

## **Importing Educators and Redefining What it Means to be a Teacher in the U.S.**

**Sue Books**

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### **Abstract**

*Unsubstantiated assertions of a U.S. teacher shortage are being used to rationalize recruitment of overseas-trained teachers – a practice fraught with difficulties, including loss to host countries of some of their best educators, abuse of some teachers working in legally precarious situations, and the possibility of displacing U.S. teachers with less costly colleagues. We affirm a universal right to meaningful work, yet find that overseas-trained teachers are ending up in highly problematic situations in the U.S., and fear that they are being pitted against U.S. teachers in a political struggle unrelated to teaching and learning. Battles over teachers' collective-bargaining rights and recruitment of overseas-trained teachers with little stake in those rights both are occurring in the context of a public discourse that takes for granted that teachers are overpaid and in short supply. Oversight mechanisms should be established to ensure that overseas-trained teachers are neither exploited nor used to disempower their U.S. colleagues. Also, purveyors of the public discourse on education should document*

*much more carefully politically potent claims about teacher shortages.*

**Key words:** overseas-trained teachers, teacher shortage, teachers' unions, collective bargaining rights, neoliberalism

The profession of education has not escaped the currents of neoliberalism now roiling the globe (Apple 2000, Giroux 2004, Harvey 2007, Robertson 2008). Teachers' unions, which historically have pushed back against the encroachment of market forces into public schooling, have necessarily been a target (Harvey 2007, Robertson 2008). The erosion earlier this year (2011) of teachers' and other public-sector workers' collective bargaining rights, most publicly in Wisconsin but in many other states as well, although disheartening to many, was not surprising. Outside the United States, the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment policies have required many developing countries to pay teachers far too little (Global Campaign for Education 2009; Spreen & Edwards 2011). Meanwhile, chronic underfunding of many central-city and rural schools in the U.S. (Kozol 1991, 2005) has made these schools not very desirable places to teach or learn (American Federation of Teachers [AFT] 2009, Anyon 1997, Eaton 2006, Hadley Dunn 2011). Underpayment of teachers in developing countries and neglect of many schools in the U.S. support another practice in public education: recruitment of overseas-trained teachers without a long-term stake in union negotiations to work in U.S. classrooms. This "burgeoning phenomenon in the neoliberal push for alternative teacher recruitment" (Hadley Dunn 2011, p. 1381) has been justified in large part through undocumented claims of teacher shortages – a politically charged discourse that warrants far more scrutiny than it has received.

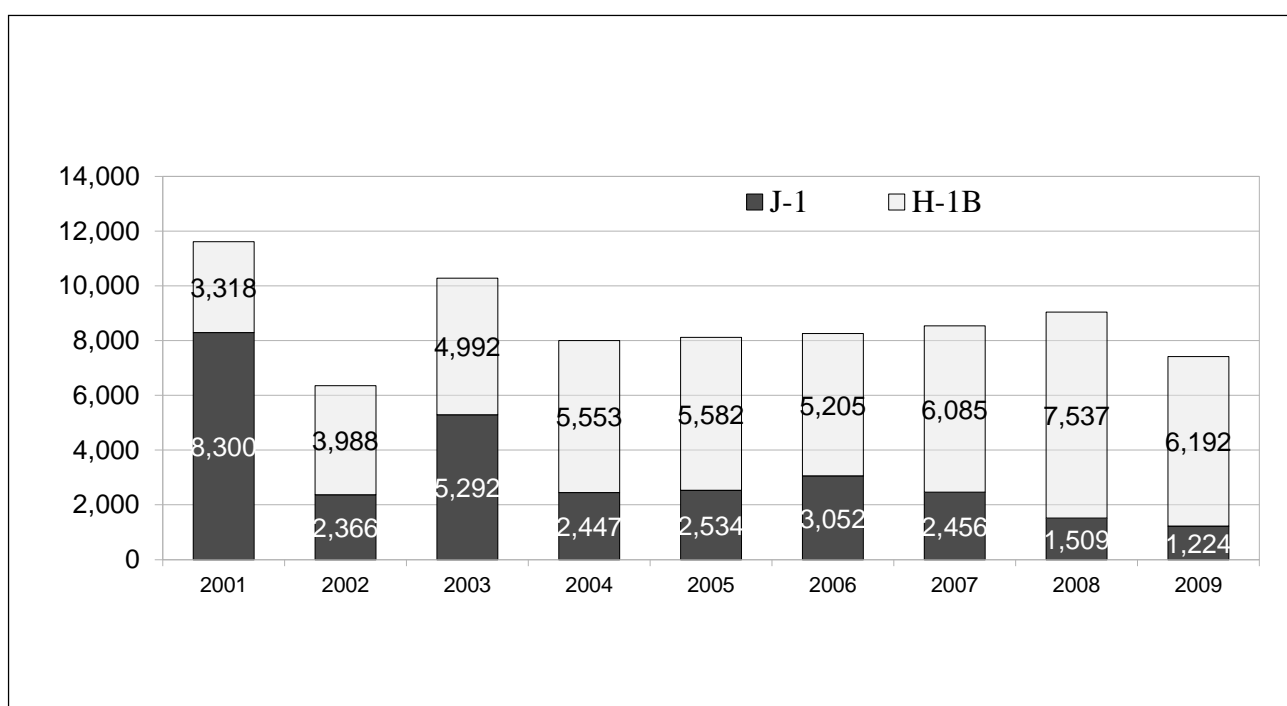
In the discussion that follows, we offer an overview of the recruitment of overseas-trained teachers to work in the U.S., explore the public discourse on the alleged teacher shortage, describe the workings of the H-1B and J-1 visa programs, and then report on the online teacher-recruitment practices of 21 U.S.-based agencies and organizations. We conclude with some recommendations and reflections on the broader political and economic context of the practice of “importing educators” (AFT 2009) – namely, the neoliberal agenda, a form of late-stage global capitalism that envisions an unrestricted market subsuming all things public, including and perhaps especially, schools. First, however, a clarification: *Our intention is in no way to challenge the right of workers everywhere to seek – and, we would argue, to find -- meaningful and adequately compensated employment.* Rather, we hope to better illuminate the political context in which overseas-trained teachers are recruited: teacher layoffs, efforts to cripple public employees’ unions, and a general move towards alternative teacher-certification programs.

