



## **International Black Professionals and Friends in TESOL Caucus E-Newsletter**

**Volume 6, Issue 1**

*A periodic newsletter for members of this TESOL community.*

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### **How Race Defined an ESL Teacher's Role as an Educator**

By Khadar Bashir-Ali, [khadarbashir\\_ali@hotmail.com](mailto:khadarbashir_ali@hotmail.com)

S: Are you the teacher?

T: Yes.

S: Are you the one teaching English?

T: Yes, I am the English as a second language teacher.

S: Where is the real teacher?

T: What do you mean?

S: I mean the American teacher.

T: Well, I am an American teacher.

S: No, no, the real teacher.

T: What do you mean?

S: You are African; you cannot be the teacher. (Snicker)

T: How do you know that I cannot be a teacher?

S: (Pause) All the English teachers I saw in Africa were all American.

T: I understand that, and I want you to understand that I am also a teacher.

S: OK. (Pause . . . smile). I never think that. (Snicker)

I had this exchange with a newly arrived student from Africa. It was clear to me she did not see me as a teacher. Upon further inquiries, I found out that her assertions in questioning my role as a teacher stemmed from the fact that the only teachers she saw teaching English in her African country were either European or White U.S. teachers. It was clear to me that the role of the global educator was seen to be for a White person. How do educators of color, then, react to this simple truth? How does my race impact my nationality and, most importantly, my profession? Is it true that my students have seen only White teachers in their classrooms in Africa?

Although perceptions have shifted lately, and more teachers of color serve overseas as English teachers, White English teachers still grossly outnumber those of color. In addition to the power that goes with being an educator, the image of the White teachers continues to propagate stereotypes and misconceptions about the minorities in this country who are absent in the global classrooms. The problem lies within the postcolonial understanding that a minority person could not be included in the power discourse in the field of education. What is the alternative then? When my student stated confidently that she has never seen a Black English teacher, and that all her English teachers in her high school were White, I began to theorize and deconstruct the notion of race and power in education. This article challenges the dominant presence of White teachers in many global classrooms and suggests ways to include an equitable representation of minority teachers in this global power base.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the invisibility of minority teachers in the global classrooms:

1. Overseas recruiters often hire White teachers because they think that an English teacher can only be a native person, and native is associated with being a White person from the United States, thereby discrediting all other minority teachers. In this process, recruiters condone racism and encourage white supremacy by validating the notion that being White equates being from the United States.

2. There is a scarcity of well-prepared minority teachers who are willing to serve overseas as English language educators. In her book, *The Color of Teaching*, June Gordon (2000) investigated the problems behind the scarcity of minority teachers; she argued that the entire educational context "is very limiting for black students" (p. 31). In addition, she quoted one of the teachers she interviewed as saying "they can't keep up, so they do something less difficult than teaching" (p. 30). This kind of behavior from teachers of students of color undermines and at times discourages students who want to go into the teaching profession. How can people condone teachers who are constantly

barraging their students, particularly in urban areas, with unfounded fears that going to college or going into teaching is out of reach?

3. Racism is deeply embedded in the power dynamics of the college and universities that prepare future teachers. Prejudice, coupled with all the other challenges students face in colleges, contributes to the failure of many minority students in completing their teaching degrees.

4. The presence of White teachers in global English classrooms unintentionally reinforces the White supremacy notion, while tipping the power balance. This one-sided representation of the U.S. teacher validates the negative assumptions that many around the world have of the minorities in the United States. Dangerous is also the notion that these assumptions are often unquestioned but reinforced.

5. Finally, popular culture and the media also contribute to the dismal misconceptions people have of the minorities here. Poor images of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian American are perpetuated in the global media outlets.

What are the solutions to this obvious unfair balance of power? Here is a list of suggestions, which I hope will break down these stereotypes:

1. K-12 education must be quality education. Teachers who work in urban areas must improve how they teach their students. Students must be prepared for the academic challenges of colleges and universities.

2. Teaching is a rewarding experience and must not be denigrated by teachers themselves or by community members who unfortunately believe that teaching is no longer a desired profession.

3. Provide positive minority role models for minority students who want to go into the teaching profession.

4. Provide internship opportunities for college minority students to serve as teachers in developing nations. Assist these students with all their decision-making processes and encourage them in understanding the concept of serving others.

5. Involve the community of the students as well as parents and religious leaders. These leaders should be consulted in the areas of recruitment of future teachers in their communities.

As for me, I will make sure to break the age-old barriers that uphold the stereotype that only a White person from the United States can be a teacher.

## **References**

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Ladson-Billing, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1990). Culturally relevant teaching: Effective instruction for Black students. *The College Board Review* 155, 20-25.

*Khadar Bashir-Ali is the incoming chair of the IBPFT Caucus.*

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### **TESOL International Research Foundation Call for Research Proposals, 2004-2005**

The TESOL International Research Foundation (TIRF) invites proposals for Doctoral Dissertation Grants and Priority Research Grants in the field of applied linguistics and/or English language education. The deadline for receipt of complete proposals is May 31, 2004 (11:59 pm, Pacific Daylight Time). For more information, please consult the foundation's Web site <http://www.tirfonline.org/>.

All Priority Research Grant (PRG) proposals must be directly related to the stated priority topic. PRG proposals addressing other research priorities will not be considered.

For Doctoral Dissertation Grant (DDG) proposals only, applicants may choose the current (2004-2005) priority or one of the past priority topics (2002-2003, 2003-2004) listed on the TIRF website.

