

One of the thorniest problems in our field is the question of judging...whether this is judging who should pass an exam or a course, who should be hired or when someone should be fired. As many mentors, trainers and educators came into education to avoid judging and to think instead about creating and supporting, many try to avoid or evade the issue of judgement. I would love to have regular articles on this but Peter Duppenhaler below is one of the very few who have obliged by sending one in to the journal! This time on teacher selection.

Teacher Selection

by Peter Duppenhaler

The Problem

As an administrator at a large private language institute in Japan, I am responsible for the selection and later training of new applicants. The problem is how to successfully judge a field of applicants and select out of that group the most suitable complement for our existing staff (60% Japanese and 40% expatriate native speakers of English) and our teaching situation. At our institute the native speakers of English are hired to teach oral English to working adults who have had six years of grammar and translation by the time they have graduated from high school. The problem is compounded (at least in Japan, and I would suspect much of the EFL teaching world) by the fact that many of the applicants have had little or no actual teaching experience. Resumes, personal interviews, written tests and writing samples, all serve as valuable sources of information, but even with experienced candidates these can be relied upon to indicate little more than a technical proficiency in the language. Evaluating the personality characteristics that make an applicant a good teacher is another thing. Wouldn't you like a clearer idea of the person you're thinking of hiring; to know just how well the applicant is able to get along with and work with others; if he or she gets excited when talking about such things as planning a class, or deciding on a common textbook; and how the applicant can handle the preparation of a given exercise within a very limited period of time? What I would like to suggest is one way to help you decide on whether an applicant is really the one for you. The following sample information sheet and two-part activity will allow you to do just that. I have used them over the past few years and have found them to be of great help.

The information sheet

The information sheet is short, simple, and designed to give you a more in-depth idea of the applicants. Applicants are asked to give short answers (two or three sentences at most) to each question. It takes approximately ten minutes to fill in and is well worth the time. I have included a list of sample questions I use in Japan, but feel free to add or delete as you think necessary. The only thing to remember is to keep it short and to try to include questions that reveal as much as possible about each applicant's character and suitability for your particular needs.

Sample information sheet:

(X = country of instruction)

- How long do you plan to stay in X?
- What brought you to X?
- What aspect of X culture are you most interested in?
- What personal and professional goals do you hope to accomplish while you are in X?
- Why did you decide to become an English teacher in X?
- Why did you apply to this school?
- What do you enjoy or think you will enjoy most about teaching?
- What new ideas would you like initiate in your classes?
- How would you like your students to view you?

- What can a native speaker of English bring to a class that an X teacher of English cannot and vice versa?

The group activity

The activity is divided into two parts: a group activity and an individual one. The group activity, (many thanks to Dr Richard C. Yorkey who presented the original idea in a workshop offered in Japan by Temple University in the fall of 1984) requires approximately thirty-five minutes, and gives you a very good idea of just how well an applicant is able to get along with and work with others, and if he or she gets excited when talking about or planning a class with other teachers. Applicants are divided into small groups and asked to write the first lesson of the beginning-level text. The exercise will tell you a great deal about their approach to teaching, their view of ELF/ESL, and whether or not they have a grasp of teaching fundamentals. The activity will also give some indication of personality factors. The five-minute report which each group is required to give at the end is immaterial (you have been unobtrusively, carefully, observing during the whole activity), but it serves to focus the applicants' attention on the activity. In addition to the above, the activity serves to give at least some indication of the applicants' motivation. We hear a lot about student motivation but teacher motivation (which seems to be taken for granted but certainly should not be) is just as important if not more so. Without it, no matter how good your training programme may be, you are not going to be able to turn out "good" teachers.

- Group activity

Procedure:

- Divide the applicants into groups of about four each.
- Hand each group a copy of the following:

Activity

You have 30 minutes in which to outline lesson one, book one, of a six volume series. One person from your group must report (maximum 5 minutes). Your plan should include the following:

Statement of objectives (What you will teach in the lesson), type of class (e.g., junior high, adult evening, etc.) type of student, number of students in the class, time for each class, etc.

Vocabulary to be taught.

Patterns/structures to be taught.

"Vehicle" of presentation (dialogue, letter, poem, drama, picture, recording, video, etc.)

Please note that you must be able to come up with a clear, concise plan, and present it within the time limit.

After the groups have read the activity and you have answered any Questions they might have, tell them to start. Once the activity has started to not encourage, comment, or participate in any way. This is the participants' time to show you what they can do. When time is up, ask for the reports. After the reports ask for any clarification you might wish for. It has been said that "shy" people will not do well in the group activity. As an administrator you should not necessarily be looking for those who talk a lot (high turn-takers do not necessarily make the best contributions) but for those who contribute the most to the success of the activity – including rephrasing, summarizing, contribution of ideas, mediating etc. These are qualities that will not only make good teachers but good co-workers.

The individual activity

Applicants will have another chance to show what they can do in the individual activity, which lets you see how well they can handle the preparation of a given exercise within a very limited period of time, and above all if they are capable of the kind of organizational skills which are essential in order to successfully teach lower-level students. In addition, the individual activity reflects what many teachers are often called upon to do - fill in for another teacher with little or no warning or time for preparation. Material for this activity should be selected from the textbooks you are currently using and are familiar with. This will make

it easy for you to tell whether an applicant: 1) has any idea of what to do with a particular piece of material, 2) is organised, 3) can work under pressure, 4) has some idea of time. Each applicant is asked to be prepared to give (orally), at the end of ten minutes, an outline of how he/she would teach only one section to be covered in one of your typical classes. Most standard core-course textbooks (one of which you are probably using) follow the same basic format: dialogue/passage, questions and answers, activities, reading/writing/listening activities, etc. With this in mind, you can ask Applicant 2, questions and answers related to the dialogue/passage; Applicant 3, activities; Applicant 4, a listening exercise, etc. Each applicant receives a full copy of the lesson to be covered with a box drawn around their respective item.

- Individual activity

Procedure:

- Hand out the material and give a brief explanation including: type of class, minutes for each class, how much material will be covered in the class, number and type of students, etc., and make sure each applicant knows which part he/she will be responsible for.

- Give the applicants ten minutes in which to come up with a plan for teaching their respective material, reminding them to keep in mind that they must present it as if it were only one segment of an entire class. Tell them that they will each have two to three minutes in which to give a detailed oral explanation of how they would present the material. Remind them that a detailed oral presentation of their outline is all that is required, NOT a demonstration lesson.

- At the end of ten minutes ask each applicant to present his/her outline. Look for how well the applicant has organised the material and has fit it into the overall plan of the class.

As administrators we must have a clear idea of what we really want from an applicant including: what type of teacher the students and staff expect, and the personality of the teachers and staff they will have to work with. Once these are established, I am sure that the above will be of great help in simplifying a very difficult job: the selection of PEOPLE who will, after training, most likely become the kind of "teachers" you and your students are looking for.

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