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Teflors teaching law or lawyers teaching EFL?

Matt Salusbury investigates who make the best legal English teachers

Do teachers of English for law need to have a legal qualification to be effective? And, conversely, do qualified lawyers need a Tefl qualification before they're let loose teaching legal English? We asked a number of centres who offer English for law for their opinions.

Peter Thompson, director of courses at the London School of English (LSE), believes, 'It's best to have both, as long as the lawyers are also ELT-trained and have ELT experience.' LSE has two kinds of trainers: qualified ELT professionals who have a wealth of expertise in ESP and have been given time to train up to teach the language of law, and qualified lawyers who have a formal ELT qualification and considerable experience.

LSE's group courses 'tend on the whole to be taught by the ELT professionals where the focus is more on language than legal content', while the ELT-trained lawyers tend to concentrate on one-to-one tutorials and leading discussions. The school's legal English courses also feature 'legal experts - current practising lawyers - to deliver workshops and seminars'. These lawyers 'have literally come from their offices to the school'.

Charles Reader, of Cambridge Academy of English, told the *Gazette*, 'Lawyers are not quali-

fied to teach English for law simply by virtue of being lawyers.' He believes this 'because we know that at, for example, Cambridge ILEC level there is a requirement for major language input of a kind that a lawyer with no EFL training ... would not have the skills set to teach'.

Maurice Cassidy, director of studies at the Executive Centre at International House (IH) London, believes that teachers should 'ideally' have a legal background. He adds, 'It is difficult to retain credibility when students with a level higher than B1 are taught by well-qualified non-law degree teachers.' Lawyers teaching on English for law courses 'absolutely need to have an initial Tefl qualification, such as Celta, as a minimum', he believes.

Other factors that Maurice feels can affect the outcome of an English for law course include 'the level of English of the students ... as can their aims. A course for newly qualified lawyers will generally be easier to manage than, say, a group of experi-

enced corporate lawyers whose field is intellectual property and whose level of English is B2/C1.'

Joseph Gerada, director of studies at the English Plus Language Centre, Malta, feels that 'English for law is an ESP course. Any English language teacher who has ESP training and who is in possession of an EFL teaching permit issued by the Maltese education department is able to teach English for law.'

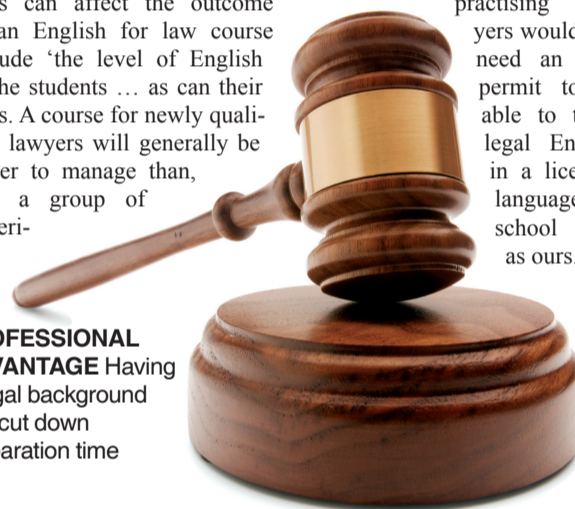
Having a legal background helps, particularly by reducing preparation time, adds Gerada. His school tries to look for English teachers 'who have a legal background to teach legal English classes. These teachers would either be law university students or lawyers who are also EFL teachers. In Malta practising lawyers would still need an EFL permit to be able to teach legal English in a licensed language school such as ours.'

Dr Shelley Saltzman is senior lecturer of English as a second language on the American Language Program at the world-class Columbia University, New York, which has had an English for law course since 1988. She told the *Gazette* that 'during these years we have employed different models of combining the legal and linguistic expertise that Northcott [Jill Northcott, co-author with Tony Lynch of *Educating legal English specialists: Teacher education in teaching EAP*, Institute of Applied Language Studies, Edinburgh, 2007] contends is required to best meet law students' English language needs.