2004-2005 Research Priority: "The demonstrable effects of the use of computer-based technology on students' learning of English as a second or foreign language"

Although the existence of modern technological resources and computer-mediated instruction has greatly increased in many parts of the world, there is insufficient research on how technology contributes to second language acquisition and especially how it compares with effective language instruction without technology. This question is important because of the high infrastructure costs associated with acquiring and maintaining technology, the teacher-training required to use technology most effectively, the quick obsolescence of these digital tools, and the limited research that demonstrates that such investments are truly superior to other modes of instruction. While we are open to research that investigates non-linguistic outcomes (e.g., socio-affective, content-learning, or cultural outcomes) associated with technology in addition to language learning outcomes, our primary interest is second language learning processes and outcomes.

TIRF seeks proposals for research on one or more of the following interrelated themes:

- Differences in access to, and effective use of, technology for English language instruction in English-dominant versus non-English-dominant countries; also, research on how access and use of instructional technology can be improved in resource-poor settings, and the results of this increased access and possibly students' increased exposure to English through technology.
- The effects of informed instruction involving computer technology on students' language learning processes as well as their English proficiency. [Note: By informed instruction, we mean pedagogically sound instruction.] For example, what demonstrable opportunities are provided by language learning technology and utilized by English language learners for input, interaction, output, and scaffolded learning? How do those opportunities translate into language acquisition outcomes?
- Differences, if any, between the effects of informed instruction with technology versus informed instruction without such technology on students' achievement in English as a second or foreign language and possibly their content learning as well, where English is a language of instruction.
- Effective models of teacher education about the use of new technologies for English language instructional purposes.
- The cost-effectiveness of institutional investments in language learning technology compared with nontechnological investments in language instruction, in terms of students' ultimate levels of English attainment.

### **TIRF Grant Features**

- **Doctoral Dissertation Grants** of up to US\$5,000 per proposal are available.
- For **Priority Research Grants** of up to US\$25,000, preference will be given to proposals that most closely address the priority issues targeted by TIRF and that involve partnerships between researchers in institutions in more than one country, ideally involving at least one partner in a non-English-dominant country.
- MA and PhD students are not eligible to apply for PRGs. Only doctoral students who have advanced to candidacy can apply for a DDG.
- Research involving multiple sites and multiple research methods (e.g., qualitative and quantitative approaches) is encouraged. If English proficiency testing is planned (for either students or teachers), TIRF strongly recommends the use of appropriate international, standardized English language tests whose results can be easily interpreted by researchers in other contexts; if other tests are to be used or developed, please include the rationale for the selection of these particular instruments.

### **About TIRF**

TIRF was founded in 1999 as an international, non-profit organization whose aim is to generate new knowledge and to collect and organize existing knowledge about the teaching and learning of English for the purposes of informing educational policy; improving classroom practices; and, ultimately, expanding educational, occupational, and social opportunities for individuals in a global society. TIRF is governed by a Board of Trustees comprised of scholars, authors, and corporate sector volunteers and is supported by charitable donations. TIRF is committed to developing and implementing an innovative, proactive applied research program, the ultimate purpose of which is to help ensure that English as a second or foreign language is taught, learned, and tested in a manner that is demonstrably effective, expedient, and economical. TIRF is committed to strengthening links between theory, practice, and policy, and to fostering partnerships among researchers around the world. Please consult the TIRF website for more information (<http://www.tirfonline.org/>).

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## **One Last Farewell**

By Michelle Maitland, [maitlandmichelle@aol.com](mailto:maitlandmichelle@aol.com)

It has been said that all good things must come to an end. The same holds true for my time as IBPFT editor. At this year's TESOL convention, I will pass the baton to our very capable incoming editor, Andwatta Nika Barnes.

In these closing moments, I'd like to extend my thanks to the members of the IBPFT Caucus and TESOL for their involvement and support during these past 2 years. With your assistance, this editorial process was made possible. See you in Long Beach, California. Adieu!

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## **About This Member Community**

### **International Black Professionals and Friends in TESOL (IBPFT) Caucus**

IBPFT exists to promote and enhance the professional growth and development of TESOL members of color, by providing a forum for the discussion of pertinent issues. It seeks to ensure that TESOL increasingly builds and maintains an organization that reflects the diversity of its members worldwide, and that takes measures to actively promote, support, and value the interests and contributions of the professionals of color among its ranks. The Caucus is inclusive in nature and welcomes the participation of all who are interested in issues affecting students and teachers of color worldwide.

### **IBPFT Leaders, 2003-2004**



Cochair: Khadar Bashir-Ali, [ibpft@tesol.org](mailto:ibpft@tesol.org)

Cochair: Shondel J. Nero, [ibpft@tesol.org](mailto:ibpft@tesol.org)

Chair-Elect: Marinus H. Stephan

Coeditor: Nika Barnes

Coeditor: Michelle Maitland

**Discussion e-list:** Visit <http://www.tesol.org/mbr/community/managesubs.html> to sign up for IBPFT-L, the discussion list for members of this community, or visit <http://lists.tesol.org/read/?forum=ibpft-l> if already a subscriber.

**Web site:** [http://www.geocities.com/ibpft\\_tesol/](http://www.geocities.com/ibpft_tesol/)

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This e-publication is for current members of this TESOL community (interest section or caucus); this issue was sent to TESOL member Tamara Thorpe 49213.

To update your membership settings for this e-publication, e-mail changes to [members@tesol.org](mailto:members@tesol.org).

*Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL)*

*700 South Washington Street, Suite 200*

*Alexandria, Virginia 22314 USA*

*Tel. 703-836-0774*

<http://www.tesol.org/>

Tamara Rollie Thorpe

309 Linden Ave.

Victoria, B.C. V8V 4E8

(250)383-0453

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