

Economy class? Lived experiences and career trajectories of private-sector English-language-school teachers in Australia.

Dr Phiona Stanley, UNSW Australia
phiona.stanley@unsw.edu.au

Published 2016 in: P. Haworth and C. Craig (Eds) *The career trajectories of English language teachers*. Oxford: Symposium Books.

Introduction and contextualizing literature

"If I worked in a nice restaurant...I'd make more money than I do here...but I love my job", says a teacher that I interview for this study. I wonder: what does it *feel* like to work in a teaching job that pays less than waitressing? What kinds of teachers are drawn to, and stick around in, commercial English Language Teaching (ELT)? What are the effects on teachers' morale and identity and on the sector more broadly? These questions motivated this ethnographic study, which was conducted among teachers, students, and Directors of Studies in eleven language schools in four cities in Australia.

A few articles have appeared in the past 25 years lamenting the dubious professional status of the ELT 'profession' or 'industry' (Maley, 1992). Some focus on the teach-and-travel phenomenon, which arguably taints the ELT profession by association with untrained Western 'teachers' teaching English as they travel the world (Stanley, 2013; Thornbury, 2001). Others have considered the problematic privilege of native speaker teachers, arguing that if nativeness is a more important criterion than professional preparation, the profession's professionalism has a long way to go (e.g. Kabel, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2006; Kubota & Lin, 2006, 2009; Phan, 2008). And still others have pointed to the 'second class' earning status of English language teachers in academic institutions (Pennington, 1992). In Australian universities, for example, English language teachers earn less, on separate pay scales, than teachers in other academic disciplines. As a result, Matei and Medgyes (2003, p. 74) write that ELT is "held in low esteem in most parts of the world", arguing that "it is very doubtful whether, without adequate financial means, teachers can command the respect of contemporary society and maintain a level of self-esteem required to pursue this profession." Teachers' salaries, then, perhaps reflect English language teachers' limited professional prestige internationally.

To some extent, the 'economy class' problem is well documented in the literature. However, the articles cited here are written by and from the perspective of old hands, and in addition many of the key articles on this topic are now rather dated; for the old hands, this is old hat. But while many readers of this chapter, including the author, doubtless enjoy the security of 'proper' (academic? management? teacher education?) jobs and salaries, not everyone working in our industry enjoys

these conditions. Therefore the voices missing from this conversation about professional identity are those of precariously hired, minimally qualified, low-wage teachers at the chalk face of language school ELT. The case study discussed here is Australia, but it could just as easily be Canada, or the USA, or the UK, or elsewhere. These teachers are part of 'centre' ELT, perhaps seen by students and others as somehow 'better' than ELT in the 'periphery'. But is it really? To address this, and to give voice to ordinary teachers getting by on short contracts and low pay, this chapter explores our professional identity narrative and the less desirable realities that we may prefer to hide.

I have written elsewhere about the 'soft underbelly' of ELT, where teachers and institutions of limited legitimacy may operate without censure in Asia and elsewhere (Stanley, 2013, p. 2). But this chapter describes a different, though related, problem. All the language schools in this study *are* accredited, which in Australia requires teachers to be university graduates with Cambridge CELTA-like qualifications. This is therefore not what Thornbury (2001) calls 'the unbearable lightness of EFL', in which unqualified 'natives' may reinvent themselves, problematically, as 'teachers' by dint of buying a plane ticket. Instead, these *are* teachers. But they are, I argue, effectively volunteering at least part of their time because their pay and conditions do not reflect the complexity of the technically skilled and emotionally challenging roles they perform. So I ask: how does this phenomenon contribute more widely to the well documented low-status of ELT? This chapter therefore has relevance for *all* English language teachers. Might our *own* professionalism be tainted by these issues and, if so, how might we 'upgrade' the ELT profession from 'economy class' status?