### **Importing Educators: An Overview**

Although the U.S. Department of Education does not track the number of overseas-trained teachers in U.S. classrooms (Wolfe 2007), we estimate that 14,000 are now teaching in U.S. public schools through the H-1B and J-1 nonimmigrant visa programs.<sup>1</sup> Shannon Lederer, associate director of international affairs for the AFT, believes the number is closer to 20,000, at least through 2010 (personal communication, April 1, 2011). In FY (fiscal year) 2009, almost 6,200 H-1B petitions were approved for workers in elementary and secondary schools (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2010), and more than 1,200 teachers participated in the J-1 program (Interagency Working Group on U.S. Government-Sponsored Exchanges and Training 2009, 2010). The H-1B and J-1

trends combined show annual visa issuances to primary and secondary school teachers in the 7,500 to 9,000 range from FY 2004 through FY 2009 (see Figure 1). To put this in perspective, this is “two to three times as many teachers as Teach For America [has been] fielding annually” (Noah 2011, p. 2).

**Figure 1. Number of H-1B and J-1 visas issued to primary and secondary teachers**



Source: AFT (2009), U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2010), and the Interagency Working Group on U.S. Government-Sponsored International Exchanges and Training (2009, 2010)

Why is this problematic? As we will discuss in more detail, the recruitment of overseas-trained teachers is justified through a questionable, if not blatantly dishonest, discourse. On one hand, the recruitment is justified as a way to address a teacher shortage (undocumented) and, on the other, to foster cultural and global understanding. Recruitment has led to emotional trauma as well as legal

and financial exploitation of often ill-informed overseas-trained teachers. The practice pits “native” U.S. teachers against teachers recruited abroad in a way that contributes to the erosion of teachers’ collective bargaining rights -- a neoliberal dream, quickly becoming a reality. Finally, the practice enables political leaders at all levels (national, state, and local) to respond to systemic problems with stop-gap measures that do not address the core problem: that some public schools in the U.S., particularly high-poverty schools in central cities, have become places where many teachers prefer not to teach (AFT 2009; Hadley Dunn 2011) and where many students find they cannot learn (Anyon 1997, Eaton 2006, Kozol 2005).

This study of international teacher-recruitment practices builds on a substantial foundation provided by the AFT (2009), the National Education Association (NEA) (Barber 2003), and The Association of International Educators (AIE) (Black Institute 2011). The NEA (Barber 2003) and AFT (2009) reports both decried not the right of overseas-trained teachers to seek work in U.S. schools, but rather the lack of federal data on this trend (or lack of public access to the data) and the inadequate regulation of the international teacher-recruitment industry. Barber (2003) found that thousands of overseas-trained teachers were working in U.S. public schools in situations that ran the gamut from acceptable to illegal. Six years later, the AFT (2009) estimated that approximately 19,000 overseas-trained teachers “from nearly every country in the world” were working in “nearly every state in the union,” and offered Baltimore as an example of “the speed with which reliance on international recruitment can take root” (pp. 8-9).

In 2005, the Baltimore City Public Schools hired 108 teachers from the Philippines. Four years later, more than 600 Filipinos (almost 10% of the

city's teaching force) were teaching in Baltimore, including more than 25 from one of the top schools in Cebu, said Anthony Japzon, president of the Filipino Educators of Maryland.<sup>2</sup> "The [school] district incurred no extra costs for hiring [the teachers]. In fact, the recruitment agency paid for multiple trips to Manila for human resources officials, with accommodations in luxury hotels" (AFT 2009, p. 8). Other counties followed suit, and by 2009, approximately 1,200 Filipinos were teaching in Maryland.

The AIE report (Black Institute 2011) details the experiences and frustrations of hundreds of Caribbean teachers "aggressively recruited" in 2001 by the New York City Department of Education.

These skilled professionals were enticed to come to the United States with the clear understanding of a number of commitments. In fact, it was the promises of New York State teacher certification, Master's degrees, housing assistance and ultimately, a pathway to permanent United States residency for themselves and their nuclear families which prompted them to uproot themselves and their families to teach in our public schools. By and large . . . these promises were never kept. (p. 4)

One of the teachers recalls the initial interviews, held for three days at the University of the West Indies, in this way:

We were told . . . that the DOE [Department of Education] would pay our airfare, pay our rent for the first three months and for those people needing their Master's degrees, they said they would assume those costs as well. Everything was very nebulous from the beginning. The recruiters kept saying things that never came to fruition. (Black Institute 2011, p. 7)

The teachers' efforts to obtain green cards, after working under J-1 and then H-1B visas, have largely been unsuccessful (Black Institute, 2011). Now saddled with substantial legal fees and threats of termination and

deportation, they are protesting what the AIE report suggests was a bait-and-switch trap. Of the 3,340 overseas-trained teachers hired to teach in New York City between 2000 and 2005, less than 20% have gained permanent residency. In one teacher's view, she and her colleagues' temporary status renders them vulnerable to "be gotten rid of at their 'whim and fancy' " (Black Institute, 2011, p. 8).

"The Learning," a 2011 documentary film that follows four Filipinos as they leave their families and students in the Philippines and move to the U.S. to work in public schools in East Baltimore, highlights the emotional trauma of teaching abroad. Lured by the promise of much higher pay (one said she earned 25 times more in the U.S. than in the Philippines), the teachers struggle with the pain of separation from husbands, families, and young children; with classroom-management challenges; and with the ongoing need to disabuse family members of the belief that a job in the U.S. can satisfy all wants as well as needs. In short, although many overseas-trained teachers undoubtedly have provided students in the U.S. with excellent instruction, the practice is fraught with difficulties (Hadley Dunn 2011).

