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The two cultures in Australian ELICOS: Industry managers respond to English language school teachers

Abstract

This article reports on a qualitative study that sought to understand managers' perceptions of teachers' professional identities in the Australian ELICOS sector. The study found that there is a powerful, socially imagined 'wall' that divides two cultures in the sector: the managers on the one hand, and the teachers on the other. While generally unproblematic in operational, marketing, and sales terms, the continued existence and ongoing strengthening of this wall is shown to be counter productive to the sector's desire for improving quality. As a result, there is a need to address structural issues rather than simply continuing with a quality enhancement model that hopes to inspire teachers to undertake professional development.

Biographical details (please remove before review)

Dr Phiona Stanley has lived and breathed TESOL for the past quarter of a century. After a fairly useless but deeply interesting Honours degree in Politics, she undertook CTEFLA (the forerunner to CELTA) in 1993, DTEFLA in 1997, MEd TESOL in 2005, and PhD in TESOL in 2009. She has worked as a Teacher, a DOS, an Operations Manager, and an ELT publishing Editor, in the UK, Peru, Poland, Qatar, and China. After arriving in Australia in 2004, Phiona taught in private language schools and universities including as a CELTA trainer and on MEd TESOL. She is now a Senior Lecturer in TESOL at the School of Education at UNSW Sydney.

Introduction

International education is Australia's largest service export, contributing almost \$20 billion annually to the Australian economy. Within educational exports, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) is a growing sector, currently worth about 10% in value terms. As a pathway into higher and/or vocational education, ELICOS is crucial to destination brand integrity as the sector may well be international students' initial experience of Australia. ELICOS provision is therefore of great importance. Further, as students' classroom experiences are central to their educational experience, ELICOS teachers' professional identities matter well beyond the lives of the teachers themselves.

And, unfortunately, it appears that many teachers are unhappy. A recent paper reporting on teachers' professional identities and perceptions of wellbeing in the sector (Stanley, 2016) went as 'viral' among teachers as an ELICOS-focused academic paper might go. It was widely shared in staffrooms and on social media, and to date it has been downloaded 479 times¹. As that paper showed, most teachers work on short contracts rather than in ongoing employment, and their salaries are significantly lower than those of schoolteachers, for instance. Further problems include the salary 'step' system, which rewards more experienced and more highly qualified teachers, and the seasonal nature of demand. These each cause teacher attrition as higher-step teachers become more expensive for schools to employ, and because teachers appear to tire of insufficient job security.

Language schools are for-profit businesses, and Directors of Studies (DOSes) in many settings described pressure to reduce operating costs by hiring inexperienced, minimally qualified, casual teachers. While this reduces the financial burden of staffing for lean business operations, it also results in a rapid churn of

¹ From:

http://www.unsworks.unsw.edu.au/primo_library/libweb/action/diDisplay.do?vid=UNSWORKS&docId=unsworks_mod_sunsworks_38862

teachers through the sector and high attrition rates. It may also cause some teachers to question the sector's credibility. As one participant put it: '[h]ow can this be a serious industry when the price of a teacher matters more than their experience?' (Op. cit.). Teachers' concerns are therefore manifest, and although many described intrinsic motivations to work in a multicultural milieu and to help young people, many others also described disillusionment with the ELICOS sector.

The purpose of this paper is to explore industry managers' responses to teachers' perspectives and to ask what the sector might do to ameliorate these issues. By 'industry managers', I mean those in predominantly non-classroom roles such as school directors, academic managers and DOSes. My aim is to spark debate, raise awareness, and frame the conversation among managers in the same way the original paper did among teachers. My overarching purpose is to contribute to the finding of solutions and thus to the improvement of the sector.