At its core, this is a problem of low salaries. Beginning teachers in Australian English language schools earn much less than newly qualified high-school teachers. In 2013, for instance, full-time, newly qualified language-school teachers earned AUD\$45,000 p.a., while newly-qualified NSW public-school sector schoolteachers made AUD\$60,000 p.a. (Fair Work Commission, 2010; NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2014). However, many language-school teachers are casual employees hired on hourly rates, which are therefore a more useful measure of teachers' actual income. Beginning graduate language-school teachers in 2013 (Fair Work Commission, 2013) earned AUD\$41.40 per teaching hour, while the 2015 rate is AUD\$44.87. Lesson preparation and marking, while expected of teachers, are not paid separately. So if, for example, an hour-long lesson takes a beginning teacher an hour to prepare, and if every classroom hour results in half an hour of marking and other administration after class, this 'hourly' rate is actually for *two and a half hours' work*, paid at about AUD\$16/hour of real time. However, in my experience of training students on University of Cambridge CELTA courses (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults), beginning teachers may spend much longer than this on lesson preparation. Teachers therefore earn below the national minimum wage, which is almost AUD\$17 per hour. Although this may sound substantial to readers in lower income/cost countries, some perspective can be found in comparisons. For example, a \$45,000 language-school teacher's full-time salary equates to, or is less than, the salaries of tram drivers, bakers, or real-estate salespeople, none of whom require degree-level qualifications and all of whom can increase their base salary through

overtime, commissions, and/or penalty rates (Open Universities Australia, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Further, as a standard language school teaching day is four hours classroom time, teachers can expect to earn only about AUD\$900/week if they are lucky enough to find fulltime work. After 20-30% tax, this does not leave much to live on. In Sydney, for example, which is where the majority of English colleges are located, a one-bedroom flat costs AUD\$400-500/week to rent.

Nevertheless, language schools manage to find staff. Teachers, it seems, are not driven primarily by money or job security. Instead, most of those interviewed for this study said they appreciate the flexibility of short contracts and seasonal work, not least as many had 'portfolio careers' encompassing diverse income streams. Interviewees included professional musicians and massage therapists, among myriad other non-teaching roles. In addition, most participants said they appreciated their diverse, interesting and sometimes well-travelled students and colleagues. These factors speak of an industry in which staff motivation may be wonderfully intrinsic, but one in which teacher recruitment and retention may be limited to those with independent means. Many participants spoke of private incomes and/or wealthy spouses. These issues of teacher motivations, demographics, and identities are explored through participants' contributions in this chapter.

Research Method and Context

In common with all qualitative research, my objective in this study was not to survey *all* teachers or to 'prove' that these participants' experiences are representative of all teachers in conceptually comparable contexts. Instead, this was an exploratory study whose objective was to illuminate this issue so as to spark discussion. The data for this chapter comes from interviews conducted with 28 teachers and 13 Directors of Studies and Directors at eleven language schools in four Australian cities in 2012 and 2013. Most of the interviews were conducted individually, although two teachers and two Directors of Studies were interviewed in pairs at their own request. The interviews were conducted in private in spare offices/classrooms in participants' places of work. Interview duration ranged from 40 to 90 minutes, averaging 55 minutes per interview. All recordings were professionally transcribed and checked against the originals. The data was then inductively coded, and the themes that emerged highlighted participants' priorities and concerns. The study was funded by a UNSW Australia School of Education research grant and was approved by the UNSW HREA ethics panel. All participants' names are pseudonyms.

The data set discussed in this chapter comes from a larger study that investigated students' expectations and experiences at language schools where English is bundled with home-stay, cultural immersion, and tourism (Stanley, 2015). The language schools were of different 'types': university-attached, international chain accredited, and independent and privately operated. Most were members of *English Australia*, the industry peak body, and all were accredited ELICOS providers. This acronym stands for English-Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students. Accreditation in Australia means that schools can accept students on ELICOS visas and ensures that certain teacher qualification and other standards are maintained.

Schools provide teacher support in the form of Masters-in-ELT-qualified Directors of Studies and on-going professional development. Most teachers were teaching general English, including examination preparation classes, and a few taught academic or business English. Most of the teachers interviewed had less than five years' teaching experience although some Directors of Studies with up to thirty years' experience in the industry reflected on their teaching experiences and the experiences of teachers they supervised, so the data set represents a range of teacher experience durations from a few months to thirty years. Some of the Directors of Studies were also CELTA trainers, and they also related information based on their teacher training experiences.

