



## Diary Studies: The Voices of Nonnative English Speakers in a Master of Arts Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

- This study analyzes the diary entries of four nonnative English-speaking (NNES) students enrolled in a master of art's (MA) program in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) in Southern California. A qualitative analysis of the diary entries shows that, in spite of the differences in the participants' background in English language learning, length of U.S. residence, and professional goals, there are four common themes in the diaries: (a) feeling language anxiety, (b) coping with feelings of inferiority, (c) coping with their language needs, and (d) bringing strength to the TESOL program. The study shows that the students experienced language anxiety but were able to use coping mechanisms to overcome difficulties. At the same time, this study highlights the strengths that these NNES students brought to the MA TESOL program in which they were enrolled.

According to the most recent TESOL directory, 194 MA TESOL programs are offered in the U.S., which does not include the additional nine MA TESOL programs in Canada (Garshick, 1998). Nonnative English speakers make up close to 40% of the students enrolled in these programs (Liu, 1999). In a national survey of 63 MA TESOL programs, England and Roberts (1989) found that the admission requirements in all but three of the programs were the same for native English-speaking (NES) and for NNES students. After being admitted to MA TESOL programs, NNES students must succeed in their classes and, more importantly, overcome any feelings of doubt they may have about their NNES status.

The present study was conducted in order to investigate NNES students' views about the demands of their MA TESOL programs. Specifically, the study focuses on the experiences of NNES students while taking courses in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL)

theory and methodology. Data collection relied on the use of diaries which, as noted by Nunan (1992), can be “important introspective tools in language research” (p. 118). Diaries have also been used in TESOL teacher preparation (Bailey (1990). Bailey suggests that one of the responsibilities of teacher educators “during preservice preparation is to provide beginning teachers with usable tools for self evaluation, for ongoing development in the absence of our input” (p. 226). While there is an ever-growing body of literature related to different types of diary studies, little research concerning diary studies has specifically focused on NNES students in MA TESOL programs.

This article presents a review of literature on the use of diaries in TESOL teacher preparation and reviews the different sources of anxiety experienced by NNES professionals in the TESOL field. Following the literature review is a description of the methods used in this study, the findings, and the conclusions.

## Literature Review

### *Uses of Diaries*

Diaries can be used to show how graduate students in MA TESOL programs mature and gain the confidence they need to become teachers. Some diaries are used primarily as dialogues between teacher trainers and graduate students in MA TESOL programs (Holten & Brinton, 1995; Numrich, 1996). Other diaries consist of exchanges between student teachers and ESL students (Cray & Currie, 1996; Gray, 1998) or exchanges between student teachers (Dong, 1997). Diary studies have also been used to evaluate teacher preparation courses (Halbach, 1999) or in-service teacher training (C. H. Palmer, 1992; G. M. Palmer, 1992; Woodfield & Lazarus, 1998).

Brinton and her colleagues have collaborated on a number of diary studies of students in MA TESOL programs (Brinton & Holten, 1989; Brinton, Holten & Goodwin, 1993; Holten & Brinton, 1995). In 1989, Brinton and Holten analyzed the diaries of 20 student teachers (5 native, 15 nonnative English speakers). The researchers divided the students' diary entries into different categories and documented how often students made comments in those categories. Although there were no major differences between NES and NNES student teachers in the total number of comments made, the NNES student teachers made more comments in the categories dealing with lesson organization and methods and activities. In contrast, NNES student teachers made fewer comments in the categories that involved teaching techniques and the instructional setting. The NNES student teachers “used the dialogue journals as a chance to focus on their own lesson preparation, presentation, and classroom predicaments” (p. 347). In another study, Brinton, Holten, and Goodwin (1993) responded to the students' entries in an attempt to create a “collaborative relationship between the novice teacher and the teacher educator” (p.16). In responding to the students' entries, the teacher educators sought to avoid building false confidence in their students. Instead, they shared their own experiences

and responded directly and personally. In this manner, they were able to use the diaries as an effective teaching tool.