'We have hired instructors with dual degrees,' says Dr Saltzman. 'We have hired ESL professionals who work as in-house language experts in law firms abroad. We have hired highly experienced ESL professionals with an interest in law and a willingness to learn. It is the last group that has proven most effective, especially when paired with legal experts.'

In Columbia's English for law programmes, 'ESL instructors concentrate on language - fluency, accuracy and legal terms - and legal experts - professors, judges and lawyers - discuss the law itself through lectures, field trips and analysis.'

PROFESSIONAL ADVANTAGE Having a legal background can cut down preparation time



Time to take your training online

Besig's Mike Hogan on the benefits of new communication technology

An ongoing challenge for teachers is to find the time and money to invest in their own professional development. Face-to-face workshops and training sessions can be costly and involve time participating and travelling. However, as technology has become cheaper, faster and more accessible in recent years, these challenges can be overcome allowing teachers to participate in online seminars (aka webinars) and workshops from the comfort of their own homes. Many teaching associations and training providers even offer them for free. So, 'Where's the catch?' I hear you ask. There is none!

The Iatefl Business English Sig (Besig) has been running both webinars and online workshops since 2011. The distinction between them is that webinars are often more lecture or presentation style, and in Besig's case, more panel-discussion-style followed by a participant Q&A session. Workshops on the other hand aim to be more like face-to-face workshops, in that they involve more regular participant interaction.

Based on the experience we've gained, here are a few tips for those thinking of running their own online workshops for

teachers within their school or organisation.

The room. There are various virtual meeting platforms available with a range of features and prices. They are generally quite similar to each other and so our tip is to take part in a couple of online events offered on various platforms to get a feel for which one might best suit your needs. Iatefl and its Sigs use Adobe Connect Pro with a room capacity of a hundred attendees. We have reached our limit before, so get your seats early!

The speaker. You don't have to be a tech whiz to present online. Having said that, a rehearsal is essential. During such a rehearsal, you can run through the basic functionality of the platform with your speaker/moderator, such as how to advance slides, play audio or video, and interact with the audience. This is also a good time to set up and check your audio and webcam settings. It's a good idea to use a headset as there is often looping feedback when you just use the built-in microphone and speakers on your computer. It's also good to make sure your phone is turned off. It's better to be connected via cable rather than wirelessly and the rehearsal should be done using the same

computer and connection as will be used for the event itself. If you're presenting using a connection with low bandwidth, turning the video feed off will help avoid overloading the connection. This could lead to bad audio quality or even losing the connection.

The topic. Just because these events are online and using technology doesn't mean that their content need be about technology. Actually, we made a conscious decision to have non-tech topics as the subject matter of the webinars and workshops with the aim of making the topics as accessible as possible to all teachers. So far in the workshops we've covered topics ranging from networking to storytelling to teaching beginner-level learners, and in the webinars have included debates on ELF/BELF and intercultural communication.

Dynamic sessions. It's important to be aware that the dynamics of online teacher training are quite different to seminars and workshops delivered face to face. You can't eye-contact with your audience and the dynamics of small group or pair work are quite different from face-to-face workshops. Participants can see and hear you, but you can't

see or hear them. The audience members have the opportunity to interact with you and each other by typing into a chat field or by speaking if you 'pass them the mic'. Bearing this in mind, it's good to offer participants regular interaction by asking for opinions and experiences, or to brainstorm ideas. You can then respond to them by name. It's also good to vary your input media. So, in addition to slides, you could also use audio or video clips, images, and so on. You should avoid snazzy animation on your slides as they may appear choppy when embedded in the virtual room. And finally, remember to allow time for Q&A.

The Besig weekend workshops are generally on the first Sunday of each month and are open to all. In addition, there are two or three webinars per year. See www.besig.org/events for more details and regular updates. We're looking forward to seeing you online.

Mike Hogan is a management and communication skills trainer, teacher trainer and ELT author based in Germany. He is a BOT member (Besig Online Team) and moderates the Besig Weekend Workshops. <http://about.me/mikehogan>