Findings & Discussion

The findings are discussed in terms of teachers' motivation, salaries, promotion steps, and the extent of their roles.

Teachers' Motivations

Why teach English in a language school? What motivates teachers? The following quotes are illustrative rather than necessarily representative from sample to population and provide insights as to what motivates these teachers:

[What I enjoy most about the job] it's the people. The students...[are] really keen to learn. ...You feel a great sense of need. You're helping them and you feel you can do things to help them on their journey. The staff are very interesting, too. You get such interesting conversations. So it's a very stimulating place to work...It's amazing the places people have been and experiences they've had....It's certainly one of the best jobs I've had. I mean, I've had some really well paid jobs in the past...but I think this is the job I enjoy the most.

(James, private language school teacher, two years' teaching experience, 2012)

I like meeting people from other countries. I can't travel as much as I would like to any more so I feel, in a way, I'm travelling every day. I've got 30 Brazilians [in my class at the moment] and I'm interested [in them]....When teachers move away from the classroom, they move into management....I just think that they get further away from what teaching's about. For some people, I'm sure that's fine. For me, I really have no ambition to lose contact with students. It's something that I really enjoy.

(Matt, university language centre teacher, twelve years' teaching experience, 2013)

I've got one [teacher] who lives on his boat....He goes up to the Whitsundays for three or four months...and then he comes back when it gets busy. Because May, June, July is really quiet. We don't have enough work. He says, 'okay, I'll be in touch from the yacht'. Then he comes back when it gets busy....He's also a dive-master and he can just do other things.

(Lena, chain language school Director of Studies, 2012)

These quotes draw out areas of language school teaching that appeal to teachers and that came up frequently in the data set. Teachers enjoy feeling needed by students. They enjoy interesting conversations with colleagues, the multicultural

milieu of international students, and the flexibility of seasonal work that offers a chance to take unpaid leave while returning to the same job in the high season.

Teachers' Salaries

For all that teachers described the enjoyment and fulfilment they experience in their workplaces, many were quick to note that the low pay was a major issue for them. In addition, the 'stepped' pay-scale, in which teachers earn more as they gain experience and further qualifications meant that, paradoxically, more experienced teachers felt under-valued. The following quotes, taken from one dyad interview and three individual interviews, illustrate these points:

- Cecilia [Salaries are] one of our biggest discussions. It's like, 'why is there such a big difference between what high school teachers get paid and what we get paid?' We're teaching. We go through all of the stress and pressure but we're...getting the same [pay], or less, than a secretary or a receptionist.
- Louise: Yeah, if I worked in a nice restaurant...where I got tips, I'd make more money than I do here.
- Phiona: So how do you feel about that?
- Cecilia: I love the job. Right now I want to stay in this industry....So it doesn't bother me that much, but I do think it's really unfair....You have to have a bachelor's degree and CELTA. So we're paying back all this money for education, although we don't have to pay it back because we never earn enough to have to pay it back [in Australia, the earning threshold for repaying student loans is \$53,000 p.a.; both Cecilia and Louise make less than this]. But I love teaching and it's something I want to continue.
- Louise: ... I'm single, I live at home [with my parents], and I don't have a lot of expenses and so this job pays for what I need it to pay for. But I know a lot of people who are teachers and their partner has a really well-paying job or they're like semi-retired and they teach just because they like it. So they don't need the money.

(chain language school teachers, less than two years experience, 2012)

The pay is really demoralising for somebody who has just gone and spent \$3000 on a CELTA....It's not a huge return on investment. It seems really quite cruel....It's factory-like, there's a conveyor belt of people coming into [CELTA] training programs....It's a conveyor belt of [teachers] coming in[to schools], and there's a conveyor belt of [teachers] leaving at the other end....Some people go, 'this isn't for me, this is ridiculous, I'm going to train to be something completely different'. I think a lot of people try it out because they like the idea of it and then realise, 'God, this is really hard work...and I get paid bugger all for it'.