Locating the study

Twenty years ago, Johnson (1997) asked the provocative question, 'do EFL teachers have careers?', concluding that teachers' narratives were heteroglossic and that their identities were not predominantly defined by career progression. Since then, other articles have similarly problematized the professional status of English Language Teaching (ELT). Many focus on the teach-and-travel phenomenon in which 'teachers' may be untrained backpackers funding their travels (e.g. Thornbury, 2001). Others have described the 'second class' status of English-language teachers in academia (e.g. Pennington, 1992) and/or have focused the disrespect for ELT in wider society (Matei and Medgyes, 2003). Indeed, over the past 30 years ELT has been widely disparaged in popular culture. While JK Rowling famously dabbled in ELT in Portugal before retreating, clinically depressed, to the UK (Aitkenhead, 2012), Julian Barnes's

(1991) English-language-teacher-in-London character struggles to make ends meet, and Parks's (1990, p.12) English-teacher-in-Italy is depicted as follows:

He was living from hand to mouth, from one day to the next, from one month to another, week in, week out. From the point of view of career, social advances, financial gain, the last two and a half years had been completely wasted. More than that, they had left him physically exhausted and mentally addled by all these stupid lessons, besieged by boredom and mediocrity.

While ELICOS centres may hire at least some itinerant 'backpacker' teachers and while local returnees from overseas ELT comprise part of the ELICOS staffroom cohort (Stanley, 2016), the sector in Australia is not predominantly characterized by the 'teach and travel' phenomenon. However, the presence, in local and international social imaginaries, of a sense that ELT is something that may be undertaken for a short time while overseas contributes to the low status perceptions of the sector and a sense that English language teaching may not be regarded as a 'proper job'.

Anecdotally, teachers may recount instances in which their profession was dismissed with comments along the lines of 'Teaching English? Yeah, I've done that'. Thus the ruinous sting of amateurism and opportunism is rarely far from the social imaginaries that frame English language teaching. Entry to the profession via a 'four-week course' (e.g. CELTA) seems to contribute to this discourse.

But the lived experiences and professional identities of *managers* in the ELICOS sector appear to be very different from the status cringe that some teachers report. Indeed, at the 'other end' of the industry, some ELICOS value-chain businesses trade on the Australian stock exchange (e.g. Navitas and IDP Australia), and their directors and managers operate as they might in any other industry. As the following two vignettes from the present study show, there is a great deal of variability within 'the industry'. While ELICOS workplaces may contain teachers and managers, the first of these vignettes depicts managers' offices in a corporate part of an ELICOS building whereas the second illustrates a language school in which predominantly teachers work. Together, these vignettes show the variability within the continuum of professional experiences in the industry.

The two cultures

Vignette 1: A whisper-quiet elevator delivers me to a mid-level floor of a city-centre tower, from which floor-to-ceiling windows offer vistas of parklands and sky. The impeccably groomed receptionist shows me to an Eames-style lounge chair, where I leaf through the company's glossy annual report. My interviewee arrives and has booked a meeting room for us. On the way we pass a brushed steel coffee machine whose tiny glass-fronted fridge contains soy, skim, and whole milk, each connected to the machine with clear plastic hoses. At the push of a button we have café lattes in corporate-branded cups.

Vignette 2: My Uber driver cannot find this back-street address, so I get out on the main road and walk past industrial-sized bins attended by filthy ibises. When I find the language school, I climb echoing stone steps to the reception area, where a smiling receptionist shows me to a cracked pleather sofa that has been repaired with slightly sticky duct tape. My interviewee checks to see if a spare classroom is available, and makes me a mug of Nescafé.

These synthesized vignettes speak to the diversity of professional experiences within Australian ELICOS and the sector's 'two cultures' problem (after Snow, 1959). While managers may enjoy workplaces that resemble the first vignette, the lives of many teachers, and of course also some managers, may play out against backgrounds that resemble the second. As an industry, ELICOS is culturally divided. This matters because between the two 'tribes' there appears to be a wall of discourse that is both hindering debate and causing others working in the industry to look down on teachers. This paper seeks to open up space for that debate and to frame it, variously, as an operational issue, a marketing issue, a sales issue, an ethical issue, and/or perhaps an issue of quality at a structural level.

Research method and framing theory

This project draws upon the narratives of people who are very experienced in managing and/or marketing and/or selling in the ELICOS sector, both in university-based English language centres and in independent and chain language schools. Together, here, I call them 'managers', as opposed to 'teachers', as their work is not predominantly classroom based. Indeed, while many were previously teachers themselves, in their management roles they do not regularly teach.