### **Teacher Layoffs and "Shortages"**

Underpinning recruitment of overseas-trained teachers has been a discourse of a teacher shortage (Books & De Villiers 2011). *The Learning* (2011) opens with an informational session in the Philippines in 2006 in which a recruiter tells his audience, "One of the things we're finding in the U.S. is that we don't have an abundant supply of math teachers and science teachers and special education teachers." In her introduction to a televised showing of the film in 2011, PBS News Hour Anchor Judy Woodruff framed the documentary as "a different take on

how to solve teacher shortages in inner-city schools.” In 2009, *The New York Times* issued a clarion call, based on a report by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future about an impending teacher shortage nationwide, created by retirements and weak retention of new teachers:

Over the next four years, more than a third of the nation’s 3.2 million teachers could retire, depriving classrooms of experienced instructors and straining taxpayer-financed retirement systems. . . . The problem is aggravated by high attrition among rookie teachers, with one of every three new teachers leaving the profession within five years. (Dillon 2009, p. A16)

U.S. Department of Labor statistics support this notion of a teacher shortage. The Bureau of Labor Statistics ranks “elementary school teachers, except special education” 12<sup>th</sup> among the 30 occupations with the largest employment growth between 2008 and 2018 (U.S. Department of Labor 2009). The U.S. Department of Education’s (2011) *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing* reports a teacher shortage in one or more areas for 2011-2012 in every state in the nation. Eighty-four percent of the states list teacher shortages in mathematics; 82% in science; 56% in foreign languages; 46% in English/English language arts; and 22% in history/social studies. Criteria for teacher shortages vary from state to state. The states report “shortage areas” to the Department of Education, seemingly with no further verification either made or sought.<sup>3</sup>

However, in testimony before a Senate appropriations subcommittee in April 2010, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2010) estimated that 100,000 to 300,000 education jobs could be lost in state budget cuts, and elaborated:



In my home state of Illinois, they are looking at cutting 20,000 teaching jobs. California and New York have also announced more than 20,000 jobs cuts each. . . . Charlotte, North Carolina will cut 600 teachers next year -- Appleton, Wisconsin is losing 50 positions -- mostly teachers -- while one district in Washington State is cutting ten percent of its teaching work force.

The next month, *The New York Times* reported that applications were far outstripping available teaching positions and that massive teacher layoffs either were occurring or soon would be.

In the month since Pelham Memorial High School in Westchester County [New York] advertised seven teaching jobs, it has been flooded with 3,010 applications from candidates as far away as California. The Port Washington District on Long Island is sorting through 3,620 applications for eight positions – the largest pool the superintendent has seen in his 41-year career. Even hard-to-fill specialties are no longer so hard to fill. (Hu 2010)

“America’s public schools may see the most extensive layoffs of their teaching staffs in decades,” *The New York Times* reported in 2011 (Dillon 2011, p. A13). “States and school districts across the country have fired thousands of teachers, raised college tuition, relaxed standards, slashed days off the academic calendar and gutted pre-kindergarten and summer school programs,” the *Los Angeles Times* announced about the same time (Ceasar & Watanabe 2011).

In a review of the first wave of economic stimulus money provided to school districts through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, Kober, Scott, Stark Rentner, McMurrer, and Dietz (2010) found that about 45% of the school districts that received State Fiscal Stabilization Fund money still had to cut teaching staffs in 2009-2010 to balance their budgets and that 75% anticipated having to do so in 2010-2011. Jack Jennings (2011), president and CEO for the Center on

Education Policy (a national advocacy group for public education), subsequently reported that almost 84% of the nation's school districts anticipated funding shortfalls in the 2011-2012 school year, and most (64%) planned to cut staff to make up deficits. A national survey of suburban, city, town, and rural school districts found that approximately 70% of all school districts experienced funding cuts the year before (2010-2011), and about 85% of these districts cut jobs for teachers and other staffs to make up shortfalls (Jennings 2011).

Advocating for his jobs bill, President Obama told Congress in September 2011 that “while they’re adding teachers in places like South Korea, we’re laying them off in droves.” In their review of state-level employment data, Marguerite Roza and her colleagues at the Center on Reinventing Public Education found an overall decline of 1.4% in total K-12 employment between the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years (Roza, Lozier, & Sepe 2010). While these data do not show the massive teacher layoffs many feared, “they do suggest that public education is in the midst of its biggest employment decline in years” – a decline that has been ameliorated somewhat by the temporary (and now largely exhausted) ARRA funds (Roza et al. 2010, p. 6). In October 2011, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Oliff & Leachman 2011) reported that school districts nationwide cut 278,000 jobs between September 2008 and September 2011.

Multiple explanations potentially could reconcile these contradictory discourses of teacher shortages and K-12 workforce reductions, including budget crises at the federal, state, and local levels that recently have worsened significantly, common practices of school districts handing out pink slips and then rehiring teachers a few months later, and regional differences (teacher shortages in some places but not others) (Books &

De Villiers 2011). Nevertheless, the double-speak calls into question the widespread assumption of a teacher shortage, a discourse being used to rationalize the recruitment of overseas-trained teachers to teach in U.S. classrooms.

### **The H-1B and J-1 Programs**

Overseas-trained teachers come to the U.S. through two temporary work visa programs. The H-1B Specialty Occupation Program, administered by the Bureau of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services within the Department of Homeland Security and by the U.S. Department of Labor, is restricted to occupations that require “theoretical and practical application of a body of specialized knowledge” and at least a bachelor's degree in the specialty (U.S. Department of Labor 2011). The H-1B visa has a three-year term, renewable once for a total of six years. Individuals apply for this visa in concert with an employer authorized by the Department of Labor to hire nonimmigrant workers. In the case of teachers, the authorized school district generally becomes the employer. Although designed to ameliorate shortages in specialized occupations, a school district does not have to show a critical skills shortage or any other workforce need (Barber 2003). Among the top 10 H-1B visa sponsors for teachers in 2011 were the Chicago, Los Angeles, Madison Parish (Louisiana), and Roosevelt (New York) public schools as well as Global Teachers Research and Resources Inc., a placement agency with offices in Morrow, Georgia, and in Bangalore, Chennai, and Mumbai, India.<sup>4</sup>

While many U.S. companies are lobbying to have the current annual cap of 65,000 H-1B visas lifted (Preston 2011), the program is facing serious criticism. Immigration scholar Ronil Hira told a U.S. House of Representatives judiciary panel in March 2011 that the H-1B program

needs an “immediate and substantial overhaul” to close loopholes that make it “too easy to bring in cheaper foreign workers, with ordinary skills, who directly substitute for, rather than complement, workers already in America” (Hira 2011, p. 2). Employers currently are not required to show that other qualified workers are unavailable before hiring H-1B workers. Furthermore, because H-1B visas are held by the employer, not the worker, the program gives employers inordinate power over workers, whose legal status is in the employers’ hands. Although H-1B visas are temporary, employers can choose to sponsor workers for permanent residence – or not.

