

## From Our Readers

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*(Have you read any articles that you either disagreed with or strongly agreed with in the MEXTESOL Journal? Have you had any similar or very different experiences as those expressed in the Journal? Are you interested in having your point of view published in this forum? Write us and we will publish your letter and, if it is possible, ask the author of the original article to respond.)*

I have a question regarding the article, "Is English Teaching a Profession: Three Mexican Case Studies," by Peter Hubbard (*MEXTESOL Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2).

This article, six pages long, is comprised of five pages of case studies and a sixth of suggestions to improve the situation, that of English teachers locally not being regarded as professionals.

In the first five pages, the active agents in this situation seem to be managers, directors, administrators and entire administrations. The article states that:<sup>1</sup>

The **institution** actually prefers teachers without background experience or training that might interfere with the institutional method. (Page 11)

However, **supervisors** are encouraged by **management** to keep their ratings of teacher performance low so as to avoid the additional burden of bonus payments. (Page 12)

...the **directors** are **managers** at heart and highly conscious of what they are paying for each hour of staff time. (Page 12)

The **management** seems to be unconcerned about the quality or relevance of this, provided that the quantity is right. (Page 13)

It is not surprising that, when **the university** belatedly recognized that English was essential for practically all successful education at Licenciatura level, English teaching approaches were found to be wanting and 30 years out of date. (Page 13)

Despite the expenditure of money and time on this teacher education program, there was **institutional resistance** to the idea that teaching foreign languages merited the status of professionals studies. (Pages 13 and 14)

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<sup>1</sup> The words in **bold** print are highlighted by the author of the letter.

*Conclusions:*...**employers** seem to regard them as relatively low-level workers, who can easily be replaced and are therefore of no consequence. (Page 14)

...when a complaint is made it is significant that the **school authorities** often side with the students or parents, rather than supporting the teacher's position. (Page 15)

Advancement results from **institutional loyalty or personal connections**, rather than from demonstrable professional certification. (Page 15)

Suddenly, on page 16, where we find suggestions to improve the situation, all of the focus shifts to the **teachers**. **Teachers** need to do this, that or the other, to rectify the situation. Why the sudden placing of the burden of responsibility to improve this state of affairs exclusively unto teachers if the previous five pages had just documented very clearly the problem(s) existing in the minds and actions of others? I am not suggesting teachers are perfect beings and shouldn't work to bring about change, but I was so surprised at the sudden shift that I wondered if my issue was missing page 15 and 1/2.

For example,

*Suggestion 1:* **Teachers** should make every effort to become more highly trained academically and keep up to date with their profession.

*Suggestion 2:* **We** need a concerted information campaign to convince employers, students and parents that being a native-speaker of a language is not enough: **teachers** need professional training. [*And, it appears to me, the author of this letter, that the campaign must be carried out by the **teachers** as I can't imagine employers, parents and students waging a campaign against themselves.*]

*Suggestion 3:* Those **teachers** who do not have a professional degree in teaching English or a subject related to this, should seriously consider enrolling in a degree course.

*Suggestion 4:* As professionals, **we** need a fully accredited Mexican professional association. [*I assume the "we" means teachers (?)*]

Is there something flawed with thinking that if the problem principally rests with employers, managers, directors, school authorities, etc., these entities deserve at least a mention in the list of solutions? How come they are absolutely absolved from any responsibility and involvement whatsoever when it comes time to talk change?

In closing, I would like to express that I found this article by Mr. Hubbard to be one of the best I have ever read in the *MEXTESOL Journal* and I thank him very much for the three case studies and hard-hitting information they provide. I only ask why all the weight is put on the teachers to bring about improvement when the problem seems to primarily originate from other sources.

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*The author, Peter Hubbard, responds...*

I was very pleased that Tracy Jordan wrote a letter to the *MEXTESOL Journal* in reaction to my article. Her concerns are, I think, the same as mine in many respects. That is, she is concerned about fate of teachers in the hands of irresponsible managers.

The point she makes is a good one. If all my implied criticisms are of institutions and their management, why do I end up asking teachers to find the solutions to the problems?

Perhaps I was writing the article from the teachers' point of view and saying that they must fight back against these situations, because I didn't see much hope of a change of mentality among management; and we certainly cannot expect management to **initiate** a change, because they are indifferent or actually hostile towards the professionalization of teachers.

Since writing that article, I have been interviewing dozens of teachers in the Guadalajara area, working in a wide variety of schools. And I have also been interviewing a number of managers. These talks have given me hope that attitudes are changing fast both among teachers and managers (although the enlightened managers are in the minority). Essentially, teachers generally want to become more professional and many managers want their teachers to become more professional. This is extremely encouraging and gives me hope that a new age is dawning in ELT in Mexico.

It is also refreshing to find passionate debate in the pages of the *MEXTESOL Journal*. However, there is a lingering doubt in my mind. I

know teachers have read the article and reacted to it. But have the managers? Would a manager please write in response to this letter? We would like to hear their point of view, also.