Diaries can also be used to encourage self-reflection (Dong, 1997; McAlpine, 1992; Numrich, 1996; Thornbury, 1991). Numrich (1996) performed a needs analysis of 26 students' diaries from a 10-week MA TESOL teaching practicum course, identifying the common issues noted by the novice ESL teachers. By discovering the interests and needs of her students, she was able to facilitate their learning. Some of these concerns were (a) the need to make the classroom a safe environment, (b) the need to create a comfortable environment, and (c) the need for control when their ESL students interrupted the class. The most frequently mentioned frustrations reported were managing class time, giving clear directions, and responding to students' various needs. In another study (Thornbury, 1991) student teachers used their logs to plan and evaluate their lessons. In this study, the primary purpose of the diaries was self-reflection; student teachers were not asked to dialogue with their peers or with the supervising instructor.

While student teachers' diary entries are frequently only read by instructors, Dong (1997) decided to have student teachers read each other's diary entries. In a semester-long teaching practicum class, which was required for state TESOL certification, nine students wrote responses to their peers' diary entries. Some of the positive results documented in the study were that the diary response activity offered emotional support, allowed the teacher educator to determine students' needs, gave information about the curriculum and public school culture, and provided opportunities for self-reflection.

In another study, Polio and Wilson-Duffy (1998) analyzed the journal entries of three international MA TESOL student teachers enrolled in a teaching practicum. The participants' journal entries tended to reflect pedagogical concerns rather than the emotions and other related problems of the student teachers. Polio and Wilson-Duffy found that the NNES student teachers had concerns that were similar to those that pre-service teachers generally have, such as lesson timing, class size, board use, and student levels. In addition, they also had concerns that were specifically related to the fact that English was not their native language, including worrying about not being understood by students, generally underestimating their language proficiency, and not having confidence to discuss U.S. culture. Polio and Wilson-Duffy argued that pairing NES and NNES student teachers could help provide NNES student teachers with needed linguistic or cultural knowledge. They also believed that, in turn, the NNES student teachers could assist NES peers since they had "a better sense of the ESL students' background knowledge of U.S. culture" (p. 27).

Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) had students keep a different type of journal in a graduate seminar designed to (a) raise the students' consciousness about the status of NNES teachers and (b) empower the NNES students as English language teaching professionals. In one part of their journals, student teachers wrote an imaginary dialogue with Medgyes (1994) reflecting what they perceived to be the positive and negative aspects of his book, *The Non-*

*native Teacher*. Student teachers benefited from this experience in different ways. Some students developed “a deeper understanding of the contexts in which English is taught” (p. 423). Others gained a sense of empowerment; for example, one student wrote, “I am more interested in ‘who can do what’ rather than ‘who is better’” (p. 423).

In summary, diaries have been used effectively to promote dialogue between teacher educators and student teachers and among student teachers, to provide teacher educators with inside information on student teachers’ needs, and to promote self-reflection among student teachers. Keeping a diary allows student teachers to reflect on their teaching techniques and to improve their teaching. It thus also allows them to more fully realize their potential and gain a sense of empowerment. Regardless of the methodology and purpose underlying the use of diaries in TESOL teacher preparation programs, they can be very powerful tools.