(Anna, freelance CELTA trainer, 20+ years' experience, 2012)

Because of my background [as an accountant] I've had the opportunity to earn a decent salary and had permanency and so on. So it's given me a financial cushioning that's enabled me to work in [ELT]....But I look at my colleagues and think, 'they don't have the opportunities I had'. Like, I've paid off my mortgage, [but] they can't even get a car loan because they're casual....I have to admit when I first joined, I knew it was low pay so I made sure that I was financially comfortable before I transitioned [from accountancy]. But now I'm just like, 'this is really not okay'.

(Jane, chain language-school teacher, three years' teaching experience, 2013)

I have one-third of my [teaching] staff who are of flexible economic means but who love doing what they're doing here....They're not working for the money. They're not after a career path. They're all in their 50s or 60s....There's that calmness that they bring to a staffroom....It's got to be the right kind of person.... They're hard to find. I will never get rid of those [teachers] because they're economically flexible. [One teacher] says, 'I just love working here. I love the interaction with young people...But I'll be flexible. If you can only give me two hours a day only or just three weeks here but not for the next seven weeks that's okay'. Those people are like gold. Don't get rid of those. Because they're your little moveable parts that enable the machine to keep going.

(Lena, chain language school, Director of Studies, 2012)

Salient in these quotes is the volunteer-like nature of language-school teaching alluded to by Cecilia and Jane. Both acknowledge that their love of teaching trumps its low remuneration, although both express concern about just how low the pay actually is and how unfair they feel it is, considering the complexity of work they do. While Louise and Jane describe strategies for managing the low-pay issue, including prior earnings to provide a financial cushion, living in low-cost or no-cost accommodation, and teaching at a stage of life when earning is not of primary importance, Anna goes deeper into her perception of the adverse effect this has on the profession more generally, noting high rates of teacher attrition and the sense that teachers come and go and therefore may be regarded interchangeable.

In addition, there is the issue raised by Lena: the ELT industry is highly seasonal, with significant lean times in the year during which student numbers (and therefore teacher employment) drops off. Having teachers 'of flexible economic means' allows schools to offer casual work at certain times of the year only, although this further entrenches the problem of attrition particularly among those teachers who rely on a year-round salary to stay afloat. Indeed, the numbers support this analysis of teacher attrition in ELT. While around 10,000 candidates worldwide undertake CELTA annually, far fewer undertake higher qualifications in ELT (Cambridge DELTA or Masters in ELT, for instance), which suggests that there is a steep drop-off in numbers between entry-level and long-term ELT teachers across the industry (Cambridge ESOL, 2009; Green, 2005).

Priced out of the market?

Another important part of the Australian language school 'story' is the pay agreement, which divides teachers' salaries into 'steps' that recognise teachers' experience and qualifications: as teachers gain classroom experience they move up the step system and their pay increases. (That said, even highest-step language-school teachers, with many years' teaching and higher qualifications in ELT, earn only \$65,000 per year; this is just over the *starting* salary of a schoolteacher. While language-school pay may be low at the *entry* level, it is arguably lower, proportionate to expertise, at the *upper* end of the spectrum!) Although well intentioned as a way to recognise and reward expertise, the step system, I contend, in fact does more harm than good. It must be noted, also, that not all schools adhere to the same pay scale. In particular, teachers at the university language centres are better paid, either on a separate step system or a flat hourly rate. But newly-qualified teachers are less frequently hired by the university centres, and the private and chain language schools are much more numerous and they hire many more teachers. So the step system has an important, and I think very damaging, impact on the ELT industry. The following quotes provide an insight into how the system affects teacher-hiring decisions:

My budget [for teacher salaries] is to be an average of a step seven [teacher]....That means if you've got someone who's got a degree and a CELTA they come in at step two. ...But you've got these great teachers, you're hanging on to them, and they're slipping up the steps every year....Then I have to sacrifice somewhere. So at the moment I look for any step two [teacher] and throw them into the mix so I can keep my step 12 [teacher]....But then [a step two teacher] becomes a step three very quickly, and then a step four. Your average slips up....So I'm constantly keeping an eye on it....There's always a turnaround. So, for instance, I'm about to lose [one of the teachers], who's a step eight. When I lose him, regardless of what I find [in terms of new teacher hires], it's got to be a step two to come in to replace that step eight, to average it out.