The research project was conducted as follows: between August 2016 and January 2017, after obtaining institutional ethics approval, I gathered 42 hours of qualitative data in face-to-face or Skype interviews with 15 industry ‘insiders’ working in six Australian states/territories (i.e. everywhere except NT and TAS). Their roles include school directors, managers, marketing managers, sales managers, business consultants, DOSes, and also a CELTA trainer. The last two categories would arguably classify these participants, particularly the one teacher trainer I interviewed, as rather more ‘teacher’ than manager. However, interestingly and importantly, the teacher trainer frames ‘going into teacher training’ as a way of avoiding getting ‘stuck [teaching] in those [private language] schools’ (Cassie, pseudonym, see below). And some DOSes, in a counter-discourse in which they rail against industry’s putative profiteering, serve to exemplify the culture on the other side of the ‘wall’. These outlier voices and counter narratives within the data set thus helpfully illustrate the discourse divide identified in this paper.

Among the study’s interviewees were people on the executive board of English Australia and those from both university language centres (citation here: ULC) and private language schools (citation: PLS). Together, they have over 390 years’ experience in the sector, averaging 26.4 years each. The questions/prompts that framed each of our conversations were as follows:

How do you feel about the following: Teachers’ salary step system and salaries more generally; casual teacher contracts and seasonality; agent discounting and the role of agents more generally; some teachers’ feeling that goodwill is being exploited; teacher attrition from ELICOS; teachers’ professional self-esteem and the image of the sector more generally.

All but one interview was conducted individually (one was with two colleagues), and most were audio recorded. Some participants preferred that I took notes instead, which I respected. All names are pseudonyms and all identifiers are anonymized.

Data analysis was inductive, drawing on content, thematic, and linguistic analyses. The last is needed as narratives produced in research interviews are ‘both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances’ (Chase,

2005, p.657). This is to say that participants' discourses, framings, priorities, and omissions were also regarded as data. This necessitates a fine-grained analysis that considers both thematic and content analysis as well as analysis of language choices (e.g. the word 'just' that prefaced 'teaching' in Gina's interview text; see below). This is why Charmaz's (2006) open (i.e. inductive), axial (i.e. relational), and selective (i.e. interpretive) coding was used to handle the data in this study.

The findings are theorized as identity work, both attributive (i.e. industry professionals' discursive constructions of teachers' identities) and appropriative (i.e. constructing their own non-teaching professional identities). The former functions as a constitutive 'other' (after Derrida, 1973), that is, a foil against which to define the professional identity of the *self* by delineating the putative shortcomings of the *other*. This process relies on 'narrative identity', described as:

One proposes one's identity in the form of a narrative in which one can re-arrange, re-interpret the events of one's life in order to take care both of permanence and change, in order to satisfy the wish to make events concordant in spite of the inevitable discordances likely to shake the basis of identity. Narrative identity, being at the same time fictitious and real, leaves room for variations on the past – a 'plot' can always be revised...it is an open-ended identity which gives meaning to one's practice.

(Martin, 1995, p.8)

Thus professional identities within each of our 'two cultures' are ongoing, shape-shifting, slippery constructs, which serve to divide ELICOS down the middle: the teachers on the one side, the higher ups on the other. This paper argues that this is a problem. And so I ask: what kind of problem? In answer, this paper is structured into sections that frame, respectively, the issues as operational and/or marketing and/or sales problems, as a cultural problem, and a problem of quality and/or ethics. While the primary purpose of this paper is not to *so/ve* these problems, I conclude with some suggestions as to how solutions may be found and implemented.

Do we have an operational problem? Or a marketing problem?

Cambridge CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) is the most common route into ELICOS, and at the very least teachers must be graduates with certificate-level TESOL qualifications such as CELTA. This is the level of qualification that was previously known as TEFL-I (initial) by the British Council (2006). Around the world, more than 12,000 people annually undertake CELTA (Cambridge ESOL, 2012), and in Australia pre-service teachers may alternatively undertake the Certificate IV TESOL, at level 4 on the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Clearly, a lot of novice, TEFL-I teachers are coming onto the market every year.

Candidate numbers are much less easily available for what the British Council used to call TEFL-Q (qualified). This is because the market is very diverse: many universities offer MEd/MA TESOL (AQF level 9), and/or teachers might undertake Cambridge DELTA (AQF level 7). But it is safe to say that, certainly in private language schools (PLSs), most teachers are only qualified only at TEFL-I (AQF 4+) level, rather than TEFL-Q (AQF 7+).