### ***NNES Professionals and Anxiety***

NNES professionals experience anxiety in different ways. Winer (1992) analyzed the diary entries of about 100 MA TESOL student teachers (about 60% of whom were NNES international graduate students). She found that neither NES nor NNES student teachers feel completely comfortable criticizing the work of other classmates. However, NNES student teachers are reluctant to give feedback to their NES peers on “discrete errors because they feel they lack linguistic competence and also assume that NES writer’s organization must be, by definition, correct” (p. 70). According to Winer, the anxiety experienced by NNES student teachers intimidated them into thinking that they didn’t have the right to criticize their NES peers. This was true even though the NNES student teachers often had explicit knowledge of grammar, knew writing rules, and were able to give explanations for them, whereas the NES students sometimes could not. At the same time, NES student teachers were reluctant to criticize their NNES counterparts, perhaps because they didn’t want to hurt the feelings of student teachers who they felt were already having problems in the class. Still, Winer found more similarities than differences in the experiences of NES and NNES student teachers in the practicum. For instance, about 90% of all the student teachers, regardless of language status, felt apprehension about writing, expressing their feelings toward this skill with words such as “dread,” “anxiety,” “afraid,” and “apprehension” (p. 60-61). Most of the student teachers also indicated that certain writing topics bored them or intimidated them and that they were insecure about their writing skills and about their teaching and grading skills. Despite the differences between the NES and NNES students, collaboration between these two groups was generally found to be mutually beneficial. NES student teachers tended to view their NNES peers as valuable sources of information. In turn, NNES student teachers helped their NES peers realize how culturally-bound some assignments were. However, tensions between the two groups surfaced at times. For example,

Winer reported that when the students work together in groups, the NES student teachers note frustration with their NNES classmates' "incompetence" as supposed peers and become disappointed that they are not getting as much help from them as they are giving" (p.70). The NNES student teachers, on the other hand, sometimes become frustrated with their NES classmates because of their arrogance, condescension, or incompetent help. They also report feelings of guilt when asking for help.

NNES student teachers are also concerned about the perceptions that ESL and EFL students might have about them. For example, Polio and Wilson-Duffy (1998) reported that one NNES student teacher in their study expressed her anxiety by writing, "What if they [students] don't listen to me? What if they thought my English is poor? All nonnative speakers are worried about that" (p. 25). Polio and Duffy also reported that the NNES student teachers in their study "were afraid that the ESL students would not understand them, that they would misspell words, and that they would not understand U.S. slang, idioms, and cultural references in authentic texts" (p. 27). Greis (1984) addressed similar issues and added that some NNES student teachers feel a sense of competition with their NES peers.

After NNES student teachers earn their MA TESOL degree and find employment as EFL or ESL teachers, their fears are sometimes realized. While Thomas (a NNES teacher) was teaching an ESL writing class, one of her students told her, "When I first saw you, I felt certain that I wouldn't like the class" (1999, p. 8). Because the student had spent a lot of money to study in the U.S., she was hoping to have a NES teacher. In Japan, a NNES teacher teaching EFL felt pressured to conform to her students' expectations for her to teach more like a NES teacher who taught at the same school (Duff & Uchida, 1997). In a study of NNES minority ESL teachers in Canada, Amin (1999) found that many ESL students believed that the only real English is "Canadian English," which can only be taught by a real Canadian, in other words a male Anglo Saxon Canadian teacher. Amin found that, as a Pakistani woman with one master's degree in English literature and another in English language, the attitudes of her students were very disempowering. Still, other studies (Cook, 1999, 2000; Kamhi-Stein, 1999) show that language status does not necessarily result in ESL students preferring NES teachers. Specifically, Kamhi-Stein (1999) quoted the journal entry of an Asian ESL student who said, "Most Asian students think American teacher who has blue eye and brown hair is much better than Asian-looking teacher, but I don't think so" (p.150). Cook (1999, 2000) assessed children's attitudes towards their ESL teachers and found that they did not have an overwhelming preference for NES teachers. Cook's surveys (which are a work in progress) indicated that the children in a country that recognizes two languages are more likely to prefer NNES teachers to NES teachers. The fact that a teacher was a NES teacher was only one of many factors influencing children's attitudes toward teachers.

## Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to better understand the feelings of NNES students in an MA TESOL program, as reported in their diary entries. The research questions guiding this study were as follow:

1. What, if any, are the anxieties identified in the diary entries of NNES students in the MA TESOL program?
2. What, if any, are the coping strategies that NNES students implement to deal with the demands of their MA TESOL program?
3. What strengths, if any, do NNES students see themselves as bringing to their MA TESOL program?

