

Dear Melanie,

I enclose the piece I promised.
Hope it makes sense.

Mario

Are Language Teachers well served by their ancillary workers?
by Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims.

The presupposition of this article is that EFL teachers are the **central workers** in the teaching of English as a foreign language. They are the front line troops. Behind them, to the rear, are a host of other workers.

How well do these ancillary or supplementary workers serve the front line needs of language teachers?

A full list of such workers might well reach 50 or 60 but let me take 5 categories and briefly evaluate their contribution to their central life task of serving learners and teachers.

Lexicographers: Over the past 25 years these people have made a major contribution to the learning and teaching of English as they have brought the first fruits of the Corpus Revolution onto each student's desk. **Collins Co-build** was perhaps the first dictionary to draw on a large computer corpus of real data and they were the first lexicographers to couch their explanations in simple, direct, I-thou language.

There have also been excellent new types of dictionaries like the Longman **Dictionary of English language and Culture**, a rich survey of UK middle class knowledge, ignorance and attitudes. and the Longman **Language Activator**, which has provided my upper intermediate classes with many a language rich lesson.

Linguists: Those linguists who, with the lexicographers, have pioneered the corpus revolution, have really helped the front line troops, the teachers. I have learnt as much from the Co-Build **English Grammar** (Collins) and from the writings and oral presentations of Carter and McCarthy as I did, as young teacher, from the Quirk et al, **Grammar of Contemporary English**.

And what about the other families of linguists? What have the Chomskyan School taught us language teachers? (Chomsky himself famously declared that T.G. had no intention of influencing teachers' work). How have ideas from the study of **Pragmatics** affected chalk face language teachers?

And finally what is it that so-called Applied Linguists do in our field? Sure, they do MA gate-keeping, but what is their real contribution to the profession?

Teacher Trainers: The corps of people who do this job are in a virtually impossible situation. Their trainees come to them already deeply trained by 12 years sitting on school benches, inevitably trained by more than a hundred role models and anti-role models, their own primary and secondary teachers. All future teachers arrive on their training course already **unconsciously trained**. What in-depth difference can teacher trainers make in their trainees' lives unless they get the trainees to unearth and look at

their past role-models, as that pioneer of realistic training, Ephraim Weintraub, does in Jerusalem.

Possibly people who work in In-service training have more chance of some success with their trainees, providing these people come to the training room wanting to learn new things, which is often not the case.

I do such work myself and I believe we trainers make a weak contribution to the work of the front line troops, the teachers.

EFL Magazine Editors and Webmasters: The last 10 years has seen a huge expansion of the "periodical" help offered to EFL teachers, with the mushrooming of rich and copious websites. The good thing is that much of this help and information is free, so not restricted to teachers in first world countries. According to David Eastment, writing two years ago, there were then at least 4500 EFL sites at that time!

But how honestly do the EFL print magazines and websites balance the positive and the negative in our profession? How often will you find an article in **ETp** or **MET**, or on the **TEFL Farm** website in Paris that actually describes a failure, a radically bad teaching situation or a lousy boss? In the magazine I edit, **HLT** < www.hltmag.co.uk>, over the last three years there have not been more than three or four reports on the downside, the shadow side of TEFL. Unrealistic, since the shadow at least equals the light. In this area, the **EF Gazette** comes close to top of my list in terms of balancing the bad with the good, though even they, as a newspaper, will occasionally run sycophantic pieces. (Am I brown-nosing the Gazette?)

Photocopier Manufacturers: Since the photocopier is central to many EFL lessons taught in the Metropolitan world, the improvement in speed, print quality and reliability of these machines over the past 20 years has seriously improved the EFL teacher's quality of life, especially early in the morning. It has made it easier for the teacher to bring in side dishes to make the coursebook more eatable, and so has benefited learners.

What contribution do **managers, janitors, resource book writers, Microsoft or spouses** make the wellbeing and efficiency of the front line troops?

I have no more space. Why don't you continue this article with your comments on other ancillary workers who second your work as a teacher, and send your piece to the **Gazette**?

Mario edits **HUMANISING LANGUAGE TEACHING**, < www.hltmag.co.uk> Pilgrims' web'zine for teachers and his latest book is **HUMANISING YOUR COURSEBOOK**, **ETp-Delta**, 2002.