The university language centres may be different in this regard, and many interviewees in university contexts expressed the certainty that their teachers were much more experienced than 'straight-off-the-CELTA' novices and that those with ongoing contracts were generally TEFL-Q. The university language centres (ULCs) certainly pay teachers much better, enjoy institutional prestige, and thus likely have their pick of the more experienced teachers. However, the existence, variously, at the ULCs of DELTA reading groups and partial funding for teachers undertaking MEd TESOL degrees suggests that many ULC teachers are *also* only TEFL-I. Further, a number of ULC-based interviewees confirmed that, across the sector 'the teachers with masters are dwarfed by the 4-week CELTA crowd' (Hannah, Director, ULC). Thus although there are clear differences in expected *experience* levels of teachers at ULCs versus PLSs, the *qualifications* difference may be more minimal.

But this does not seem to cause operational problems. Indeed, one often-raised perspective is that ‘the vast majority of students can’t tell a good teacher from a bad teacher’ (Edward, Business Manager, PLS) and that ‘they can tell who they like or who they don’t like, and they can tell which teacher cares or doesn’t care, but they can’t tell you who is more qualified and who isn’t’ (Andy, Sales Director, PLS).

Indeed, this relates to a larger issue, also oft-cited in the data: general English, and perhaps English teaching more generally, is highly commodified. As a result, and because ‘a certain minimum quality is assumed’ (Doris, Marketing Director, PLS), it is very difficult for providers to differentiate their marketplace offerings to justify hiring better-qualified teachers and charging higher prices. Some businesses tackle this by diversifying: the ULCs’ are arguably ‘not selling English at all. We’re selling university pathways’ (Kylie, DOS, ULC). Others may differentiate by brand: ‘we’re the Haagen Dazs of English language providers and the little language schools are the cheap, supermarket vanilla’ (Jacob, Director, ULC). But the commodified nature of the sector explains why some language schools are ‘not interested in highly professional teachers [but, instead] just someone, anyone, who can do the job’ (Sam, DOS, ULC) and ‘we talk about quality, cohesion in the staffroom, PD [professional development], all those things. But for HR [human resources], a teacher is a teacher is a teacher’ (Kylie, DOS, ULC).

This suggests that, from operational and marketing perspectives, there is little incentive for the industry as a whole to push for TEFL-Q teachers as a more professionalised teacher workforce might cause more issues than it would solve. There would be a need to justify charging higher premiums for a more sophisticated product when the market does not seem to value or wholly perceive this distinction. Particularly as there are many alternative ways of both learning English and having a tourist-like experience in Australia, ELICOS’s value proposition only goes so far, and ‘there’s a limit to how much you can charge’ (Edward, Business Manager, PLS). In

metaphorical terms, it is difficult to sell Haagen Dazs to a market that wants to pay for, and is quite happy with, supermarket vanilla.

Or is it a sales problem?

Another frequently raised issue was the role of educational agents. According to one participant, 'in every school I've worked with and spoken to, 90-95%' of students are recruited through agents (Edward, Business Manager, PLS), and although 'centres would jump at the chance to recruit students directly' the reality is that 'it's a nexus we can't break' as without agents 'we wouldn't be able to survive' (Hannah, Director, ULC). Other interviewees took up this theme, extending it to describe the power of agents as brands in and of themselves. One recounted watching a Korean soap opera featuring a storyline about going to study English overseas. Paid product placement saw the characters visiting the offices of the real-life educational agent, whose branding featured prominently in the episode (Fred, Director, PLS). A related reason that schools struggle to compete for sales with educational agents is that some agents return some of their commission to students in the form of discounting. So, for example, if a student pays \$1000 for a course, the agent's commission may be a notional \$300. But that agent may choose to charge students \$900, with the discount financed by their commission, thereby undercutting the competition including the provider itself. While directly-recruited students' fees do not pay agents' commissions, the costs to schools of marketing to and directly enrolling students are substantial, not least as visa complexities may necessitate much hand-holding before the student arrives. And so despite the paradigm shifting changes to the comparable tourism industry, in which savvy travellers serve as their own travel agent by accessing information through comparison sites like Trip Advisor and Skyscanner, the equivalent digital disruption does not yet seem to be happening in ELICOS.