## Method

### *Setting and Participants*

The participants in this study were four students in an MA TESOL program at an urban university in southern California. At the time of the study, the first participant, Julie,<sup>1</sup> had been in the U.S. for 10 years. She was born in Taiwan and her native language was Mandarin Chinese. She started learning English in Taiwan at the age of 13 in a classroom setting. Instructors were not native speakers of English and used the grammar-translation method (GTM) and the audio-lingual method (ALM). Verbal fluency was not expected; the curriculum focused on reading and writing tasks to prepare students to take university entrance exams and relied heavily on repetition and drilling exercises. After she finished high school in Taiwan, she came to the U.S. Once in California, Julie went to a community college for two years and took ESL classes that earned credit but did not transfer to four-year universities. After she finished her ESL courses, she took two remedial English classes designed for native speakers of English to improve their essay writing skills. Julie then transferred to a four-year university and majored in biology. At home and in her other activities she preferred to use her native language. During this time, she held several jobs. Only one of them, which she had for 10 months, required her to use English; she had to speak to clients on the telephone for many hours a day. Therefore, after the termination of that job, Julie's use of English was limited to school. When she later decided she wanted to improve her language skills, she enrolled in a TESOL graduate program, hoping that knowing more about language acquisition would help her own English learning process. After Julie obtained her degree, she planned to go back to her country to teach EFL.

Sally, the second participant, was born in Korea and, at the time of the study, had lived in the U.S. for five years. In elementary school, she had her first exposure to English through children's songs. For six years, in middle and high school, Sally received English instruction five hours a week. The teachers were nonnative speakers of English and used mostly the GTM. In college, she majored in Korean Language and Literature. When she first arrived in California, she went to an adult school and took ESL courses from levels four to six, the latter being the highest level possible. In her daily activi-

ties at home, and with her close friends, Sally used Korean to communicate. She used English at school and for school-related activities such as talking to classmates and writing papers. Like Julie, Sally felt that she “was very limited in English skills” and that by working toward an MA TESOL degree, she would “conquer English.” After she decided to earn this degree, she went to a community college for one year to earn credit and to raise her grade-point-average to enable her to enroll in an MA TESOL program. One of her goals was to return to her country and open a private language school.

The third participant, Anita, was born in Panama to Chinese immigrant parents. At the time of the investigation, she had been in the U.S. for 12 years. As a child, she spoke Cantonese at home, but Spanish was her native language. In Panama, she started studying English in the third grade, and up until the seventh grade she had English instruction twice a week, with each class approximately one hour long. All of her teachers except one were nonnative speakers of English who used both GTM and ALM. After many years, she had not learned much and could not communicate in English. Therefore, she decided to go to a private language institution, and within a few months she had learned more English than she had in all her previous years at school. She credits her success at learning English to the communicative approach and to other current methods of language instruction that teachers used at the language institution. Anita came here on a student visa, planning to start eighth grade. Before the beginning of the academic year, she attended summer school and had English instruction in a sheltered environment. In the fall when classes started, she was placed in an ESL class. However, after only a few months, she was mainstreamed into English-only classes. She believes that one of the reasons she learned English so quickly is because she used the target language extensively outside of the classroom as it was the common language with her schoolmates. She said that at first she would interact in Cantonese with the Chinese-speaking group, then in Spanish with the Spanish-speaking group. Finally she decided it was easier to use English with everyone. After high school, she went to UCLA and initially majored in Chemistry. She took classes in other departments as well and then decided to change her major to Linguistics and Spanish. While taking an elective course in ESL teaching theories, Anita discovered that she wanted to teach ESL, so after she graduated, she chose to obtain a master's degree in TESOL. Her goals were to teach ESL in high school, a community college, or abroad.