The J-1 visa, linked to the Exchange Visitor Program of the U.S. Department of State and administered by its Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, has an explicit mission of promoting intercultural understanding through educational and cultural exchanges. This visa has an initial term of one year, renewable twice for a total of three years. Thereafter, a participant must return to his or her home country for at least two years before applying to return to the U.S. Successful applicants must be qualified to teach in their home countries, must have at least three years of teaching or related professional experience, and must meet the standards of the U.S. state in which they will teach.

Although the State Department regards temporary employment as tangential to the J-1 program’s core mission, there is concern that it is serving more as a short-term employment vehicle than as a cultural-educational opportunity (Barber 2003). The J-1 program now has 61 sponsors, including 21 state Departments of Education; the Chicago, Denver, Philadelphia, and Shawnee (Kansas) Mission Schools; and a range of private schools, foundations, institutes, and nonprofit and for-

profit agencies (U.S. Department of State 2011). Despite the program title, no actual exchange of teachers occurs.

Most overseas-trained teachers with temporary visas are paid by the school district, although some are paid by a third-party agency or organization. School districts often pay a contractor fee to the recruiter. This fee generally is less than the cost of benefits and pension contributions, so employing visa holders can be a way to cut personnel costs. Many teachers also pay fees upfront (sometimes very high fees) to recruitment agencies and organizations as well as in some cases a percentage of their salaries. However, because teacher salaries are so much higher in the U.S. than in most other parts of the world, these costs can seem like wise investments, as clearly is the case for the Filipinos profiled in the film “The Learning.” H-1B visa regulations require that workers be paid the prevailing wage. J-1 visa program rules do not speak about wages, but it seems that nonimmigrant teachers generally are paid wages comparable to those of other teachers with similar qualifications and experience. Still, “there is at least anecdotal evidence that, absent a collective bargaining agreement or law or policy, some school districts pay their nonimmigrant employees as new teachers, regardless of their experience and qualifications” (Barber 2003, p. 2).

As Barber (2003) notes and as the AIE report also argues, the temporary and “legally precarious status” of nonimmigrant teachers is a “troubling dynamic” in both visa programs (p. 2). “Because their sponsor constructively controls their visa, they are effectively ‘at will’ employees,” which creates “at least the potential for a degree of intimidation from which permanent employees are shielded” (Barber 2003, p. 2). Although there is no reason to assume such behavior is the

norm, multiple agencies have been fined for extorting wages and threatening overseas-trained teachers with deportation.

In 2002, 15 mathematics and science teachers from India who were teaching in Newark charged the Teachers Placement Group (TPG) with extortion of wages. With the help of the Newark Teachers Union, the Indian teachers sought to invalidate a contract they had been forced to sign that required them to give TPG about \$1 million of their gross earnings over a three-year period. Finding that TPG had coerced and threatened the teachers with deportation, the Department of Labor fined the company's founder and president \$120,000 and required TPG and its officers to pay \$187,546 in back wages (Barber 2003). Despite this history, the Connecticut Department of Education began working with TPG in 2006 to develop a Visiting International Teachers program to bring Indian mathematics and science teachers to Connecticut on three-year contracts. The Bridgeport, Bloomfield, and Hartford school districts subsequently signed up for the program (AFT 2009).

In 2004, Omni Consortium, Multicultural Professionals, and Multicultural Education Consultants were indicted on charges of conspiring to commit alien smuggling, visa fraud, mail fraud, and money laundering in connection with the recruitment of 273 Filipino teachers who were promised teaching jobs in the U.S. The teachers paid up to \$10,000 for the recruiters' services, many by taking loans from the recruiters that carried a compounding interest rate of more than 60% a year. The teachers were housed in unfinished properties in groups of 10 to 15, were forbidden to own any transportation, and were warned that they would be deported if they tried to find jobs on their own, which they could not do in any case because the recruiters had confiscated their transcripts and certifications (AFT 2009, p. 17).

In 2010, the AFT and the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a class-action lawsuit in a California federal court against Universal Placement International, Inc. The lawsuit accuses the Los Angeles-based company of running a human-trafficking operation that brought hundreds of Filipinos to teach in public schools in Louisiana. “Teachers were saddled with crippling debts, placed into shoddy housing and threatened with deportation if they complained,” according to a lawyer for the AFT (quoted in Deslatte 2010). Each teacher paid about \$16,000 (five times the average annual household income in the Philippines) before leaving home, some by taking high-interest loans from a lender recommended by Universal. More fees and legal entanglements followed once the teachers arrived in the U.S., including contracts requiring them to give a percentage of their monthly pay to Universal, which confiscated their passports and visas (Deslatte 2010).

In 2011 the U.S. Department of Labor ordered Prince George’s County Schools in Maryland to pay \$5.9 million in back wages and fines to Filipino teachers who had paid \$1,000 in visa fees that the employer legally was required to pay (Green 2011). The Baltimore Public Schools (where *The Learning* was filmed) is now scrambling to avoid a similar breach of Department of Labor regulations and to honor what may have been tacit promises to help their Filipino teachers gain permanent residency (*Baltimore Sun* 2011). Many of those hired in 2005 have now all but exhausted two three-year H-1B cycles. Meanwhile, every year since 2008, the Baltimore schools have carried a “surplus teacher” force of more than 100 certified educators who then are assigned to positions such as co-teachers and substitutes, so making a case that qualified teachers cannot be found is difficult, at best (Green 2011).