The upshot for teachers' professional identities is that the paying of substantial commissions to educational agents adds an extra cost to be extracted from students' already downward-pressured fees. This pushes schools to save money on academic staff salaries, as the single largest slice of the operational pie. From this comes the pressure on DOSes to hire cheaply.

Is this a problem of two cultures?

Given the above discussion, we should be unsurprised that many teachers are dissatisfied with the professional identity attributed to them. It appears that there is an in-built downward pressure on teacher quality, at least as conceptualized by qualification frameworks, because as a commodified product in a relatively undiscerning market, ELT is not something for which most customers are willing to pay a premium. Where they do, agents reach for sizeable cuts. Various interviewees, predominantly DOSes –who are perhaps physically and conceptually closer to teachers– expressed concerns about the resultant situation. Their comments are exemplified as follows:

I don't talk much about my work because I'm embarrassed about it. I feel I've let myself down. I think, 'oh Kylie, you could have done better'...I wonder if the people on the [English Australia] board were, themselves, embarrassed to be teachers. [If so], is it easier for them to justify their, the industry's, disdain towards teachers? Does it let them dehumanize them [the teachers]?
(Kylie, DOS, ULC)

Why do teachers stay in this industry? Some of them say, 'I've been teaching for so long, what else could I do?' They start to believe what their employers are telling them, that anyone can do their job, that it is unskilled. And so they forget that they do have transferable skills.
(Monica, DOS, ULC)

These quotes speak to a quiet desperation that these DOSes perceive among their teachers and, in some cases, of their own identity struggles. And yet some teachers *do* seem to be very happy and enthused, including, for instance, those who participate in professional-development social media discussions and webinars organised under the #AusELT hashtag and those engaging in professional

development through English Australia. Some teachers, it seems, *do* find the sector professionally fulfilling. However, even those that do may encounter some powerful negative constructions of teachers' status and identity:

I'm a bit different. I don't see the extra mile stuff as a burden. It's part of my professional and personal integrity. [I originally trained as a schoolteacher] and I'm passionate about the students, about learning...[When I started in Australia as a PLS teacher] I wanted to prove my worth.

(Sam, DOS, ULC)

A staffroom of all high-step teachers is stale, crap. You need new, fresh, energetic teachers, [and] then the medium-to-high step teachers get to be mentors [to them].

(Edward, Business Manager, PLS)

I'm in my thirties. I do still need that challenge, not just teaching. It sounds bad, I know it's not *just* teaching [laughs]...But really, how many times are you going to teach the present perfect?...I used to whinge as a teacher as well. But later [from the vantage point of this role] you realise how easy teachers have it...[When I was a teacher] I used to think, 'I'm wasting my life'. If you're ambitious, you are [wasting your life].

(Gina, Program Coordinator, PLS)

[CELTA] it's a one frickin' month course! Degrees are a dime a dozen in Australia; everyone's got one...[teachers] you basically go to work and you orchestrate fun...Compared to teachers, the admissions staff are a lot harder to replace. And the good ones contribute a hell of a lot more to your business ...They earn less money than a teacher and get no credit or thanks or conferences.

(Edward, Business Manager, PLS)

I don't know that I ever made a choice [to stay in ELICOS]. I just wanted to do something where I'm not watching a clock. I think you've got to make it work for you. That might be going into teacher training, make yourself valuable, help with IT, say yes to everything. You don't have to be stuck [teaching] in those [private language] schools.

(Cassie, Teacher Trainer, ULC)

[As teachers] we could do a lot less and get away with it. That's the heartbreaking thing.

(Kylie, DOS, ULC)

I like this industry. It's quirky. It's idiosyncratic. It's a small business, so there are opportunities you maybe wouldn't get in a bigger company. For a lot of [teachers] this is not the main game [i.e. they think of themselves mainly as musicians or writers, or some other identity]...And there are also plenty of people who are stuck.