The last participant, Lucy, is from Paraguay. At the time of this study, she had been in the U.S. for six months on a Fulbright scholarship. She had started learning English when she was in high school. For three years, she had classes that met once a week for approximately two hours. The instructors were nonnative speakers of English and used GTM to teach. All lessons were in Spanish, her native language. After high school, she enrolled in a private language institute where she had two-hour classes twice a week for four years. There, the instructors used mainly the ALM. In college, she majored in English. After graduating from college, she taught EFL at a private bilingual (Spanish-English) school in Paraguay.

### *Data Collection*

Two types of instruments were used to collect data: diaries and interviews. Three of the participants kept a diary for one quarter, and the fourth kept one for two quarters. The rationale for using diaries rather than interviews was that they provide students the chance to work at their own pace and to have more control over the language, minimizing stress-related inhibitions. Participants wrote in their diaries either after each class meeting or at the end of the school week. They were instructed to record their feelings and reactions to the classes in which they were enrolled. At the end of the quarter, the diaries were collected and read by the authors of this article. Then, each participant was interviewed over the telephone. In these interviews, the participants provided biographical information and answered the question, "As a nonnative speaker of English, what, if any, are the strengths that you bring to the MA TESOL program in which you are enrolled?" Each interview lasted from 15 to 20 minutes.

Julie kept a diary for two quarters. During the first quarter, she often wrote in her diary after weekly meetings of the two courses she was taking, "Discourse Analysis" and "Theories of Second Language Teaching and Learning." The following quarter, Julie was enrolled in another two courses, "Teaching English for Academic Purposes" and "Language Testing." Sally kept a diary for one quarter while she was taking classes in "Theories of Second Language Teaching and Learning," "Phonetics for the Second Language Teachers," and essay writing. She also tried to write at least once a week after each class meeting. Anita kept a diary for one quarter while she was taking "Teaching English for Academic Purposes." She wrote consistently every week, most of the time after each class meeting while her thoughts were still fresh. Finally, during the period she kept the diary, Lucy was enrolled in two courses, "Theories of Second Language Teaching and Learning" and "Issues in Classroom Second Language Acquisition." She wrote once a week usually at the end of the week. She focused on language issues and divided her diary into the areas of reading, writing, library research, class participation, and what she called "something positive," where she recorded ways in which she felt successful in the program.

Prior research has shown that NNES professionals face many difficulties in the TESOL field, ranging from language barriers in graduate programs to employment issues and insecurities as NNES professionals (e.g., Greis, 1984; Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999; Polio & Wilson-Duffy, 1998; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Thomas, 1999). Therefore, before analyzing the diary entries, we anticipated that possible findings would include perceived shortcomings and strengths arising from the participants' second language status, as well as from the participants' coping mechanisms. We analyzed the diary entries by engaging in a process of recursive reading, identifying recurring responses, and assigning the responses to themes.



## Findings

In spite of the differences in the students' English language learning background, length of U.S. residence, and professional goals, four common themes emerged in the diaries: feeling language anxiety, coping with feelings of inferiority, coping with their language needs, and bringing strength to the TESOL program.

### *Feeling Language Anxiety*

The participants reported a high level of language anxiety due to the fact that they were NNES students. This anxiety was especially present in the areas of reading, writing, and speaking. The students were so anxious about what they perceived to be their English ability that they frequently felt incapacitated. For example, their ability to participate in classroom discussion was impaired because they felt self-conscious about their English language abilities.

***Listening and speaking skills.*** In general, listening did not appear to be a major source of anxiety. Interestingly, the participant who had been in the U.S. the longest (Anita) was the only one who directly pointed out the frustration she felt on the first day of class when she missed essential information. In one of her entries, she stated, "During lecture, it was hard for me to catch up...I must have missed quite a few concepts...I was frustrated...first day of school and already behind" (September 26, 2000).

