

Title:

An Acronym By Any Other Name

Word Count:

318

Summary:

I don't know about you but I loathe acronyms. Yes, I know they have a convenience factor but they also seem to me to be potentially sinister, redolent of George Orwell's Newspeak. Our field has its fair share of them and woe betide anyone who uses one wrongly. Never, for example, say ESL or TESL when you mean ESOL or TESOL. Why? because you might unwittingly insult a learner by referring to ESL (English as a second language) when the learner might be a speaker of several lang...

Keywords:

Teach English, Teaching English, Teaching English Overseas, ESL Jobs, ESL, TEFL, TESOL

Article Body:

I don't know about you but I loathe acronyms. Yes, I know they have a convenience factor but they also seem to me to be potentially sinister, redolent of George Orwell's Newspeak. Our field has its fair share of them and woe betide anyone who uses one wrongly. Never, for example, say ESL or TESL when you mean ESOL or TESOL. Why? because you might unwittingly insult a learner by referring to ESL (English as a second language) when the learner might be a speaker of several languages with English some way down the pecking order: it is politically more correct to refer to English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). So important has this distinction become that the heavy hand of officialdom in the UK now requires people seeking British citizenship to demonstrate that they have at least ESOL Entry Level 3 from the national "skills for life" curriculum (strange distinction, after all we hardly need "skills for death"). Exam boards now dutifully provide ESOL qualifications that seem to have eclipsed the old EFL certificates, making English as a foreign language somehow less relevant.

So have EFL and TEFL lost status? Not exactly, but they imply the use of English in international situations, perhaps among non-native speakers. They still get a look in, but to teach English as a "foreign" language requires different emphases. For example, TESOL would require the teacher to concentrate on situations and contexts that the learners would meet in everyday life in an

Anglophone country. TEFL, on the other hand, suggests an orientation towards travel and global situations. I don't dispute that these distinctions have their uses but the trouble is that you can see the potential for all sorts of new acronyms on the horizon. When we will start to teach EIL (English as an international language) or EIB (English for international business)? I'd happily settle for good, old-fashioned ELT (English language teaching).