(Fred, Director, PLS)

There is complex identity work going on here, in which the participants who have successfully made careers in ELICOS beyond the classroom distance themselves

from those teachers who they construct, variously, as 'stale', 'stuck', 'crap', and 'whingeing' while 'just' teaching and 'getting away with' doing very little. Qualified only by 'a one frickin' month course', teachers 'have it easy'. Further, teachers are constructed as lacking 'professional and personal integrity' if/as they perceive going 'the extra mile' to 'make yourself valuable' as a 'burden'. And unless teachers have high levels of 'ambition' and 'passion' with which to 'prove their worth', they can expect nothing better than endlessly teaching the present perfect and 'orchestrating fun'. Fred leaves a door ajar for those for whom teaching 'is not the main game', but most of the participants espouse some variation on the theme that those who are 'just' teachers are 'wasting their lives'. In contrast to teachers, those who succeed in building non-classroom ELICOS careers are constructed by these narratives as 'different', distinctive, better.

As described above, ELT's image from the *outside*, in wider social imaginaries, has long been lamented. But these excerpts describe the way teaching is seen from the *inside*. And sadly it offers no more flattering a picture. Instead, this is a discourse of constitutive otherness. The 'stuck teacher' imaginary seems to function as a way for ELICOS managers to soothe themselves, constructing a flattering professional identity for themselves that is different from the minimally trained, 'stuck', 'whingeing' teacher. This damning construction functions as a line of otherness around their own safe, professional, managerial, non-teacher identities.

Paradoxically, though, teachers and some DOSes *also* engage in constitutive othering in which they construct *their* identities as pro-student and anti-profit:

English Australia makes them [member colleges' management] look like they care about quality, like, 'it can't be that bad because, look, it's an EA college'...But English Australia is on the wrong side. The board are school owners, directors, not students, not teachers...EA gets its money from its members. Follow the money...It represents the management, not the teachers.

(Bella, DOS, ULC)

A student is a young person who is learning. Instead of valuing these young people, the industry values profit.

(Nancy, DOS, ULC)

We don't need to make as much money. Instead of trying to get rich, we should be trying to make the world better. If profit wasn't the primary goal...
(Kylie, DOS, ULC)

These statements seem rather naïve, particularly given the slender profit margins of most ELT operations and the reality that the sector comprises for-profit businesses, whether owned by universities, accountable to shareholders, or privately operated.

Indeed, responding to this paper, Edward (Business Manager, PLS) comments:

[T]he [English Australia] board would be mortified to be seen that way. There is only one person on the board who isn't an ex-teacher...[They're] an amazing bunch of people who volunteer a lot of their time (it's not a paid role - even for the Chair) to try to improve and defend/advocate for the sector. They all have very busy jobs but want to contribute even more than they already do. They are almost all ex-teachers ...and they genuinely care about the interests of the teachers and students.

But the problem may be one of perception. Teachers and some DOSes *perceive* that 'the board' and 'the management' and 'the industry' are all about profit and not students, and this *perception* is talked into being as part of the cultural 'wall' that divides the sector. On one side, some DOSes echo the teachers in the original study who cited the students' keenness to learn as their motivation. This is very different from the talk of 'profit' that they perceive dominates the culture on the other side of the wall. Together, these distinct narratives construct an industry that is riven by a professional identity wall between 'them' and 'us'. This is the two cultures problem.

Do we have an ethical problem? And/or a quality problem?

Does this matter? At sales, marketing, and operational levels it may not. ELICOS continues to thrive. President Trump's immigration policies and post-Brexit UK may yet make Australia an all-the-more attractive destination for international students. CELTA courses keep producing keen, shiny new teachers willing to work for \$45,000 p.a. on casual contracts. And for all that some DOSes may lament the profit drive, they cannot deny reality: 'teachers need to understand that without profit there's nowhere for them to work' (Lisa, Operations Manager, PLS). In other words:

If students are happy there's ongoing employment [for teachers]. It's a simple equation...some can't reconcile that, but it's the sector they've chosen to work in. You'd have to be in a cave to not understand what it's like.

(Hannah, Director, ULC)

And yet two problems remain: quality and ethics. While presenters at English Australia conferences, for example, may push for quality in the hope that teachers will undertake classroom action research (Burns, 2016), provide 'after-sales customer service care that delivers on brand promise' (Ling, 2016), and teach ever more creatively (Hadfield, 2016), teachers may be simply trying to survive. Most are only TEFL-I (e.g. CELTA qualified), after all, and the issues described here and in the previous paper (Stanley, 2016) explain why most do not stay long-term in ELT. So while we may enthusiastically develop teacher training initiatives and professional development frameworks (as English Australia and several UK organisations are doing; Cambridge English 2016), the sector is structurally ill suited to simply pushing and hoping for quality.