(Lena, chain language school, Director of Studies, 2012)

We do hire a lot of very good teachers...but we lose them when they become too expensive for the school. It's not that they want to leave; there are many people I know who would have loved to have stayed, but they weren't given more work because they'd reached that part of the [salary] award where they became an expensive teacher, and there's somebody cheaper who could do the job....[In ELT] you have a shelf life, and when you become too expensive [you lose your job]....We've definitely kept not-so-good, inexpensive teachers and we've let expensive, very good teachers go....How can this be a serious industry when the price of a teacher matters more than their experience? It's very disheartening....When you talk to other teachers, many people think oh, 'I don't know how long I'm going to be in this industry'. People say to me, 'Oh you're studying your Master's [degree in ELT], why? What are you going to do with that? What other school's going to hire you? You're going to have this [step] level and your Master's, where on

earth are you going to find a job?' (Amy, chain language school Senior Teacher, five years' experience, 2012)

It seems incredibly paradoxical that teachers become *less* employable as they gain skills, qualifications, and experience. But in language-school ELT, it is so. Indeed, in the research for this project and in ten years of involvement with the ELICOS sector I have distressingly often heard of teachers whose pay step has risen beyond a level their school can afford who are negotiating their own salaries *down*, so as to keep their jobs. Obviously, at an industry level, this is problematic, conspiring to reward and value inexperience and lack of professional expertise; as Amy says, 'how can this be a serious industry when the price of a teacher matters more than the experience?' She is right.

But the 'price' of teachers' salaries *does* matter to the small, private language schools and to the chain-school operations. It matters enormously. These are very lean business operations with little money to spare. This is because the ELT industry is beholden to diverse stakeholders each of whom takes a sizeable slice from the students' fees. These include facilities and equipment costs and the salaries of ancillary staff (e.g. cleaners and receptionists, but also Directors of Studies, accountants, and marketing staff). But, perhaps most significantly, schools bear the cost of agents' fees and agent discounting. The phenomenon of education agents is akin to that of travel agents in the tourism industry. Despite the internet, many students approach education agents to navigate the complexity of overseas courses, and even students on-shore in Australia often book through agents rather than directly with institutions. Agents market to students and are often engaged as problem-solving middlemen. This role of agents was explained by almost all the Directors of Studies participants. But agents, and discounts, account for a large proportion of school income, which is one reason that teacher salaries are low compared to student fees. It is not (just) that most schools are for-profit businesses with sizeable overheads. It is also that many hands are reaching for a share of the spoils.

Going the Extra Mile

But is it not the case, murmur the sceptics, that English teaching is easy (Thornbury, 2001)? Isn't language-school teachers' pay low because any reasonably proficient user of English can do the job? Sadly, this view permeates in the Australian social imaginary, in which many people have heard of, or even undertaken, 'teach-and-travel' ELT work during extended overseas sojourns. This is the 'soft underbelly' problem I referred to in the introduction. Against a background of discourse that constructs ELT as an easy way for young backpackers to make money on the road (Stanley, 2013, pp. 26-30), teachers' perceptions of low pay may originate, in part, from comparing the complexity of (the reality of) the job with the meagre salary it attracts. The following quotes speak to this complexity and the high expectations of teachers that students, and schools, may have:

This job, it's lots of fun but also at the same time it is really difficult because you work with people five or six hours a day....You're 'on', you have to be

'on', all that time....I spend more time with [the students] than with my husband. So it can be really hard work.