## **Online Recruitment of Overseas-trained Teachers**

International teachers learn about the possibility of working in the U.S. in part through Web sites maintained by teacher recruitment agencies and organizations. Our inquiry into the recruitment of overseas-trained teachers began three years ago with a fairly straightforward study of the online recruiting practices of 43 UK-based teacher-recruitment agencies recruiting in South Africa. How well are the agencies informing prospective educators about the costs and complexities of living in the UK and about basic conditions of work? we wondered. Also, how are they representing or “selling” the opportunity to live and work abroad? (De Villiers & Books 2009).

We then raised similar questions with respect to U.S.-based agencies that are recruiting globally. Proclamations of a teacher shortage provide the U.S. public with an explanation of recruitment of overseas-trained teachers, but how are these teachers being persuaded to come to the U.S. to teach, and how are school administrators being encouraged to hire them? In other words, what information are recruitment agencies and organizations providing on their Web sites, and how are they describing or marketing their services? As the AFT (2009) report notes,

Recruiters have a financial interest in making the “pull” factors seem as tempting as possible and may mislead teachers by encouraging inflated and inaccurate expectations about life in a country like the United States. Potential recruits may learn, for instance, of the comparatively high salaries they could earn . . . but receive no information about income tax rates or the cost of living. They may also make their decisions to migrate without ever learning about the very different challenges of teaching in American schools. (p. 14)

With this concern in mind, we used purposive sampling to identify 21



agencies and organizations with home offices in the U.S. that recruit teachers overseas.<sup>5</sup>

We created a 48-item checklist to profile each agency or organization, to record its Web site content, and to capture its “selling points” or “pitch” to schools and teachers. We then summarized the quantitative and qualitative data on a spreadsheet and a comment sheet. For each agency, we looked to see when it was established, when its Web site was last updated, and whether it has overseas offices. We recorded information about each agency’s application and vetting procedures, about its fees, and about any special offers for teachers and schools. We also looked to see what information is provided about the U.S. education system, about living in the U.S., and about ongoing support for teachers.<sup>6</sup>

### **Informational Content of the Web Sites**

Fourteen of the 21 Web sites say when the agency or organization was established. Nine were established between 1992 and 2003. Only 11 of the sites indicate when they were last updated. Nine agencies and organizations list offices in other countries, including Belgium, Brazil, China, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Korea, Mexico, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Spain, Thailand, the UK, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Vietnam. Four of the agencies recruit from the Philippines, and three recruit only from the Philippines. With its high poverty and surplus of well-trained teachers, the Philippines are regarded as “a fertile recruiting ground.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, English is the language of instruction in schools in the Philippines, and Filipinos “typically see migration to the U.S. as a golden opportunity,” the Houston-based Professional and Intellectual Resources Corporation notes on its Web site (2011).

Eighteen of the recruitment Web sites inform prospective applicants that they will need teaching certification and U.S. entry documents (J-1 or H-1B visas) to teach in the U.S. (see Table 1). (Teachers from abroad generally arrive with provisional teaching certification and then have a couple of years to become fully certified, often through alternative pathways.) Most of the Web sites tell applicants that they must have at least the equivalent of a U.S. bachelor's degree. Fifteen of the sites note that an interview is required (in-person or by telephone, video conference, or Webcam). Fourteen of the sites inform applicants that they must have at least three years of teaching experience; a few specify that the experience must be in the subject to be taught.

Fewer than half the Web sites (eight) list resumes or references (generally two or three letters of recommendation) as part of the vetting procedure. Only half the sites list English proficiency as part of the procedure, and only a few note the need for a criminal record clearance (six) or a health record (one). Some agency Web sites list additional dispositional requirements, such as a good reputation, a pleasing personality, or a passion for teaching. Three emphasize the importance of having a valid driver's license and some driving experience.

**Table 1. Vetting procedures of U.S.-based teacher-recruitment agencies/organizations (N = 21)**

Web site information	Number of agencies/ organizations
Teaching certification	18 (86%)
U.S. entry	18 (86%)
Interview	15 (71%)
Teaching experience	14 (67%)
Resume	8 (38%)
English proficiency	8 (38%)
References	5 (24%)
Criminal-record clearance	5 (24%)
Health record	1 (5%)

Source: Authors' Web site review spreadsheet

Several of the recruitment Web sites suggest that teachers can expect significant mentoring and support. For example, Foreign Academic and Cultural Exchange Services, based in Columbia, South Carolina, says that a staff member visits every teacher in his or her class at least once and often several times during the school year, and that teachers are invited to a 10-day orientation, including all-day workshops and meetings. VIF International Education, based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, promises ongoing support online, via telephone or email, and in person, primary through school visits. The Alliance Abroad Group, based in Austin, Texas, says it assigns a mentor as well as an agency staff member to each school to support and assist teachers. However, these promises are not backed up with sufficient information about the U.S. education system (see Table 2). Only two of the Web sites apprise teachers of the socio-

economic, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in many U.S. schools. Only five include useful educational links, and only three provide information about school-based mentoring.

**Table 2. Information about the U.S. education system and teaching support provided by U.S.-based teacher-recruitment agencies/ organizations (N = 21)**

Web site information	Number of agencies/ organizations
Description of the work	6 (29%)
School levels	5 (24%)
Links to education Web sites	4 (19%)
Agency orientation program	4 (19%)
Support staff	4 (19%)
Classroom management advice	3 (14%)
Professional development	3 (14%)
School-based mentoring	3 (14%)
Curriculum	2 (10%)
Student diversity	2 (10%)
English language learners	1 (5%)
Acronyms spelled out	1 (5%)
Methods of assessment	0
Special-needs students	0
Legal protections for teachers	0

Source: Authors' Web site review spreadsheet

As Professional and Intellectual Resources (2011) notes of its Filipino recruits, many regard work in the U.S. as “a golden opportunity,” but are unaware of the true costs of housing, food, and transportation. Our review suggests that agency and organizational Web sites, which may be recruits’ main or only source of information, overall are not providing enough information about essential services and costs. Information about moving to the U.S. (and relocating families or spouses) and about health care is available on fewer than half the Web sites (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Information about U.S. living costs provided by teacher-recruitment agencies/organizations (N = 21)**

