

PLATFORM

STEVE RUMBOL. CCOO's Coordinador d'Idiomes

Turning point for private-language teaching

English teachers are taking to the streets! Why? It seems that the private language teaching sector is at a turning point.

After the disastrous effects of the "Wall Street/Opening/Brighton crash" of 2002, the sector recovered, but did it learn its lessons? Has anything really changed?

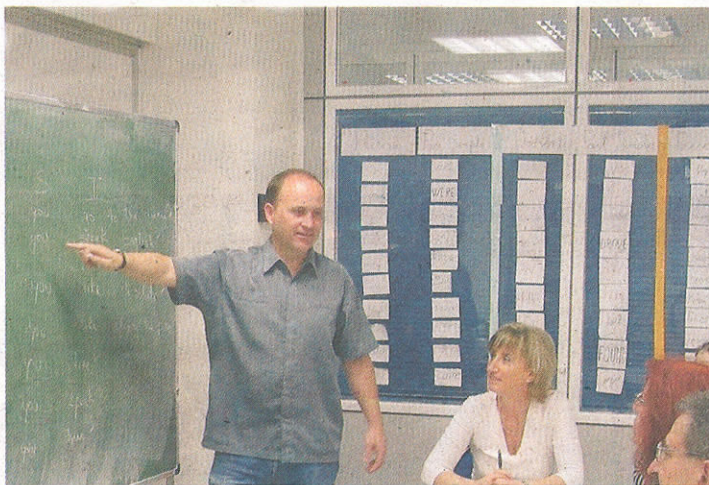
Is there a less dramatic but just as serious ongoing undermining of working conditions by schools prioritising financial return over quality teaching and working conditions?

Any language teacher, be that English, Spanish, French or German, knows the realities of this sector. Feeling valued, ongoing professional development and working your way up the career ladder to greater job satisfaction and pay... these things exist, but are the exception to the rule.

The reality for the majority is job and timetable insecurity, fraudulent contracts, not getting our full holiday entitlement, being paid cash-in-hand with the subsequent loss of social security contributions, loss of unemployment benefit/pension entitlements, juggling different part-time jobs along with private classes to earn somewhere near a living wage. And the list goes on.

We want to deliver quality teaching, but is that commitment really shared by our employers?

Apparently not. The *Conveni de l'Ensenyament Privat de Catalunya* is currently up for renegotiation. This is the collective agreement that sets out minimum standards for working conditions (timetable, holidays, pay scales) in all private sector



Steve Rumbol, CCOO's Coordinador d'Idiomes, teaching an English class

education, i.e. primary/secondary schools that follow the national curriculum (the official sector) along with language schools and the broader adult education and lifelong learning courses (the non-official sector).

So what's the problem?

Some employers want to split the *convenio* into two, official split from non-official. By pushing for a split agreement, some non-official employers are aiming to separate their sector away from the concept of "education" towards one of "production."

What do we mean by "production" and what's that got to do with English teaching?

Have you ever heard an English teacher complain they feel they're just on a pro-

duction line churning out the students and courses for employer and profits? Quality of teaching, students' learning and teacher satisfaction get left way down the list of priorities.

What does this mean in practice for teachers?

More teaching hours, more days worked per year, less days holiday and an almost unfettered flexibility and availability demanded of the teacher to work when and where the company decides. Job satisfaction, quality education, personal and family life? Forget it!

And that is why, five years after the Opening debacle, teachers are taking to the streets again in protest.

A split *conveni* weakens results for all concerned. A unified *conveni* applies the

concept of education across the board. More than that, it also says quality education requires quality working conditions.

Therefore, the sector really is at a turning point. The Generalitat wants a trilingual Catalonia but abandons private language schools to free-market jungle economics in which schools based on fraudulent employment practices drag down quality for students and teachers alike.

Now more than ever is the time for the schools that do care about quality to respond. Currently, many schools that prioritise quality teaching frequently offer better working conditions than the minimum set in the agreement.

Those schools should be pushing for a new agreement that raises the bar to ensure quality teaching based on quality working conditions, and not accept its "dumbing down" to the worst practices of the worse schools.

As English teachers are we really willing to stand by and watch our sector, our job security and satisfaction eroded away, no, signed away in the *non-official* employers' proposed new agreement?

Many teachers already say no. Enough is enough. Backed by CCOO, the most representative trades union in the private language teaching sector, we demand a *conveni* that guarantees quality for students and teachers.

Demonstrate your support for a unified *Conveni* on December 11, 6.30pm, outside the employers' head office, at Carrer Diputació/ Carrer Girona (metro Girona, L4). For more information: 93 481 2842, or e-mail: srumbol@ccoocat