(Natasha, Private language school teacher, six months' teaching experience, 2012)

You need teachers who notice the moods of the students and who actually say, 'are you okay? You look a bit quiet today'. They might say 'I'm just - I'm not feeling that well'. So, 'make sure if you're sick go and see a doctor, we can help organise that'....These are 22, 23 year old [students]. They're away from home....You don't want to bring in [a teacher] who will say, 'I'm just here to teach'....[Part of the job] is that caring for students as individuals. Sometimes being prepared to give that little bit of extra time, that one to one with students as they need it. Just being a real, like a surrogate family...[the teachers] have got to understand that, that it's part of their role.

(Lena, chain language school, Director of Studies, 2012)

Some language schools won't look at [higher step teachers] so it's hard for them to find work....You can't afford to have probably more than one or two step 12s. But you want them, you need them, they're important....Somebody who's a step 10, 11, 12, has to be much more than just experienced....Maybe they they're happy to run PD [professional development] sessions [for other teachers]. Be a bit of a leader and a mentor, not just come in[to school] and go, 'I'm just here for four hours'. They might be the grammar guru or whatever [in the staffroom], and also they can teach anything that you need them to teach. If you say, 'well can you go and teach [Cambridge Proficiency; a very high level class]?' [They'll say], 'yep, no problem'.

(Chris, private language school, Director of Studies, 2012)

I'm a history buff, I could bore you for hours [laughs]. The first day we went to [a historical site]. So I spent half a day [taking] them around [the area] and explained about the hotel, it's got a tunnel underneath where they used to shanghai the sailors....The other day we went to [another historical site]. ...Then last week we went to the market and they were interested in the cheese, this array of cheese. So I bought them some blue cheese and we had it, it was really quite good actually. Every second week we go somewhere on excursion.

(Serena, chain language school teacher, two years' teaching experience, 2013)

[Teaching in a language school, as a newly qualified teacher] is actually not much less stress than the CELTA course, and [the teachers] get paid bugger all for it. [They feel,] 'I give, give, give'...and, you know, once you've started getting feedback, you get feedback on everything. Stand in the corner with your hands in your pockets, and some DOS [Director of Studies] will come in the room and say, 'what are you doing standing in the corner with your hands in your pockets?' There's always feedback, there's like constant feedback. I think that's really tiring....[There are] such high expectations, such low rewards.

(Anna, freelance CELTA trainer, 20+ years' experience, 2012)

I have selected a large number of quotes here because, together, they construct the teacher role as multi-faceted and highly complex. Within the written, and perhaps more importantly unwritten, language-school job description, the importance of 'going the extra mile' is obvious for teachers hoping to keep their (mostly casual, usually seasonal) jobs. Natasha highlights the emotional labour of many hours of face time, while Lena emphasises the pastoral-care role of teachers (to reiterate: most of whom are hourly paid and not contracted to work beyond their classroom contact hours). Chris's extra mile is staffroom peer support by being the grammar guru or running professional development sessions, while for Serena the extra mile is the extra skills and dedication her historical expertise and passion bring to her role (as well as buying cheese!). Anna's text, perhaps more nuanced, concerns the burden on teachers of surveillance. The extreme casualisation and implicit daily re-interviewing for one's own continuing employment means that every action is under constant scrutiny, and teachers cannot afford to let their guard down for a moment.

Matt also described an expectation on teachers to 'go the extra mile', in this case in pursuit of stable year-round contracted employment. Having worked as a casual teacher, on five-week contracts and often only during peak periods, in the same language institute since 2005, he says:

At the end of the year, all the teachers apply for [annual] contracts [as opposed to five-week agreements that a majority of teachers are on]....Quite a big part of [the selection criteria] is developing materials; how much work you put into that. That's tricky, though, because, as a casual I'm expected to be there for six hours a day; four hours teaching, a couple of hours prep. To develop materials on top of that, they're pushing it to get that from us. ...The other [criterion] is professional development days and training courses, so if you go on those unpaid. They used to be [paid] but now they're not...So if you're a casual that develops a lot of materials, goes on all the professional development days, that would put you in better stead for a contract....But it's beyond me so far. I've got a daughter in school, so it's complex.

