are very good. If you could make all the teachers as good as the top quarter, the U.S. would soar to the top of that comparison (with other countries).”

This trend has made its way into the legislative realm. In the Washington state legislature, proposed Senate Bill 5399 would “revise educator layoffs”; rather than rely upon seniority, it responds to public outcry when bright, young, inspiring, “good” teachers are laid off only because they have the least seniority. The bill’s sponsor, state senator Rodney Tom, says: “The research is abundantly clear that the No. 1 factor in the classroom as far as student learning is making sure you have a quality teacher in the classroom.”

While people like Rhee and Gates certainly assume there are good and bad teachers—which is a difficult proposition to argue with—they don’t explain how to tell the difference. When pressed, proponents hold up testing as the way a judgment can be made about teacher effectiveness. But it is doubtful that performance on the test is a true measure of teaching effectiveness, since it is ultimately up to the learner to learn.

It is hard to argue with the notion that the teacher is key to the learning process. This observation is echoed by Barak Obama from his book The Audacity of Hope, who asserts that “the single most important factor in determining a student’s achievement isn’t the color of his skin or where he comes from, but who the child’s teacher is.”

How do we ensure the quality of teachers? One thing is to embrace the truth behind the slogan: “A teacher’s teaching conditions are a student’s learning conditions.” Teachers become better individuals if they sense a measure of respect in their skill and confidence in their job. When ESL teachers find themselves in the all too common situation of frantically teaching classes but unable to profit professionally from their efforts or failing to see career growth in the field, deceptive employment practices notwithstanding, they are apt to lose their inspiration and become bad teachers.

For ESL teachers employed by private schools, the most inspiring counter to depressing reality is the sterling example of the unionization of teachers by the ETEA in British Columbia, Canada. Vancouver is a city with many private intensive English programs and fierce competition between schools. Given that context, it might seem to be among the last places where unionization of ESL teachers would be possible. Yet a strong organizational effort has been growing over the last few years, with solidarity among ESL teachers achieved. The outcome has been the bargaining of remarkable working conditions. At times, the fear of a strike has helped move along the bargaining process. Some of the provisions achieved have been:

- a. A beginning full-time salary of C\$50,000; with pro-rated part-time ESL teacher wages (Note: as this is being written, the U.S. dollar and Canadian dollar are at par.)
- b. Built-in annual pay increases
- c. Professional development leave and professional development expenses
- d. Class enrollment is capped at 14, but the employer has the ability to increase classes from 14 to 15 in low season or 16 in high summer season if necessary.

Unlike the depressing introductory scenario of the ESL profession, where there is frantic demand for ESL instruction but all too often, poor compensation, ESL teachers represented by the ETEA are protected by standards, and are able to benefit as professionals from the intense demand for ESL instruction, thanks to the structure created by the union framework.

In reality, organizing ESL teachers is no easy task, even in a setting where unionization is strong as it is in Vancouver, Canada. In many places, it is not possible to form or join a union. But there are still essential things that can be done by individual teachers that can promote fair employment conditions whether they are unionized or not. Those strategies are itemized in the Program for Change: 2010-2030, which is intended as a road map for U.S. higher education to overturn the stifling domination of a two-tiered tenured vs. non-tenured system. While the most commonly used excuse to reject ideas for improvement in the teaching workplace is a lack of funds, the strategies listed in the Program for Change are segregated as being (a) no-cost

or very low one-time costs, (b) costs, (c) union/association actions, and (d) legislative action. If any one of the goals were enacted, it would bring improvement to the quality of teaching and the professional lives of the teachers affected. A version of the Program for Change: 2010-2030 is viewable at <http://newfacultymajority.info/PfC/>.

An example would be teacher evaluations. Often classroom evaluation visits are carried out in an ad hoc manner with an administrator dropping in, sometimes announced. The outcome may be a superficial assessment based on snapshot impressions of the activities observed.

Management consultant Samuel Culbert in his book Get Rid of the Performance Review (2010) makes a case that has applicability to the ESL classroom. Culbert condemns the standard "performance review," where a supervisor meets with a subordinate and discusses general performance. The subordinate, anxious to remain in good standing with the boss, willingly complies with the recommendations made in his/her quest to be good employee. But missing from this structure is an honest discussion of what is really happening in the classroom. When teachers find themselves having trouble in being as effective as they know they can be, they are rarely inclined to bring up these issues with their supervisor, perhaps feeling that their supervisor is the last person who they would like to know about the problem.