Web site information	Number of agencies/ organizations
Cost of living	12 (57%)
Housing assistance	10 (48%)
Family information	9 (43%)
Health care	4 (19%)
Moving to the U.S.	2 (10%)
Agency-planned social events	2 (10%)

Source: Authors’ Web site review spreadsheet

### **Selling services to schools and opportunities to teachers**

The Web sites of the 21 U.S.-based recruiters vary, but also are surprisingly similar in the way they describe their services – namely, as a response to the “teacher shortage” in the U.S. (which suggests, for teachers, a sure job) and as a way for schools to build “cultural understanding” while, not incidentally, cutting costs. Personnel International (2011), a Houston-based agency that places Filipino

teachers in Texas schools, cites “widespread agreement” about a U.S. teacher shortage and even puts a figure on it: “an estimated 2 million teacher vacancies over the next decade.” Global Teachers Research and Resources (2011) claims no school district is exempt as “with each passing year, the undeniable financial constraints and scarcity of reliable teachers for each school system is readily apparent.” Teachers International Placement, based in Burbank, California, offers its services as “innovative solutions” to “the current crisis,” which requires more than “merely redistribution of the current teacher population.”

Almost all the agencies describe their organizational mission as building “cultural understanding” and sell overseas-trained teachers as “global ambassadors who work well with multicultural students” (Hadley Dunn 2001, p. 1380). VIF International Education (2011), for example, says its teachers “bring a global mindset to the classroom,” thereby fostering “global understanding and awareness.” USA Employment (2011), with a home office in Houston and a sister office in New Delhi, says its teachers help “demystify the exotic, dispel stereotypes, and broaden minds.” Annapolis-based Teachers Council (2011) warns that if “children of today . . . miss opportunities to interact with foreign cultures [ . . . ] they will fall behind.”

Many of the recruitment agencies and organizations also point out the financial gains for schools, which pay either no fees or an administrative fee that amounts to a net savings. As the Global Teachers Research and Resources (GTRR) Web site points out:

As GTRR makes benefits available for our teachers, the school is relieved of the burden of providing the same. Rather school systems pay an administrative fee that is generally less than the cost of benefits. Collaborating with GTRR means quality teachers with savings to the school systems.

The Alliance Abroad Group (2011) similarly notes that its teachers “come with full health coverage and travel insurance if it is not available through your school: this could represent a substantial savings!” Further, the teachers are exempt from Medicare and social security taxes – “a savings of 7.65% of their salary” (Alliance Abroad Group 2011). Several agencies throw in free recruiting trips. USA Employment (2011), for example, advertises top-tier excursions to India for school personnel seeking to recruit 10 or more teachers:

USA Employment handles ALL costs and expenses of this trip, including airfare, hotel and accommodation, and some sight-seeing. USA Employment’s India office will prepare candidates for interviews at a five star hotel. This is your chance to see a new part of the world, and experience a new culture!

Many of the recruitment Web sites also speak about international candidates’ dispositional qualities. For example, Teachers Placement Group (2011), which recruits in India from its base in Plainview, New York, promises “highly qualified and culturally curious” teachers. Teachers International Placement (2011) notes that its candidates are not only “often bilingual,” but also “eager”; and Professional and Intellectual Resources (2011) comments on Filipino recruits’ resourcefulness in trying “to make the most out of the most minimal resources.” These Web sites create a picture of hard-working, eager-to-please, and “bargain-priced” teachers (i.e., “perfect workers”), available to schools seeking to ameliorate a “teacher shortage,” to cut costs, to promote “cultural understanding,” or all of the above.

This rosy picture rests on inaccuracies and distortions, of course. Credible data directly contradict assertions of a teacher shortage, and the sheer numbers of overseas-trained teachers and their placement in hard-to-staff schools defy a notion of “cultural exchange.” Noah’s (2011)

blunt statement is much to the point: “When 10 percent of a school district’s teachers are foreign migrants [as is the case in Baltimore], that isn’t cultural exchange. It’s sweatshop labor” (p. 2).

Tellingly, almost none of the Web sites include arguments that the overseas-trained teachers will improve the quality of teaching and learning in a school. Perhaps most crassly, Teachers International Placement positions teaching in the U.S. instead as “a unique opportunity to work with young students have summers off and competitive starting salaries” [sic]. In her review of the scholarship on teacher migration in Southern Africa, Brown (2008) considers this question of educational quality, which she notes has been largely overshadowed by a focus on “teacher shortages” (p. 283). Teacher migration overall has hurt the quality of education in sending countries, Brown (2008) argues, because the teachers who leave generally are the best. As a case in point, 25 teachers from one of the best schools in Manila are now working in Baltimore.<sup>9</sup> When experienced teachers leave, the relatively new teachers left behind are often then saddled with larger classes and a skeletal staff of colleagues. Consequences for receiving countries have been mixed. Although overseas-trained teachers can enrich the curriculum by bringing new perspectives to bear, cultural differences also can and have led to miscommunication, to clashes in basic approaches to work, and to struggles to adapt a curriculum to unfamiliar local contexts (Brown 2008, Hadley Dunn, 2011).

## **Recommendations**

The international teacher-recruitment industry needs to be made more transparent and regulated more diligently to protect everyone involved, but especially teachers. Barber (2003) recommended that employers “be



required to demonstrate an actual shortage of specific available workforce skills before being granted the authority to employ nonimmigrant workers” and that the federal government “be required to disclose much more extensive data on nonimmigrant work visa certifications and authorizations” (pp. 4-5). Echoing Barber (2003), the AFT expressed concerns not only about limited access to federal data, but also about the lack of almost any regulation of international recruiting, about the loss to host countries of some of their best and brightest teachers, about kickback-type arrangements for school officials, and about “widespread and egregious” abuse of teachers -- “often the profit point in the industry” (AFT 2009, p. 7).