And then there is the ethical problem. Neoliberal economic theory posits that flexible, dynamic, incentivized workers moving in and out of highly competitive systems deliver, without the inefficiencies of workforce rigidity and layers of red tape. And yet, on the ground, such flexibility, dynamism and incentivization can look a lot like futureless, service-industry McJobs. This does the students a disservice. While Australian international education talks the quality talk, ELICOS walks the TEFL-I walk. This also short-changes teachers, for whom career progression relies on 'the sorting hat' (Sam, DOS, ULC) of trying to impress in low-pay language schools, hoping to access meaningful, if unpaid, professional development, and aiming one day to land a precarious but more prestigious and better paid job at a university. Even then 'the only real way to succeed is to get out of the classroom' (Lisa, Operations Manager, PLS). As some ULC teachers do have ongoing contracts, Lisa's notion of career 'success' seems to be defined as professional prestige and/or higher pay borne of working in an office rather than a classroom. While in other

educational sectors career 'success' *can* be had within classrooms, Lisa constructs classroom-based work as necessarily signifying being 'unsuccessful' in ELT. In response to reading this paper, Sam comments:

I'm not sure what Lisa means by 'success'...Is she talking about money or identity or both?...This is interesting to me as it is something I sense around me, but do not necessarily feel myself. I wish I could have stayed in the classroom, but I needed to earn more money and therefore had to get out of the classroom.

(Sam, DOS, UC)

Lisa's and Sam's are telling and problematic perceptions. While teachers may be seduced into the sector by the apparent prestige of the 'teacher' title, the reality seems to be very different. And yet some do still believe in teachers' status:

I wouldn't want to know myself as the person who worked in Coles. With [ELICOS] teaching, the money might be rubbish, but at least you're a teacher.
(Ingrid, Senior Teacher, PLS)

Ingrid still believes. But after reading the narratives above, her comment begins to sound like the man cleaning up elephant dung at a circus who is reluctant to leave 'show business'. While teachers' roles are often packaged as a professional career, they seem to be narratively constructed as interchangeable service-industry McJobs. The ethical issue is that industry professionals may expect teachers to be serious and professional even as they deride them for doing jobs that the same industry professionals see as neither serious nor professional.

What are some solutions?

This paper has aimed to provoke debate. My feeling is that the 'one frickin' month course' is part of the image problem of ELICOS and its teachers. That said, I also think that CELTA is very useful as initial teacher training in and of itself, and that it makes teachers classroom-ready in a way that other training options may not. But CELTA is not, and was never intended to be, stand-alone professional preparation. In addition, the 'teacher' label sets up expectations that do not meet the reality of the job. While less the case in ULCs, teaching in the 'sorting hat' language schools is

perhaps more akin to that of a cultural insider/guide whose role it is to create and provide assisted access to a fun English-language environment.

Perhaps, then, it is necessary to reintroduce the TEFL-I/TEFL-Q distinction, even going so far as to distinguish between teachers (who teach, and who are qualified as such) and 'para-teachers' (who have undertaken four weeks' training). Differentiating may also mean changing the well intentioned but problematic salary 'step' system that currently makes experienced, well qualified teachers all but unemployable in many schools (Stanley, 2016). Perhaps the pay distinction should simply be between qualified teachers (e.g. DELTA/ MEd TESOL) and those who are just starting their ELT journey and who have, to date, only undertaken e.g. CELTA.

This would likely mean that some schools would only employ 'para-teachers', and ideally there would be some way of signalling this to agents and students. Schools would (have to?) advertise the percentage of their teachers that are TEFL-Q and the percentage of para-teachers that are TEFL-I. For many students, para-teachers would be enough. But for those students who wish to undertake serious English language development, there needs to be much more transparency as to what, precisely, they are buying. This would also help the sector pull down the wall that divides the two cultures. To do this, we need to start valuing the serious, professional contribution that some teachers make to our industry. Yes, great careers can be had in school management, sales, marketing, and even academia. But if ELICOS is to grow and develop as a high-quality sector, we also need to recognize, and stop disparaging, the career-minded TEFL-Q teachers in our midst.

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