(Matt, university language centre teacher, twelve years' teaching experience, 2013)

I have separated out Matt's contribution from the excerpts above as it also illustrates a point I raised in the introduction, and want to revisit, that much of the conversation in the literature on the issue of ELT and low status/low pay is written by people who are safely ensconced, themselves, in much more secure and fairly paid jobs. This is also my story. Although I worked in language schools from 1994 to 2006, in a range of roles, a variety of countries, and series of somewhat precarious contractual situations and sometimes low pay, I am now much more secure in a 'proper' academic job with a reliable income, a transparent and merit-based career structure, and a sense that I am fairly remunerated for my work. So while I still respond viscerally and emotionally as much as intellectually to the central ideas in this chapter, my own normativities have changed. I was shocked by Matt's point that teachers were expected to attend unpaid professional development sessions. When I expressed my surprise and checked I had understood Matt's intended meaning: yes, these sessions are unpaid. For Matt, this is the natural way of things; for me, it

seems unusual. Therefore, while researchers, like me, are more likely to be writing chapters like this one, we must still strive to listen to, and *to hear*, teachers at all levels of ELT.

The excerpts discussed in this section reveal a world of unwritten expectations and subtle and not-so-subtle demands made of teachers. While social imaginaries, in part borne of the 'teach-and-travel' phenomenon, may construct ELT as easy, these teachers' testimonies speak to a complexity and emotional labour that may be relentless, thankless, and exhausting. While plenty of teachers certainly enjoy their work, minimal pay and low status perceptions are a high price to pay given the attendant complexity of succeeding in the role itself, particularly given its many demands for going the 'extra mile' in areas such as out-of-class pastoral care for students, materials preparation, peer mentoring/troubleshooting, attending unpaid meetings, drawing on teachers' other areas of expertise, and submitting to constant surveillance.

Conclusion

Teachers' low pay, the problematic salary step system, insecure working conditions, and unwritten 'extra mile' expectations do not appear to actually hinder teacher recruitment to the extent that schools find it impossible to recruit teachers. Perhaps if they did, things would change. If school owners and Directors (whose status, stake, and longevity in the industry makes them much more influential than most teachers) were to experience teachers' working conditions as an operational problem, they might push for a salary system that values and recognises good teachers above cheap ones and that pays graduate teachers more than bakers, tram drivers, and real-estate sales agents. Such a change would be good for teacher recruitment, morale, and retention, and would create a sense that language school teaching is a viable career option rather than a semi-volunteer, pocket-money-earning hobby to be enjoyed by those who do not need the money or whose stage of life allows them to live cheaply.

Individual teachers' experiences of the ELT industry also matter in and of themselves, beyond the more obvious effects on the industry of teacher recruitment, morale, and retention. Bearing in mind the 'conveyor belt' through CELTA and language schools, and teachers' subsequent disillusionment, as Anna described above, there are many, many people for whom ELT is something with which they experimented before moving onto pastures new. This means that for most people who have first-hand experience of ELT, the experience is likely to be fun but ultimately not viable as a career for any of the reasons discussed above. A small minority go the distance. These majority, early experiences then contribute to the social imaginary of ELT as low status; it is not just the 'teach-and-travel' discourses that construct the idea that ELT is, as Thornbury puts it, a 'low status, even slightly disreputable thing to do' (2001, p. 391). So by attending to beginning teachers' experiences, and constructions about the industry, we are attending to the industry itself both at an operational level, as in the previous paragraph, and at a reputational level, as discussed in this paragraph.

There is a final point to be made that is perhaps the most important point of all. The issues discussed here are, I feel, quite simply unfair at a human level. Novice teachers' enthusiasm, expertise, flexibility, care for the students, and goodwill are being exploited and squandered through ever higher expectations of minimally paid and marginally employed teachers. While the ELT industry offers some job satisfaction and a chance to work in an interesting and international milieu, it also seems to result in teachers struggling with the difficulty of getting and keeping ongoing work that provides a living wage. But *they* have not failed; the industry has failed them. This is the depressing reality of 'economy class' ELT.

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