More recently, immigration scholar Ronil Hira told a U.S. House of Representatives judiciary panel that Congress and the Department of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ought to publish full employment data for all H-1B workers (by employer, job title and location, wages paid, and whether the worker is being sponsored for permanent residence) (Hira 2011). Without such data, it is not possible to gain an understanding of the scope, consequences, and basic functioning of the H-1B program across occupational sectors. The AFT (2009) and Black Institute (2011) reports include recommendations that overseas-trained teachers be hired only by school districts and not by third-party agencies or organizations, be paid comparably to others in the district, and be provided with the same working conditions as well as with special protection against arbitrary revocation of their visas, and that “responsibility for immigration documentation” be taken “out of the hands of school principals” (Black Institute 2011, p. 16). We concur with all these recommendations and would add a few more:

- Data on teacher layoffs and shortages should be collected routinely by federal agencies and should be monitored closely by scholars.
- International recruiters should include such basic information on their Web sites as the costs of living in the U.S. and the realistic challenges overseas-trained teachers likely will face in U.S. schools.
- Oversight mechanisms should be established to ensure that recruitment of overseas-trained teachers is not used to exploit their “legally precarious status” (Barber 2003, p. 2) or to disempower their U.S. colleagues.
- Teacher-education programs should ensure that all practicing and prospective teachers understand teachers’ rights, the ideological forces shaping the profession of education, and the international context of the work of teaching.
- Finally, the legal, political, discursive, and human-rights dimensions of international teacher recruitment warrant far more critical scholarly attention than they have received.

### **Conclusion: A Shortage of Candidness and Commitment to Public Schooling**

Recruitment of overseas-trained teachers allows leaders at all levels of educational governance (national, state, and district) to respond to problems of neglect and underfunding in high-poverty, central-city schools with stop-gap measures that do not address the core reasons that hard-to-staff schools are hard to staff. As Hadley Dunn (2011) notes, “The harsh reality is that it is easier and cheaper to hire teachers abroad than to solve the systemic problems” at home (p. 1401). Still, this begs the question for

If there are truly schools where no one wants to teach, and the only teachers available are those who do not know any better because they are uninformed or misinformed about the reality of urban education, why would any students want to learn in these schools? If the only work for which these teachers are hired is work that few others will take on, why does such an environment exist in the first place? (Hadley Dunn 2011, p. 1404)

International recruitment of teachers ought to be seen not only as a short-sighted effort to staff schools “where no one wants to teach” on the cheap, but also as part of a broader transformation of public schooling in the U.S. Taken-for-granted but undocumented assumptions about a widespread teacher shortage, plus promises or promoting cultural understanding, provide a rationale for displacing U.S. teachers with short-term and less expensive overseas-trained teachers with no long-term stake in union contracts and negotiations. Lured by “broken promises,” too many of these “bracero teachers” (Noah 2011, p. 2) end up, at best, in ambiguous situations, and, at worst, in nightmarish immigration-status limbos (Black Institute 2011).

As we have noted (Books & De Villiers 2011), from the perspective of the Heritage Foundation, a self-described conservative think-tank and advocacy group, this displacement is all for the best. The Heritage Foundation advocates raising the cap on H-1B visas (now 65,000 per year) and structuring teaching contracts accordingly “to give local districts more stability and flexibility” (Johnson 2005, p. 1). By aligning contracts with three-year H1-B visas, a school district furthermore could “eliminat[e] the possibility of [a teacher] moving to another school district or employer without compensation” (Johnson 2005, p. 4). “This vision of ‘captive’ teachers perpetually trying to acclimate to a new

country is not in the best interest of students or teachers,” here or abroad (Books & De Villiers 2011).

Recruiting abroad to hard-to-staff schools creates “a migrant class of teachers who shortchange students in their home countries as well as potentially under-educate the students stuck in these [ . . . ] schools” (Spren & Edwards 2011, p. 32). That is bad enough, but worse, teachers, and therefore students, are being used as proxy warriors in a high-stakes political battle that ultimately has nothing to do with teaching and learning. Battles over U.S. teachers’ collective-bargaining rights and recruitment of overseas-trained teachers with no stake in those rights are occurring in the context of a public discourse that takes for granted that teachers are both overpaid and in short supply. Indeed, it seems that public-sector workers, including and especially teachers, have become the new “welfare mothers” (Albelda 2011, Gabriel 2011, Rice 2011). This discourse, which flourished in the hard-fought struggles over public employees’ collective-bargaining rights, most notably in Wisconsin in the spring of 2011 and then in Ohio in the fall of 2011, ought to be seen as part of a larger battle, the aim of which is to “re-class” (change the social class of) public school teachers (Noblitt 2011) in line with neoliberal commitments to deregulate markets and to privatize all things public (Harvey 2007).

Teacher educators and the schools and colleges of education in which they work are being marginalized and devalued as well. Increasingly, fast-track, alternative teacher-preparation programs are being put forth as necessary to recruit “the most talented” to teach in the “neediest” public schools (Kumashiro 2010, p. 56). Federal dollars are supporting such practices, which mark a move away from teacher preparation offered by schools and colleges of education and away from viewing teaching as a

professional career. The move instead is towards “solutions” that staff classrooms, often in any way possible and sometimes by pitting teachers worldwide against each other in an unregulated “free market” competition for jobs. Even as traditional teacher-preparation programs are regulated ever more heavily, federal support is offered for fast-track alternatives like Teach for America. These paths are depicted as breath-of-fresh-air alternatives to college-based teacher-preparation programs, characterized by former President George Bush as “unnecessary barriers” keeping qualified candidates out of the classroom (Kumashiro 2010, p. 61). More harshly, the Heritage Foundation (again) has construed the whole enterprise of state teacher certification as “a cartel operated by the teacher unions and colleges of education to enforce monopolies in what amounts to restraint of trade” (quoted in Imig & Imig 2008, p. 889).