While Anita was the only participant who voiced dissatisfaction with her listening skills, all the participants felt strong language anxiety when asked to speak in class, a concern also expressed by Liu (in this issue). This anxiety was especially strong when participants had something to say but had to struggle to overcome the fear of their language ability being judged by their peers. Although they had a contribution to make to the class discussions, the possibility that their linguistic ability might be judged as less than perfect heightened their anxiety. All the participants reported the need to formulate thoughts in their minds and correct mistakes before speaking. However, they said that at times they would simply speak without planning in advance, which resulted in less than perfect speech or unorganized ideas. In other instances, they would spend so much time perfecting sentences that the opportunity to respond would be lost when another student in class would answer first (see Liu in this issue for a discussion on the same topic). Revealing their feelings of anxiety in the area of speaking, the participants reported the following:

When it's my turn to talk, I stumble. I give out a short answer with no explanation or talk without my thinking together. (Julie, April 26, 2000)

Sometimes I felt I wanted to say something but somebody else just said while I was trying to organize the ideas in my mind. (Lucy, November 26, 2000)

I believe I am so anxious about the language that sometimes I tend to omit or mix ideas when I participate in class. Then, I am not very sure

if what I said was well understood or well expressed. (Lucy, November 14, 2000)

These results support the notion that NNES students should be eased into the requirements of the U.S. academic classroom by integrating participatory structures in MA TESOL programs that are more conducive to NNES student participation. Such participatory structures might include the use of electronic bulletin board discussions and e-mail activities. As shown by previous studies (Kamhi-Stein, 2000), such discussions reduce cultural and linguistic barriers and allow students to hear different view points.

**Reading and writing skills.** In the area of reading, Lucy and Sally, the two participants who had been in the U.S. for the least amount of time, expressed the most anxiety. Referring to the time spent reading for weekly courses, Sally said, "The time I spend for one class is approximately six to eight hours." Lucy also expressed similar frustration, especially at the beginning of her first quarter, as the entry below illustrates.

Last week I spent about four hours a day reading. I found that reading the first time to get the general idea; and then working on study guides helps organize information and facilitate comprehension. (November 14, 2000)

Towards the end of the quarter, however, Lucy's entries revealed that although reading was still time consuming, she had an increased understanding of the readings and improved reading strategies:

I feel that I can sit and read chapters in my books and don't need to read the same paragraph over and over again as I did when I just started this quarter. I feel that little by little reading seems more automatic. (November 14, 2000)

I still spent a tremendous amount of time reading, about 3 hrs a day. Even though I can feel that my fluency in reading improved, I am still a slow reader. (November 26, 2000)

In the writing area, Anita, who had attended high school in the U.S., was the only participant to say, "I feel more comfortable writing." The other three participants encountered difficulties in writing, as it took time and effort to organize ideas and check grammar and spelling. Although Julie and Sally mentioned their struggles in writing a paper, it was Lucy who summed up the general consensus:

I believe writing is the hardest thing to do in a foreign or second language. It demands a certain style in English. Besides the style and organization, there are also other items such as spelling, grammar and vocabulary to pay close attention to...I need to spend a lot of time trying to express my ideas, sometimes getting the adequate word and checking the dictionary for spelling. This week I spent about 4 hours a day writing. (November 1, 2000)

While in her first quarter of study Lucy reported struggling to fulfill her writ-

ing assignments. Her quotation above reflects a later stage in her process of developing competence as an academic writer. As shown in this quotation, she was very much aware of the requirements of writing for academic purposes.

### ***Coping With Feelings of Inferiority***

Besides having to deal with language anxiety, the diaries also indicated that these students shared another perception: They felt inferior to their NES peers and believed the NES did not have the same difficulties or have to work as hard as the NNES students. Overall, there was a sense that NES students had a linguistic advantage over their NNES counterparts, which explains why Julie sought the help of a NES peer in order to do better in class:

Kevin, a native English-speaking student, has helped me out with my midterm paper for the theories class. He asked me to read for an hour, and then I could discuss with him. After the reading, I still did not get very far, so he helped me with the outline of the paper. (April 30, 2000)

I've felt more comfortable in my discourse analysis class after I got help/support from him [Kevin]. (April 5, 2000)

In addition to seeking the help of NES peers, these NNES students showed a general sense of inferiority, as indicated by Anita when she sought validation from other NNES students. Explaining the events of the first day of class, she noted: "I wondered how my other NNES peers felt...Most of us agreed that her [the professor's] pace was too fast for us; we couldn't catch up with the lecture." In the same entry, Anita wrote, "Interestingly, one of our classmates, a native speaker, thought the pace was fine and had no trouble following through." These comments helped to confirm the different language abilities of the NNES students and their NES peers.

