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Pappas on Taxation

Your Tax Dollars at Work: Is Public Education *Really* About the Students

September 26th, 2011

Here we go again.

[Walter Olson](#) wrote the following post for Cato:

As Pat Kossan reports in the [Arizona Republic](#), the state of Arizona has averted a threatened civil-rights lawsuit from Washington by agreeing to stop monitoring teachers' English fluency and pronunciation in the classroom. "In November, federal officials told Arizona that its fluency monitoring may violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by discriminating against teachers who are Hispanic and others who are not native English speakers."

Does this strike you as perhaps a bit crazy? If so, it's craziness with quite a pedigree.

It was way back in the first Bush administration that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) began filing lawsuits against employers for "discriminating" against employees with difficult-to-understand or heavily accented speech, the theory being that this served as an improper proxy for discrimination based on national origin.

The scope for allowable exceptions was exceedingly narrow, too narrow to cover most teaching positions, as I wrote quite a while back when the issue had just come over the horizon [in a Massachusetts case](#).

Indeed, the National Education Association (I pointed out) had been prevailed on to pass a resolution "decrying disparate treatment on the basis of 'pronunciation' — quite a switch from the old days when teachers used to be demons for correctness on that topic."

Don't assume you can escape by choosing one of your local private schools. Their employment of teachers falls under the EEOC's jurisdiction too.

Apparently, proper syntax and grammar are no longer appropriate pedagogical goals.

Who cares if the students can understand their teacher? Who cares that the students may imitate their teacher's poor diction, syntax and grammar?

No wonder everyone under the age of thirty can't manage to enunciate the "t" sounds in the middle of the word "button" – they say "buh-in."

I'm sorry, folks, but it's *not* about the students.¹

Footnotes:

¹ *If I were a parent and my child had a teacher who didn't speak fluent English, I would yank him from the class faster than you could say "oh, no, you dih int." And they wonder why there is a huge home-schooling movement in this country.*

External Must Reads:

- [*Cultivating Language Skills Early Ensures Success Later*](#), by E.D. Hirsch of the New York Times