The current assault on teachers’ collective-bargaining rights, the denigrating teacher-bashing and especially teacher-union bashing, the marginalization of schools and colleges of education, and the largely under-the-radar “experiment” in international teacher recruitment – justified through undocumented assertions of a U.S. teacher shortage -- all are components of an ideologically driven agenda that is fundamentally redefining what it means to be a teacher in the U.S. The stakes are alarmingly high in this neoliberal move to replace tenured teaching positions with short-term work contracts “won” in an international trade in teachers. Quality teaching and learning, hardly the focus of this agenda, may nevertheless be the collateral damage left in its wake.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This figure is derived from the methodology that Barber (2003) and then the AFT (2009) used to estimate the number of non-immigrant teachers in 2003 and 2009, respectively. The estimate includes the number of J-1 visas for 2009 and the number of new and renewed H1-B visas for 2007, 2008, and 2009 issued to primary and secondary teachers, a total of 21,038. The estimate assumes that approximately two-thirds of all J-1 and H-1B visa holders are teaching in public schools, based on an analysis of FY 2002 H-1B certifications by the U.S. Department of Labor, where 67% of the positions approved for K-12 teaching positions were for applications from public school authorities (Barber, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> R. Anthony Japzon, president of Filipino Educators of Maryland, shared this information during a live chat held in conjunction with the PBS broadcast of the film “The Learning.” The transcript, retrieved September 28, 2011, was available at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/learning/newshour-chat.php>.

<sup>3</sup> Asked about the criteria for a shortage, Mary Miller, analyst with the Department of Education, offered this brief response via email on March 4, 2011: “The States determine their Teacher Shortage Area and submit them to the U.S. Department of Education. The criteria vary from state to state.”

<sup>4</sup> See ranking provided by *Myvisajobs.com*, a job information portal owned by the Mahwah, N.J.-based Quant Decisions LLC at <http://www.myvisajobs.com/Teacher-11JT.htm>.

<sup>5</sup>The AFT (2009) reports that 33 international recruiters are working with U.S. schools. Other estimates are as high as 150 (Spren & Edwards, 2011). We started with the AFT list, then eliminated any entity without a valid Web site address or that did not conform to our definition of “agency or organization.” Our revised list, supplemented by a Google search of “teacher recruitment agency” and related terms, yielded 21 agencies and organizations with Web sites accessible in 2011:

Advanced Health Alliance, Inc.  
(<http://www.advancedhealthalliance.com/employerteacher.htm>)

Amity Institute (<http://www.amity.org/index.html>)

Avenida International Consultants, Inc.  
([http://www.aicorp.us.com/international\\_teacher\\_placement\\_program.php](http://www.aicorp.us.com/international_teacher_placement_program.php))

Alliance Abroad Group ([http://www.allianceabroad.com/schools\\_us.asp](http://www.allianceabroad.com/schools_us.asp))

Cordell Hull Foundation for International Education  
([http://www.cordellhull.org/english/Teacher\\_Programs/J-1\\_Teacher\\_Exchange\\_Program.asp](http://www.cordellhull.org/english/Teacher_Programs/J-1_Teacher_Exchange_Program.asp))

Educational Partners International LLC (<http://www.teachwiththeipi.com/>)

Foreign Academic and Cultural Exchange Services (<http://www.facesinc.org/>)

Global Teachers Research and Resources Inc. (<http://gtrr.net/career.php>)

Healthquest Enterprises (<http://healthquestenterprises.com/index.html>)

Institute of International Education (<http://www.iie.org/en/What-We-Do/International-Education-Services/Visa-Sponsorship>)

International Teacher Exchange Services (<http://www.itesonline.com/>)

L&B Schoolhouse (<http://teachinusa.tripod.com/>)

Morningside College Teacher Externship Program  
(<http://www.virtualeduc.com/morningside/te/>)

Personnel International ([http://personnelinternational.com/educator\\_placement.html](http://personnelinternational.com/educator_placement.html))

Professional and Intellectual Resources Corporation  
([http://www.philippineteachers.com/company\\_aboutus.html](http://www.philippineteachers.com/company_aboutus.html))

Son-Light International, Inc. (<http://www.sonlightinternational.com/teachers.html>)

Teachers Council (<http://www.teacherscouncil.com/>)

Teachers International Placement (<http://www.teachersinternationalplacement.com/>)

Teachers Placement Group (<http://www.teachersplacement.com/>)

USA Employment (<http://www.usaemployment.org/index.htm>)

VIF International Education (<http://www.vifprogram.com/>)

We included Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa, because it offers a Teacher Externship Program designed to attract international teachers and, according to the Web site, to provide these teachers with “the information they need to understand and teach students in U.S. classroom.” Externship students take four courses: two in classroom management, plus two electives chosen from a menu of special education, more classroom management /assessment, and school /social issues courses. The total cost is \$990.

6 More specifically, we looked for information about interviewing procedures, teaching certification and experience, U.S. entry requirements, and the need for a health record and criminal record clearance; for requests for a resume and references; for information about pay and retirement pensions, and for offers to help set up a bank account or provide tax advice. We checked for information about school organization, cultural diversity, special-needs students, English language learners, school support staff, the curriculum, legal protections for teachers, assessment, school-based mentoring, professional development, and advice on classroom management as well as whether links were provided to education Web sites and

whether acronyms were spelled out. Finally, we looked for information about housing, transportation, and food costs in the U.S., about health care, about agency-planned orientations and social events, and about family relocation or anything specific about moving to the U.S.

<sup>7</sup> Sara Neufeld, a freelance journalist whose articles in the *Baltimore Sun* inspired the film *The Learning*, made this observation in a live chat held in conjunction with the PBS broadcast. Transcript available at: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/learning/newshour-chat.php> [Accessed 10 October 2011].

<sup>8</sup> R. Anthony Japzon, president of Filipino Educators of Maryland, shared this information during a live chat held in conjunction with the PBS broadcast of the film *The Learning*. Transcript available at: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/learning/newshour-chat.php> [Accessed 10 October 2011].

<sup>9</sup> The Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004), adopted in 2004 by the education ministers of 53 member nations, attempts to establish practices that ensure fair treatment of international teachers in recruiting countries and to protect the interests of source countries. This document could provide a model for the U.S. Another positive initiative, to consider the feasibility of extending a voluntary code of conduct for the ethical recruitment of overseas-educated nurses to other health professionals as well as to teachers, has been undertaken by George Washington University and funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, 2011).

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