Evaluations should proceed according to a regularized and scheduled system so that all players understand. The Program for Change distinguishes between summative and formative evaluations, the former being a judgment on whether the individual should remain in his/her job and the latter being feedback intended to help the instructor teach. Oftentimes in many institutions, no distinction is made, which causes unnecessary resistance and consternation in the workplace.

ESL teachers, whether in a unionized setting or not, whether as part of an independent faculty association or not, could take up the initiative to develop their own evaluation system to provide formative feedback. This can be done by simply arranging to visit each other's

classrooms and then privately sharing impressions, recommendations, and options. In order to work, this does require a level of trust and instructors who see each other as colleagues and not competitors. But all performers stand to benefit from feedback, it is a way to improve the effectiveness of teaching. If teachers themselves instituted a procedure whereby meaningful suggestions could be offered to help teaching, management could very well realize that it is squarely in its best interest to support this initiative. It could decide to waive the need for traditional punitive instructor evaluation reviews, on the ground that they are necessarily snapshots and seldom touch on the essence of an individual teacher's performance.

It is hard to expect inspired, young, "good" teachers to remain as inspired and effective when the high demand for their skills does not result in reasonable working conditions. It could be that they become the very people that Rhee and Gates refer to as bad teachers. The proper role for professional association like TESOL is to point the field toward improvements to upgrade the teaching conditions, which directly impact the students' learning conditions.

Links to FFE website, and a list of internet resources for part time/ adjunct/ contingent faculty:

<http://karen.stanley.people.cpcc.edu/TESOL.htm>

Bulgaria Blues

Bill Templer

Within the global ESL/ EFL economy, conditions for adjunct and part time teachers vary greatly. I write from Bulgaria, where I have worked for many years in full-time regional higher education. Bulgaria today is the lowest-income country in the European Union. Full-time teachers with 5-15 years experience, ex-pat and local, can expect a monthly salary in the range of 200-325 Euros equivalent at best, with a doctorate or MA. Striking is pay for adjunct teachers. I have recently been offered six hours of advanced teaching at the rate of

USD 2.50 an hour, at a major state university with a large English Studies Dept. The program encompasses the BA and MA in English and Applied Linguistics. No other benefits are involved. Transport costs to campus per week would eat up around 30% of that, so that I would be making about USD 10.50 per week before any taxes. I hesitate to accept. My former colleagues need me badly. Nonetheless, this is what a large Bulgarian public university can offer a part-timer, local or foreign. The situation in the capital Sofia is similar. A number of local Bulgarian academics, even full-time senior staff, teach at more than one university part-time in order to survive. Private language schools and the few private universities pay a bit more, but not much.

Bulgarian universities are virtually bankrupt, students are protesting in the streets. The national Academy of Sciences is threatened with dismantling, and fighting for its life. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian government will spend USD 700 million in 2012 on F-16s and Eurofighter Typhoons for its air force.

TESOL 2011: Don't miss these sessions!

Presentation Title: Working Toward Fair Employment: What We Can Do

3/18/2011 10:00 AM - 12:45 PM = Hilton Grand Salon 3

Session Summary Lack of full employment status affects teachers, students, and programs. A panel of presenters look at big and small efforts being made globally to improve professional conditions and compensation. Each presentation allows time for questions, followed by a discussion group format for full audience participation.

Presenters: Lorraine Rehnby; Jack Longmate ; Jane Ryan Desnoee; Carmen Roman-Murray ; Cynthia Wiseman; Liz England; John Schmidt; Christine Coombe

Presentation Title: Factors Influencing a Career in TESOL

3/17/2011 4:00 PM - 4:45 PM = Hilton, Belle Chasse

Session Summary Data from an alumni survey of 275 MA TESOL and TESOL Certificate program graduates will be shared regarding factors that influenced whether or

not they stayed employed in the field of TESOL after graduation. Implications of the data for those seeking employment in the TESOL field will be discussed

Presenters: Mark Tanner ; Lynn Henrichsen ; Eimi Priddis

Presentation Title: The Contributions and Challenges for Nonnative ESL Teachers: Administrators' Perspectives

3/19/2011 4:00 PM - 4:45 PM = Convention Center Room 214

Session Summary Two experienced TESOL teacher educators report on the results of a city-wide research project in NYC to examine public school administrators' perceptions of the contributions and challenges that nonnative-English-speaking teachers face in teaching ESL in their schools. The presenters suggest research-based teaching strategies for nonnative-English-speaking teachers.

Presenters: Soonhyang Kim ; Joanna Labov

Forum for Fair Employment Business Meeting

3/18/ 2011 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM Grand Salon 19

Forum for Fair Employment (FFE)

(Formerly COPTEC)