### ***Coping With Their Language Needs***

Besides having to deal with the requirements of the program, the participants also had to cope with their own language needs. Although they reported feeling anxiety when speaking, the skills that created the most anxiety were reading and writing, which, therefore, required the most attention and effort. That reading and writing produced the highest anxiety supports prior findings (Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999). These results are not unexpected given that in academic settings most tasks require reading-to-write for the purpose of demonstrating content understanding.

The most common way that the participants reported coping with their own language needs was to spend extra time keeping up with the reading assignments. They also reported spending a significant amount of time writing papers and preparing for presentations. Although not as demanding as these activities, the participants also mentioned the time spent thinking about what to say in classes during discussions or when they felt they had something important to say. The participants made the following comments about the extra demands on their time:

I spent a lot of time just to write 3 pages that I had for my reading class last week. Write it, and rewrite it and rewrite it. (Lucy, October 24, 2000)

I practice presentations, speeches, anything that requires public speaking, over and over again. (Anita, September 26, 2000)

### ***Bringing Strength to the TESOL Program***

When asked the question, “What are the strengths that nonnative speakers of English bring to the TESOL Program?” the participants unanimously agreed that the most valuable asset is their experience as learners of English. The participants reported that having learned English as a second language themselves enabled them to better understand the problems and struggles their future students might face. Therefore, the theories discussed in class could be better understood and brought to life when NNES peers shared their experiences with their classmates. Lucy explained it well when she said, “I can understand and feel what the professor is saying about the theories, and I can put myself into the learners’ shoes when I am preparing a lesson plan.” Sharing their experience was seen as a positive aspect of being a NNES student in the TESOL program because they could offer their expertise and perspectives in learning a second language to the rest of the class and form a network of support with other NNES peers in the program.

### **Conclusion**

Being in a graduate program in the U.S. can be challenging. Being a nonnative speaker of English in the TESOL field makes it even more so, since NNES students are expected to have mastered the language they are planning to teach. The findings of this study reveal that, regardless of the differences in their backgrounds, the participants had common feelings and experiences as NNES students enrolled in an MA TESOL program. If at first the participants expressed concerns about their experiences in the classroom, upon further reflection they realized that they also brought many important attributes to their program, including but not limited to their first-hand understanding of the second language acquisition process.

This study has important implications for instruction. Specifically, MA TESOL programs should strive to meet the needs of NNES students in order to give them an equal chance of success in the programs. As already noted, this can be done by integrating participatory structures designed to promote NNES student participation. Another way to meet this goal would involve engaging students in reading-to-write tasks that reflect the demands of academic publishing. In these tasks, students could write for a specific journal audience and produce multiple drafts with the guidance of peers and the course instructor. Finally, TESOL programs should promote NES and NNES student collaboration so that both can become better teachers.

Although typically restricted to a small number of subjects, diary studies such as this one present an important means of gaining access to

NNES students' perceptions and experiences. It is hoped that future diary studies of NNES students enrolled in MA TESOL programs will provide more information about their perceptions. This information would greatly contribute to the understanding of how better to serve their needs and meet their expectations. After all, NNES teachers make up the majority of the world's EFL and ESL teachers. Research on them will affect the TESOL profession as a whole. By learning more about the challenges and triumphs of NNES students, both NES and NNES professionals can concentrate on uniting as EFL and ESL teachers rather than accepting the profession as one divided.

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed.

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